



Angel, 10, fills out a form to attend EDCI's STEAM Spring Break program. Angel is one of over 1,600 children that EDCI has been able to serve. (Photo by Elizabeth Chen)



AmeriCorps VISTA fellow and STEAM staff member Beth Ross discusses important qualities of role models at STEAM Saturdays on March 24. (Photo by Elizabeth Chen)

### STEAM Saturdays Schedule

EDCI offers STEAM Saturdays every weekend from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Maureen Joy Charter School. For more information visit [www.edci.org](http://www.edci.org).

# EDCI's STEAM Saturdays offer kids educational fun

By Elizabeth Chen  
Durham VOICE

A typical Saturday morning for 10-year-old Angel consists of a healthy, balanced breakfast, playing soccer outside with his friends and learning something new at the East Durham Children's Initiative's (EDCI) STEAM Saturdays Program.

STEAM Saturdays focus on furthering elementary education in science, technology, engineering, arts and math for students in third through fifth grade.

"The kids come here at about 9:30, and we serve breakfast, talk to the parents, let them know about any upcoming events and we usually go outside for a bit so they can play," said AmeriCorps VISTA fellow and STEAM staff member Beth Ross.

After free time outside, the children attend a workshop to enhance their learning experience. STEAM workshops are led by a variety of people and organizations.

"We might have anywhere from Duke Gardens coming in and talking about environmental health and gardening, to Boost coming in — which is a group of college students from Duke who come and do science experiments with the kids," said Ross.

Ross says that in addition to attending educational workshops, children in the program go on one to two field trips during a semester. She added that one group recently went to the Triangle Land Conservancy at Brumley Forest Nature Preserve to learn about the ecosystem.

### EDCI's mission

The youth-oriented organization was founded in 2008 and began operating in the East Durham community in 2011. In the past seven years, EDCI has served over 1,600 children and 850 families.

EDCI's vision is to assist all children in the 120-block area of East Durham from the time they are born until they graduate high school, prepared for college or a career.

"EDCI's concept is to start from cradle to college — so you start from the very beginning to give them the support that they need," said AmeriCorps VISTA fellow and STEAM staff member Alissa Alba.

Alba, who speaks Spanish fluently, is one of many bilingual EDCI employees.

"Most of our staff is bilingual, the

advocates have bilingual staff and our community programs have bilingual staff — it's huge for us, since about half of our families are Spanish-speaking," said EDCI Development Manager Lauren Stephenson.

### Programs galore

In addition to STEAM Saturdays, EDCI offers over 40 free or low-cost programs.

"We have academic programs, we have pre-school and we have our amazing Parent Advocate program that works directly with families at home and at school," said Stephenson. "We also do a lot of summer camps to help kids prevent summer learning loss."

Stephenson says that the EDCI's summer camps are the most popular programs among children.

"All these camps we offer for 200 kids are totally free, and they all have an academic component that has been proven to help prevent learning loss," said Stephenson. "And, actually, some of our kids have started to show learning gains over the summer, which is really important for them catching up and graduating from high school some day."

### Giving back

The children in EDCI STEAM Saturdays gain real-life experience by working on projects to help their community.

"We're going to be working on project planning, which is under the umbrella of YLC (Youth Leadership Council)," said Ross. "So, the kids will get to pick a community project that they want to do, and they'll brainstorm, work in small groups and then they'll actually do their project. So, thanks to GSK (GlaxoSmithKline PLC), we're actually able to give them money to do their community project."

### Fun for all

For Angel, STEAM Saturdays act as a social event and a learning opportunity.

"One reason [why I go to STEAM] is because I want to see my friends," said Angel. "And another reason is because I want to learn more."

"I like it because after breakfast we go to the park," added Angel's 8-year-old sister, Alison.

*Editor's note: Some last names have not been disclosed to protect the privacy of individuals served by the East Durham Children's Initiative.*