Student program SHINEs on

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ELLEN F. O'CONNELL/Staff Photographer. Senator Ryan Aument, from left, PA 36th District, Senator John Yudichak, PA 14th Senatorial District and Congressman Louis Barletta, PA 11th Congressional District, attend â€œA Holistic Approach to STEM Educationâ€� workshop about the SHINE program held Wednesday at the Carbon Career & Technical Institute in Jim Thorpe.

JIM THORPE — A bridge that Ayden Zamudio, Anthony Ruiz and Joseph Paulino were building had a step at each footer instead of a level deck.

Building an even bridge took extra blocks, and the boys from Shenandoah Valley Elementary School were told to build the longest bridge, not the smoothest.

The longest bridge, the fastest measurements — which sisters Amanda and Alexis Colecio of the Weatherly Area School District raced to compute — and other contests help interest students in learning through a program called SHINE.

During after-school sessions and summer camps, SHINE supplements what children from 10 school districts in three counties learn in school.

SHINE, or Schools and Homes in Education, also lets children try out scientific equipment, like the schematic drawings of cars that the Colecios' brother, Antonio, evaluated on a computer.

"These are the kids who would be dropping out or might not pass the next class. Here they are building robots," U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, R-11, said while watching a 5-foot silver creation with eyes of digital blue lights wheel around the Carbon Career and Technical Institute in Jim Thorpe.

Lawmakers, state government workers and educators gathered at the institute to learn more about SHINE on Wednesday.

The program began 14 years ago in Carbon and Schuylkill counties, expanded to Luzerne County this year and, local lawmakers think, could become a national model.

"We know the track record. It's not a program about possibilities. It's about the data," state Sen. John Yudichak, D-14, who has teamed with Barletta to promote and seek funding for SHINE.

Ninety-nine percent of the students in SHINE pass to the next grade, but data, which the program's 30 teachers collect rigorously, also shows that students improved their grades, attendance and behavior.

The program delves into science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the so-called STEM curriculum that prepares students for future career opportunities.

ELLEN F. O'CONNELL/Staff Photographer. Laura Saccente, director of the PA Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network, talks about the SHINE program during Wednesday's workshop help at the Carbon Career & Technical Institute in Jim Thorpe.

In 2018, Pennsylvania will have 413,000 vacancies in STEM jobs, Laura Saccente, director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network, said.

After-school programs like SHINE help students from poor households catch up to students from wealthy families in academics. Students who attend programs after school improve their grades in science and math and gain an interest in those subjects, a first step toward careers in them. Only 16 percent of the state's female students are interested in a career in science, the network's literature says.

Saccente said after-school programs help guide children from cradle to career.

In SHINE, tutors visit kindergartners at home to meet the children and their parents.

Rose McGlone said kindergartners from Panther Valley School District look forward to seeing her once a week.

"What did you bring today?" they ask.

From her traveling bag, McGlone might pull out a beachball, a book or seashells labeled 1 to 25 that help children learn numbers.

ELLEN F. O'CONNELL/Staff Photographer. Rachel Strucko, director of the Lehigh Carbon Community College and the Carbon and Schuylkill SHINE program, explains the philosophy of the SHINE program during Wednesday's workshop held at the Carbon Career & Technical Institute in Jim Thorpe.

Rachel Strucko, director of SHINE in Carbon and Schuylkill counties, said during summer, teachers visit homes of each student in kindergarten through eighth grade. The visits help students remember lessons from the school year.

At summer camps, which run from mid-June to early July and provide breakfasts and lunches, students have raised trout, built cars and learned culinary science with an emphasis on science in molecular gastronomy classes.

While SHINE ends at eighth grade, summer camps have been open to older students since 2010 to help them explore careers.

During the school year, Strucko said students go to SHINE programs four times a week. The programs last from 3 to 6 p.m. and include a hot meal, exercise and homework reviews.

Once a month, students put on programs for their parents as a way to build partnerships between home and school.

"If somebody does something positive in our after-school program, we call the parents," Strucko said.

The meals and exercise help children stay healthy, she said, while literature handed out to the audience said 92 percent of adolescents don't get enough physical activity and 90 percent of children don't eat enough vegetables.

Strucko said SHINE costs $1,500 per child each year.

Yudichak said governments and private donors from utility firms to the William C. McGowan Charitable Fund have given $3 million in the past year to start SHINE in Luzerne County.

"I've never seen anything grow this rapidly," Yudichak said.

He and Barletta view SHINE as an outgrowth of the anti-gang effort that they began together. SHINE provides supervision during hours when crimes committed by and against young people peak, and the program shows students possibilities for their future.

"It needs to be an example not only for Pennsylvania but for our country," Barletta said. "The best thing we can do for America is to change the lives of the children."

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