Boeing Computer Literacy Program Builds Networks Between Southeast L.A.-Area Students, Parents

A novel Boeing community outreach program is uniting more than 200 Southeast Los Angeles-area students and parents to learn more about computers--and each other.

The participants - sixth through eighth-grade students and parents from schools in La Mirada, Lynwood, Paramount, Santa Fe Springs, South Gate and Whittier - are part of the Boeing "Parents, Kids and Computers" (PKC) program, which concludes its spring semester tomorrow evening, April 11, with a graduation ceremony at Boeing North American Space Systems Division in Downey.

PKC is designed to provide opportunities for students and parents to learn together about computer hardware and software and develop learning skills. In the process, they also get to share quality time and improve their communications and dialogue on topics of mutual interest.

The classes, which are taught by more than 20 Boeing volunteers, range from word processing and computer-aided design to computer programming and the Internet and use modern software tools including Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, CATIA, Microsoft Paintbrush and QBASIC. They are structured to encourage joint student-parent participation. Classes are held one night a week for five weeks, primarily at the Boeing Downey facility, and are offered in the spring and fall. Enrollment sessions are held at area schools in coordination with local educators.

PKC was founded in 1993 by three Boeing engineers who wanted to share their computer expertise with local Boeing communities. Rather than reaching out only to youth, they chose to target families who are seeking opportunities for shared learning experiences, particularly at schools where computer training is limited.

Reaction to the program by students, parents, schools and the community alike has been overwhelmingly favorable, said PKC coordinator Dan Santana, a vehicle and systems analysis engineer at Space Systems Division.

"PKC gives parents opportunities to share quality time with their children for a few hours a week, while learning technologies that are often just as unfamiliar to them as to their children," Santana said.

"Not only do the parents gain an understanding of skills their children need to survive in today's workplace, but the parents and children are often able to establish new bonds based upon their shared common experience. The result is improved parent-child relationships.

"Boeing encourages other companies and schools to establish similar programs."

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