Delaney Ferrell, left, a materials engineer at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, shows students how an X-ray cabinet is used to perform non-destructive inspections of materials during a Mentor Day event on April 16 at China Lake. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION, CHINA LAKE, Calif. - A mix of about a dozen high school and college students gathered in Michelson Lab at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division China Lake to be paired up with a NAWCWD employee for the day in a Mentor Day event sponsored by the NAWCWD Equal Employment Opportunity Office along with the Individuals with Disabilities Advisory Team.

Each student was paired with a mentor working in a field that matched the student's career aspirations. Another Mentor Day event was held at Point Mugu on April 27.

“This event is designed for you to learn about the work we do here at a federal installation,” NAWCWD Command Master Chief Todd Gruchalla said in his introduction of the event. “I’ve had mentors in my 30-plus years in the Navy and I still reach back and talk to them. I’m very happy that you took the time out of your busy schedules to be here today.”

After brief introductions with their mentors, the students were led on a tour of the Materials Engineering Lab in addition to getting the opportunity to explore a couple of mine-resistant, ambush protected vehicles. Before lunch, mentors and students had an hour of one-on-one
time. While some remained in the conference room to talk, others explored different areas of the base with their mentors such as workspaces and additional labs.

“During the one-on-one session, my mentee and I met with John Auborn, an electronics engineer,” said Jason Zehendner, director of Corporate IT and Cybersecurity. “He gave us a tour of the Integrated Battlespace Arena and provided several examples of the benefits of combining a technical foundation in engineering with a business management approach, both of which were subjects of interest to my assigned mentee. I offered to be a mentor because I understand and appreciate the impact that my mentors have had on me over the years and I believe that it is my responsibility to pay it forward whenever I can.”

Sarah Delisle, a Point Mugu mentor and branch head of the Naval Air Systems Command Sustainability Office, echoed Zehendner’s experiences.

“I benefitted tremendously in my career due to mentors who believed in me and guided me through various professional issues,” Delisle said. “Sharing advice and lessons learned from experiences I’ve had in my professional career can help young professionals be more successful as they start out in their employment, and potentially serve them in making quality decisions throughout their entire professional career.”

As the event concluded, students received a presentation on career mapping and were briefed on various opportunities for employment at NAWCWD such as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Student Employment Program and Pathways. Dan Carreño, one of the Senior Executive Service champions for the IWD Diversity Advisory Team and director of the Weapons and Energetics Department, left the students with a few final thoughts.

“I remember a few years ago, I spent the day as a mentor and it was one of the most rewarding days of my career,” Carreño said. “Hats off to you for taking the day to look into your future, for taking the time to explore what you can do for the Navy and the opportunities that we have. Any way we can help you, please reach out and we will do our best to get you the information you need and make sure you have people to talk to.”
As part of their tours, students view and learn about mine-resistant, ambush protected vehicles from Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division's Steve Selph during a Mentor Day event on April 16 at China Lake. (U.S. Navy photo)

Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division employees meet with students during a Mentor Day event at China Lake on April 16. (U.S. Navy photo)