

Maritime Aquarium Offers Online Programs to Darien Schools

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Darien schools that have had to eliminate field trips from the new school year can still welcome seals, sea turtles, sharks and other marine animals into their classrooms through live online programs offered by the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

— *an announcement from the Maritime Aquarium*

Long a regional resource to educators for fulfilling STEM-based teaching standards, The Maritime Aquarium has shifted from primarily presenting in-person classes to now offering 25 online distance-learning lessons. They're available to any school anywhere.

“Actual field trips are sometimes considered a luxury but, in the time of distance learning, virtual field trips are more important than ever,” said Tom Naiman, the Aquarium’s director of Education. “They inspire students, give teachers time to prepare their own future lessons and engage parents of younger students in their children’s education.”

Teachers can select from a menu of age-appropriate programs, including: an interactive story time for preschoolers (which also can be offered as a series); observing the adaptations and lifestyles of various sharks for Grades K-2; exploring the causes and solutions of water pollution for Grades 3-5; and investigating coastal resilience for middle- and high-schoolers.

Dives into the worlds of seals, sea turtles and jellyfish are available for all ages. Plus, classes can join in during the feeding of a different Aquarium animal each week.

Most programs are for up to 30 students, vary in length from 30 to 50 minutes, and cost \$95.

The programs are streamed live to allow for questions and answers, and for adaptations to a specific focus. Live captioning and other accommodations are available for students who have special needs.

Over the course of a normal year, The Maritime Aquarium would connect with some 70,000 students from the tri-state area, through school field trips to the Norwalk attraction and through Aquarium educators traveling to schools.

In March, The Maritime Aquarium pivoted to offer online programs when the COVID pandemic forced schools into virtual classrooms. Offerings quickly expanded to be available for families & individuals as well, and these continued through the summer. Naiman said some 8,000 students participated in school presentations in the spring.

In total, since late March, more than 20,000 individuals from 43 states and six foreign countries have participated in the Aquarium's virtual programs.

Even when the pandemic subsides, the Aquarium's online programs will continue as an exciting new way to present marine science to students — whether they're local, across the country or international, Naiman said.

“Virtual programs have given us the ability to reach even more diverse and geographically dispersed audiences,” he said. “It’s exciting to expand our ability to serve more people and to provide teachers, students and families with new avenues of education and inspiration.”

Browse the list of virtual programs at www.maritimeaquarium.org/distance-learning.

Naiman added that in-person programs remain available for Darien schools able to welcome in the Aquarium's “traveling teachers” or to make field trips to the Aquarium.

Field-trip options include coastal exploration programs at local beaches and marine-life study cruises onto Long Island Sound aboard the Aquarium's research vessel.

Programs can be scheduled through the Aquarium's Reservations department. Call (203) 852-0700, ext. 2206, or email reservations@maritimeaquarium.org.