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Plugging in young minds

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By **Rebecca Rose**
 Killeen Daily Herald

"What I'm going to say may surprise you," Mayor Tim Hancock said, speaking to a room full of students at the Killeen Boys & Girls Club. "But I cannot operate a computer."

His words were part of a cautionary tale shared with students attending the Connect a Million Minds event on Wednesday. The event was sponsored by Time Warner Cable.

Hancock told the 40 students that he didn't have the same opportunities as a youngster to learn about technology as they have.

"I encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities. You will be faced with technology in the future," he said. "You're not going to be able to survive without it."

Connect a Million Minds is a five-year, \$100 million initiative created by Time Warner to make math and science more appealing to young students.

The cable company invited Killeen students to become their engineers for a day, to learn how wireless devices such as phones and laptops share information across networks.

Students donned T-shirts with expressions such as "Rock Scientists Rock!" and "Do the Math." Name tags were written in binary code to demonstrate how computers talk to each other.

In one game, students built a mock wireless network with a hula hoop to show how Wi-Fi communications work.

Ryan Kelly, Time Warner Cable spokesman, said the event is part of an ongoing project to spark interest in subjects that American students are lagging behind in.

"It's designed to inspire kids to get the skills they need in science and math," Kelly said. "Statistics say that American students are falling behind in those areas. The U.S. ranks 17th in science and 24th in math out of the top 34 industrial nations."

Asya Love, a sixth-grader at Rancier Middle School, said the activities helped her learn about the wide variety of things electronic devices can do.

"I found out that there are a lot of different things you can do on cellphones besides play games or text," she said. "You can get information on science and nature, and things like that."

The students at the event were from Rancier and Manor middle schools in Killeen. Kelly said the focus on middle school students was deliberate.

"We target mainly middle school kids because studies show that's the age when the decline in math and science begins."

Kelly said with fields such as engineering and technology rapidly expanding, it is important to keep young minds interested in pursuing careers in those areas.



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"We want to create that spark, to teach kids that math and science can be fun," Kelly said. "We need the next generation to be skilled in math and science because that's where the jobs are going to be."

Time Warner pledged \$2,500 to the Killeen Boys & Girls Club for math- and science-related activities.

More information about the Connect a Million Minds initiative can be found at www.connectamillionminds.com.

Contact Rebecca Rose at (254) 501-7548.

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