



A GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL'S NAVIGATOR PROGRAM SPENT TWO DAYS THIS SUMMER ABOARD *BRILLIANT* AS PART OF AN ONGOING PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MUSEUM'S EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

THE NAVIGATOR PROGRAM: MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN LIFE LESSONS

By JOHN BOUDREAU

In the beginning, Andrew Marzano just wanted to build a boat. As a teacher at Hamden Middle School in Hamden, CT, he realized boatbuilding was an ideal way to get his summer school students to learn the math and science concepts they didn't absorb during the school year. So, during the summer of 2011, Marzano, his colleague Frank Kachmar, and a few students built a 12-foot Bevin skiff. The project went so well that they built another boat the next summer, and another the summer after that.

Around the same time, Marzano and coworker Rob Mandel began to discuss an alternative education program for underserved eighth graders—students who

had consistently low grades or high rates of absenteeism. They wanted to create an environment for these students that would harness the rambunctious energy of 13-year-olds and give them a way to succeed outside of a traditional classroom setting.

As Marzano and Mandel began to discuss a central theme for the program, boatbuilding again seemed to be the right fit. It was already an effective way to teach math and science, and given Connecticut's historic connection to the sea, it was easy to integrate boatbuilding alongside a study of maritime history and literature. As the students worked on building three boats (two Bevin Skiffs and a Glen-L sloop), they would learn both character education and the eighth grade curriculum. Hoping to

give students the tools to steer themselves through life's sometimes stormy waters, Marzano and Mandel dubbed it The Navigator Program.

While Mandel assembled a team of teachers to help implement the program, Marzano began looking for local resources to help augment the in-class curriculum. He immediately thought of Mystic Seaport.

Sarah Cahill, director of Education at Mystic Seaport, and Shannon McKenzie, director of Watercraft Programs, both recognized the value of the Navigators' approach to learning. "The program's philosophy was what most attracted me," Cahill said. "Using the power of experiential education to change the outcomes of underserved populations draws heavily on my own