



## World of digital technology opens for high school students

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In a giant step from surfing sites on their home computers and watching "C.S.I." 18 Howard County Public School high school students spent three weeks of their summer vacation immersed in a course -- the Young Scholars Program -- learning skills in digital literacy and exploring career opportunities in computer security, information assurance, and digital forensics.

Davina Pruitt, owner of the consulting firm Educational Technology Policy, Research, and Outreach, is the director of the program.

Part of the intent of the program is to expose students to the fields of information security, systems administration, information assurance and digital forensics which are plentiful in the region, especially with the Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, initiative, Pruitt said.

What sets the Young Scholars Program apart, said Pruitt, is that the key component targeted is information assurance.

"There is a need for a workforce in this area because of homeland security," Pruitt said.

The course is a way of getting more details to students interested in careers utilizing technology and how to pursue them, Pruitt said.

Topics covered included cryptography, system vulnerabilities, and careers in computer security, digital forensics and information assurance.

Students participating in the summer course were given an opportunity to open, examine and install hardware components of a personal computer while gaining basic knowledge of a computer operating system. They examined a variety of different programs related to computer security, how to get rid of spy ware, how to tell when a web site is secure. Students tried their hand at encrypting and decrypting codes sent through a digital format. Most importantly, students were presented with common issues related to information assurance, such as how to debug a computer program, in order to advance their skills in problem solving.

Students toured local labs, among them those at the National Security Agency and National Institute of Standards and Technology and heard from a variety of speakers, which included people from the Maryland Computer Crimes Section's Computer Forensic Lab and security companies.

The course was headquartered at the Applications and Research Lab and funded by CyberWATCH Center through a grant from the National Science Foundation coordinated by Pruitt.

Pruitt is a member of the Howard County Public School System Science, Technology, Engineering and Math--STEM--business education coalition. The coalition is designed to bring specialized opportunities, like the one held at the ARL this summer, to kids in the school system, said John Quinn, coordinator of science for the school system. "We are fortunate to have the course," said Quinn, who added that more courses like this one will be offered to students as the coalition builds partnerships with businesses in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

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