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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN DAY SCHOOL LAUNCHES SURFACE DRIFTER

OCTOBER 15, 2016 – First Presbyterian Day School is the sole participant of a Student Drifter project in the Gulf of Mexico. The surface drifter was built by four sixth grade boys, Charlie Hight, Chambers Malouf, Blake Martin, and Braden Stewart with instruction by FPDS Science Teacher Patti Lewis.

“This is normally a junior high or high school level project,” Lewis said. “Now that we have launched the surface drifter, our fifth grade science classes are using latitude and longitude to track the unit. Currently, it is the only Student Drifter in the Gulf of Mexico; the majority of them are in the North Atlantic.”

The boys built the drifter using parts ordered from James Manning and Erin Pelletier with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The crew worked with Jimmy Sanders, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, and was escorted by Mike Strickland, Mississippi Marine Patrol, to launch the unit three miles south of Horn Island near Biloxi. The group coordinated with Jay Ledbetter, policy advisor to Governor Phil Bryant, on guidance in making the trip happen.

The concept of Student Drifters was established more than 10 years ago as a research-based program by scientists at the NOAA lab in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. As originally conceived, the programs’ primary objectives were to engineer and deploy low-cost, hand-built, ocean drifters. These units are used to track currents via satellite telemetry. The data collected contributes to NOAA’s Integrated Ocean Observing System and validates numerical models.

In recent years, the drifter program has broadened its scope and invited local schools and educators to become involved in drifter building, deployment, and tracking.

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