

Showing off science skills

Thursday, August 11, 2016

SHINE students show value of program

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Amanda Colecio, 13, of Weatherly, shows off Mr. Robotic, a 4-foot-tall robot that she helped build through the SHINE program. See tnonline.com for photo gallery and see Times News Facebook for video. AMY MILLER/TIMES NEWS Copyright - Zubek-Miller Photography

The Carbon and Schuylkill SHINE Afterschool program has been changing students' lives for the past 12 years.

It has inspired students through hands-on programs, built stronger support systems in their educations and formed strong interest in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

For 13-year-old triplets Amanda, Antonio and Alexis Colecio of Weatherly, the SHINE program has opened up a world where anything is possible.

On Wednesday, the three showed off some of their newfound STEM skills to over 40 people from the Pennsylvania Afterschool Caucus leadership team, state Department of Education, Pennsylvania Statewide Youth Development Network, Lehigh Carbon Community College and local school officials.

They used computer animated design to create parts for a race car and showed a 4-foot-tall robot that moved and followed simple commands during the

meeting at Carbon Career & Technical Institute in Jim Thorpe.

The meeting demonstrated the need for programs like SHINE across the country.

A believer

Congressman Lou Barletta, who has been an advocate for the program since 2011, said that since his first visit to the Panther Valley SHINE center, "I was a believer."

"After seeing the SHINE program, it is exactly what we need to do to change the lives and direction of our children," he said.

“So often we talk about dealing with crime that we have in our communities, but we have to look beyond that. We have to change the lives of our children and the next generation and this program has proven that for over 10 years. This program works. This program is an example of what we need to do.

“We need to make sure funding is there and to increase the funding and replicate this program,” he continued. “This will change the lives of our children.”

Barletta has partnered with state Sen. John Yudichak to replicate the Carbon and Schuylkill SHINE model in neighboring Luzerne County last year and is excited to see the program changing the lives of at-risk children in the three counties.



State Sens. Ryan Aument and John Yudichak, left and center, watch as Antonio Colecio, 13, of Weatherly, shows how to use the computer animated design program to design a portion of a race car during a recent visit by state, federal and local officials to see how the program works. With them is Carbon Career & Technical Institute instructor Jeremy Pease. For more photos of the meeting, visit www.tnonline.com. AMY MILLER/TIMES NEWS Copyright - Zubek-Miller Photography

Like Barletta, Yudichak has been an advocate of the SHINE program since he became a senator, taking up the charge of the late Sen. James Rhoades, who helped move this program through its infancy.

“It’s always inspiring to see the children of SHINE be excited about education and to talk to the children and their parents and see how much it empowers them and invests them in the education of their child,” he said.

State Sens. Ryan Aument and Art Haywood, and state Reps. Mindy Fee, Doyle Heffley and Jerry Knowles, provided bipartisan support for the program Wednesday.

Yudichak said that one of the goals is to show legislators where the \$800,000 earmarked for the SHINE program in the three counties is going.

“It is very important that they understand those dollars are well spent. It’s a great investment and the return on investment in the inspiration of these children is worth it,” Yudichak said.

He said the goal is to have partners in the Pennsylvania General Assembly who will fight to fund afterschool programs.

STEM jobs

Laura Saccente, director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Youth Development Network, said STEM careers are the future of Pennsylvania and by 2018, Pennsylvania will have over 314,000 STEM-related jobs.

Less than half will be because of the lack of qualified workers.

The SHINE program aims to help fill those gaps for the future workforce of the country by introducing students in the birth to career model that they can be engineers, scientists, medical professionals, and more and building on that interest through various projects.

“Let us go beyond today and think about the future,” Saccente said. “What will it take to ensure all Pennsylvania children and youth have access to these types of programs? What steps can we take tomorrow to bring that vision closer to reality?”

Students Jeremiah and Joseph Paulino of Shenandoah Valley’s SHINE center said that SHINE has helped them academically, while making learning fun.



Jeremiah Paulino, a third-grade student of Shenandoah Valley SHINE center, helps build a bridge using blocks during a math exercise that marries math and engineering. Copyright - Zubek-Miller Photography

Jeremiah, who has been in the program for four years, said he loves competing in the SHINE challenges and especially liked building marshmallow catapults.

Six-year SHINE member, Joseph, agreed with his brother, adding that he loved working with Tinker CAD to create things for the 3D printer.

“It has helped me in reading and math and we are able to build and construct,” he said. “I love SHINE.”

The group was impressed as they walked the halls of CCTI, watching students build bridges, complete math programs, use sophisticated programs to design blueprints and learn how to work with tools to create amazing things.

The SHINE program is 12 years of data, director Rachel Strucko said, adding that this model takes a student, builds bridges between the program and the student’s school and family and works to make sure children excel both academically and socially.

At its inception, the SHINE program worked in three centers in Carbon and Schuylkill with 90 students. Today, it will serve 1,200 students from 16 centers in Carbon, Schuylkill and Luzerne counties.