

Patriots Point eyes ‘ambitious plans’ for its Flight Academy

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History comes to life as students navigate how to fly a famous World War II aircraft Patriots Point’s Flight Academy. Provided/Patriots Point

Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum is looking to take its Flight Academy to the next level in the coming year.

Since its launch more than a decade ago, it has been described by officials at the state-owned visitor attraction as a catalyst for growing interest in aviation careers.

The inaugural AviCom, a two-day aerospace competition for high schoolers held aboard the Yorktown carrier, was a testament to that. Earlier this year, 10 teams of teenagers from across South Carolina took part in virtual hands-on missions using the flight simulators on the Yorktown carrier.

Chris Hauff, chief of staff for the Patriots Point Development Authority, said that the hope is to hold more events like that in a new space.

Demand is driving the expansion plan but the current location, under the carrier's flight deck and near the pilot room, has restricted the program's ability to grow.

Patriots Point plans to relocate the simulators to the current main exhibition area in 2024 after the next temporary display ends. This space, which is four times larger, can increase the program's participation and capacity.

The Flight Academy curriculum and simulators were redesigned in 2021, after a brief pause during the pandemic.



The Patriots Point Flight Academy is on the Yorktown aircraft carrier.
Provided/Patriots Point

“Space has been a limiting factor in its current location, but being on the main hangar deck will change that,” Hauff said.

While it is early in the planning process, it was part of the development authority's fiscal budget for next year.

Hauff called the plan “ambitious” but necessary project. Staffers are looking at other established programs, such

the Navy's Flight Academy in Pensacola, Fla., for ideas and inspiration.

Patriots Point executive director Allison Hunt told the museum's board in June that she envisions a “one-of-a-kind, state-of-the-art facility that will support our educational, overnight and revenue generated leadership programming.”

The plan to add virtual reality simulators and classrooms in the new space. The current capacity is 25 kids at a time, which is usually the cap for summer camp groups. Once completed, the flight academy could support 60 to 80 would-be aviators. It then could tie into the “Operation Overnight” program, where campers spend the night on the Yorktown.

“The ship is an artifact in itself and when kids are on board, they're touching a piece of history while learning about the technology of these history-making aircraft,” Hauff said. “Students can learn to fly a Corsair, which is one of the most famous

aircraft in World War II. It helps them connect what they've learned in the classroom to real-life STEM skills. It's a fully-immersive experience."



Students put their flight knowledge to the test at the Patriots Point Flight Academy. Provided/Patriots Point

Hauff said Patriots Point officials have heard stories of the program's impact, including participants who chosen aviation careers or joined the Air Force.

"It supports education and the aircraft and manufacturing industry here in Charleston," Hauff said.

"When we think about what's next, we feel that this needs to be our focus. This is the future of Patriots Point education, and that is worth a big

investment."

The relocation effort is expected to cost around \$800,000 and is to be largely funded by state grants that help fund strategic educational programs. Additional money will be raised through [the Yorktown Foundation](#).

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