

New spring break options for Durham kids

Durham VOICE
By Candice Craig

While one mother leisurely planned a spring break trip with her children, another frantically searched for child care.

Every year Dajuana Parker, a single mother from Raleigh, takes a trip with her son on his spring break. This year the two took a trip to London with a couple of other family friends.

While Parker is able to enjoy a spring break every year with her son, her friend Denise Jackson, a single mother from Durham, is not as lucky.

"Breaks are great for the children, but I'm a working single mother and I don't get a break," Jackson said. "Who's going to watch my kids?"

Jackson is from Denton, Texas. She moved to North Carolina with her two children 7 years ago for the sake of her job.

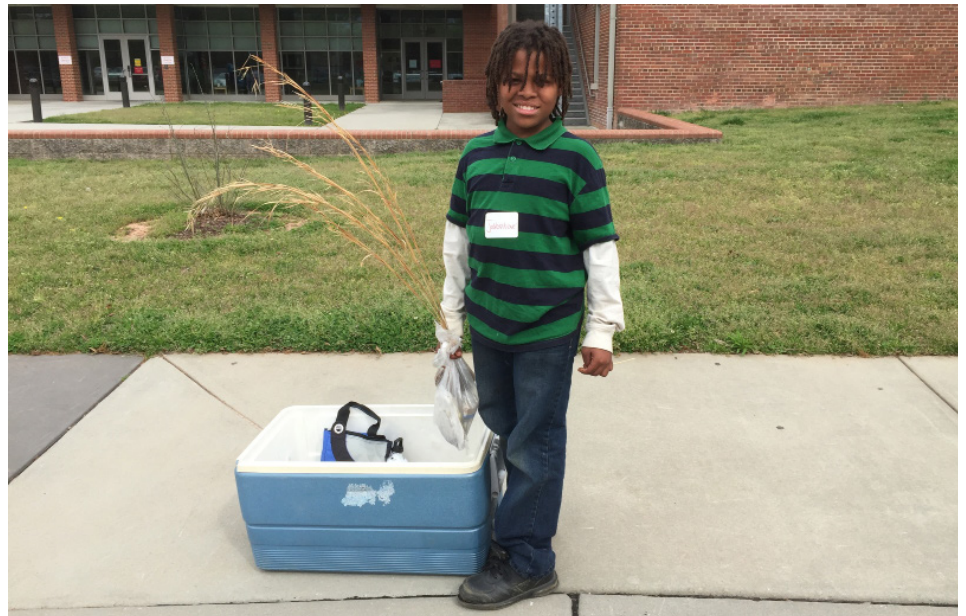
"Child care can be very expensive," Jackson said. "Back home in Texas my family was able to help me a lot with my two children. But here I don't have that advantage."

Jackson resorted to paying close friends and neighbors to watch her children during school breaks while she was at work.

"It was sometimes hard for the kids. They didn't want to spend their spring break going from house to house. They weren't able to play with their friends when they wanted and most of the time they just spent the entire day cooped up in someone's house watching TV," Jackson said. "It was even hard for me. Finding people who were available and asking them for such a big favor was difficult. I also had to wake up hours earlier for work to get my kids ready and take them to whoever was watching them that day."

Angel Minor, an East Durham resident and mother of three boys, was facing almost a similar problem as Jackson with finding child care. Her children Elijah, 8, Quamel, 11, and Javontae, 12, all attend Y.E. Smith Elementary Museum School.

But the East Durham Children's Initiative, an East Durham nonprofit organization started in 2008, gave Minor's children an opportunity to be a part of STEAM Week. This year Minor's sons were three of 20 kids that were selected to be a part of the initiative's STEAM spring break.



Waiting for his mother, Javontae Minor, 12, outside the Horton Career and Resource Center collects some materials from a field trip to the Horton Grove Preservation. He said he planned on taking these items to show his science teacher when he returned to school from spring break. (Photo by Candice Craig)

"They weren't able to play with their friends when they wanted and most of the time they just spent the entire day cooped up in someone's house watching TV."-Denise Jackson, parent

STEAM Week is in the initiative's spring break learning program. STEAM is an acronym that stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics.

"The program is free for all of the students a part of it," Natalie Pickett said, a staff member of the initiative. "Our students range from third to eighth grade."

The program is paid for through donations. A \$150 donation supports tuition and supplies for one child.

From March 28 to April 1, the 20 students took daily field trips to a new place.

On Monday, the students took a trip to the Iron Yard in Durham, one of the world's largest coding schools.

"I was able to meet many talented kids with great problem-solving and creative skills," Tori Hedden said, an engineer student at the Iron Yard. "The kids

seemed very interested and learned a lot."

On Thursday, the students took a field trip to Triangle Land Conservancy's Horton Grove Preservation.

"I'm excited to take all these cool things I got from the woods to my science teacher when we go back to school," Javontae said after his field trip to the preservation.

The initiative is an organization dedicated to changing outcomes and expectations for children and families living in East Durham. Their vision is to have all children in the area graduate from high school to transition to college or a career.

"It takes a village to raise a child, and I'm just thankful that I live in a community that is offering such wonderful opportunities for the children and parents here," Minor said. "It's a lot of help to me and my children are able to be active, go places, and learn things instead of just sitting around at the house watching TV all day."

This year was the program's kickoff year and along with STEAM Week there are STEAM Saturdays. For STEAM Saturdays each month, 20 students in third through eighth grade attend workshops on different topics and go on field trips for four consecutive Saturdays.