

# Excited about Science

## Grad students share lab work in GK-12 program

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T-H Staff Writer

How do you generate enthusiasm in a junior high science lab? One way is to bring in a graduate student, who not only occasionally brings animals, but is knowledgeable about them.

And then you could call it GK-12.

"A few years ago, then-principal Katie Jones came to Coach Billy Carter and myself about this program, and we didn't know anything about it," said Barry Hodges, also a coach and teacher. "It was called GK-12. It's a program in which graduate students in a science field, from Arkansas State, come down and they do lab with our kids.

"They're given money so they can buy supplies. They can bring animals, they can bring supplies from ASU," Hodges continued, adding that the grant from the National Science Foundation is due to expire this year. "And we're hoping they'll be able to write a new grant."

It is the third year that Forrest City Junior High has participated in the program. Coach Carter moved to Trumann, and Coach Jonathan Klein is the other teacher.

"He'll come to me one week, he'll come to Coach Klein one week," said Hodges.

Wynne, Harrisburg, Nettleton and West Memphis East are some of the other junior high schools participating in the program.

Jonathan Elston is the grad student who visits once a week. He is working on his master's in biology.

"Specifically, I study conservation and the ecology of turtles - reptiles and



David Nichol • Times-Herald

**Science lab:** Jonathan Elston, a graduate student from Arkansas State University, holds a hognose snake in the science lab at Forrest City Junior High. He often brings snakes or turtles to the lab, once a week, as part of the GK-12 program, funded by the National Science Foundation.

amphibians, but turtles are kind of my specialty," said Elston.

His master's thesis deals with urban habitat usage.

"I walk through muddy ditches and catch turtles, tag them and release them," he continued. "And I do a population survey to see how many turtles are there and what kinds. The over-all goal is to find methods where companies and businesses and construction crews can continue to expand, and still maintain the critical habitat components of the animals. So schools can still be built, restaurants can still be built, etc., and the animals can still live there."

Elston said the National Science Foundation wants the grad students in the program to incorporate their own personal research, as well as try to generate an over-all interest in science.

"So I try to have some of my personal area of interest in every lesson," he said. It's not always possible, but he tries.

"We try tell to them what we need for our standards," said Hodges. "Like today he's doing things on responding to stimuli. And Coach Klein will be on something different next week."

"One of the main things we want to do,"

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added Elston, "is make sure they understand that science isn't some far-stretching field that is removed from them and that they can never be involved with. We use science every day in our thought processes.

"Every field uses science. We want to make sure they know that you don't have to be the

smartest kid in the class or the richest kid in the class. You can be just a curious person and become a scientist, as long as you ask questions and are willing to work to try and solve those questions. That's all it takes to be a scientist," said Elston.

"The kids just eat it up," said Hodges.

WOLFWAYS