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Irving's Classroom in the Sky Seeks To Inspire Youth

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by CURT EPSTEIN



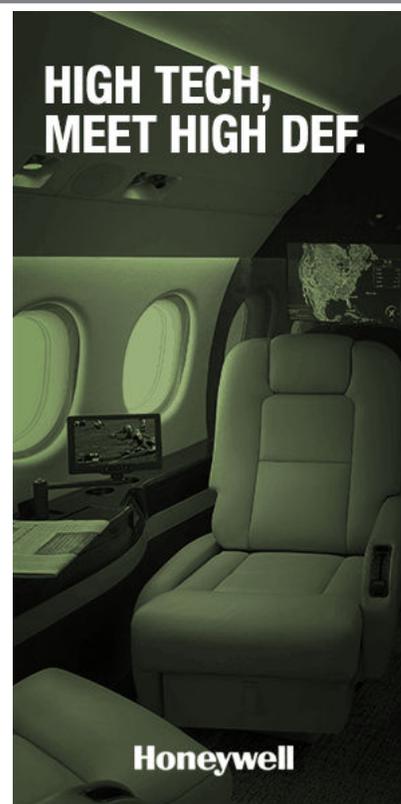
In an attempt to cultivate in young people an interest in aviation, Barrington Irving will interact with millions of students as he flies around the world in a Hawker 400XPR, showing the real-world value of science, technology, engineering and math. (Photo by Cy Cyr)

October 30, 2012, 3:00 PM

"It will be the only classroom in the world capable of reaching 41,000 feet in 18 minutes," said record-setting pilot and educator Barrington Irving yesterday at the launch of his latest endeavor, known as "Classroom in the Sky." The project, an initiative of Irving's non-profit Experience Aviation, will attempt to expose millions of students to aviation by allowing them to interact with him during a planned around-the-world flight, which will take him to all seven continents.

Irving believes the science, technology, engineering and math (Stem) curriculum under development will engage students in a way that is challenging for typical classroom learning. "This is the advantage that we have in the aviation industry," said Irving. "What we do is exciting, what we do really triggers and fires the neurons in the brains of young people to take interest in math and science, and that is very difficult to do within the educational system." Through the Internet, social-media outlets and even through in-flight conversations, students will be able to follow along and participate in lessons tied to the flight. "We are empowering the students to become their own engineers, become aviators, scientists," he said. In addition to science and math, Irving plans to include other disciplines such as geography, ecology and biology as well, as students learn more about our planet.

In support of the program, Hawker Beechcraft (HBC) has donated a Hawker 400XPR jet to serve as the flying classroom. "Sponsoring Barrington's Classroom in the Sky initiative is a natural fit for Hawker Beechcraft: we provide an aircraft that showcases its ability to meet his rigorous mission requirements anywhere in the world and we help highlight the importance of Stem education in creating a strong future for aviation and other industries," said Shawn Vick, HBC's executive vice president for customers. In addition to HBC, many other aviation companies have pledged their support to the project, which so far has accumulated approximately \$1.3 million in funding and donated services on its way to the nearly \$3 million required. The mission will receive sponsorship and support from the National Geographic Society, NASA and Innovations for Education to develop a curriculum that can serve students from grades 3 to 10 and expose them early on to a possible career choice, according to Irving. "If you can get a student to pick up the bug of aviation or engineering at an early age, studies have proved that it works," he said.



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Irving, who was born in Jamaica and raised in Miami's inner city, credits his passion for aviation to a chance encounter with a Jamaican-born professional pilot who allowed him to tour an airliner cockpit. He washed airplanes to earn his flight-school tuition, and in 2007 he became the youngest pilot ever to fly solo around the world, accomplishing the feat over the course of 97 days in 2007.

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