



Arkansas Department of Education

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Transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education

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Arkansas Joins Partnership Encouraging Young Women to Explore Careers in Cybersecurity

Governor Hutchinson Announces State Participation in Girls Go CyberStart Initiative

LITTLE ROCK — Gov. Asa Hutchinson today announced Arkansas' participation in an innovative cybersecurity training partnership with the SANS Institute, the largest provider of cybersecurity training and certification for professionals in government and commercial institutions worldwide. The partnership aims to inspire the next generation of cybersecurity professionals and identify talented youth in Arkansas.

Open to female high school students, the Girls Go CyberStart initiative encourages participants to explore their interests in cyber studies, learn core cybersecurity skills, and build confidence in problem solving.

"In the past four years, the number of girls taking computer science has increased more than 1,000 percent," Hutchinson said. "I am pleased that the Department of Education is partnering with the SANS Institute to encourage young women to learn about cybersecurity. Computer science and cybersecurity are too important to the future of our state for us to move forward without the skills and intelligence that women will bring to the field. I am confident this training program will bolster the number of girls in our computer science programs, and the state will be stronger for that addition of talent."

Girls Go CyberStart is a free, online game open to all female students in grades 9 through 12, regardless of their prior knowledge or experience with cybersecurity and information technology. Playing alone or on teams, participants solve challenges to gain points and advance through levels, earning prizes along the way. In addition to individual prizes, such as trips, gift certificates, and computers, the three in-state schools with the most participants win monetary prizes.

Though thousands of students participated in the CyberStart program when it was launched in 2017 by the SANS Institute, SANS noticed a notable deficit in participation by young women, who represented only 5 percent of the first-round participants. The Girls Go CyberStart initiative is the direct result of that discovery and is designed to specifically engage female high school students.

The Arkansas Department of Education will collaborate to encourage young women to register and participate in this exciting opportunity.

“When the Arkansas Computer Science Initiative began in 2015, Governor Hutchinson emphasized his commitment to not only ensuring that the overall number of enrolled students increases, but also to establishing a system that empowers young women, as well as young men, to engage in this critical state endeavor,” said Anthony Owen, chief state STEM officer and state director of computer science education. “Partnerships like the one we are entering with Girls Go CyberStart is another exciting strategic step, as Arkansas continues to expand the impact of the #CSforAR / #ARKidsCanCode initiative. Arkansas will continue to strive to grow female participation in cybersecurity and technology.”

“The nation desperately needs more highly-skilled cyber professionals, and we have evidence that CyberStart improves the quality and preparation of people entering the cybersecurity field,” SANS Director of Research Alan Paller said. “Women are significantly underrepresented in the technical side of cybersecurity. By opening CyberStart to thousands of girls in high school, and to all college students, we hope to help the nation identify the next generation of talented people who will excel in this critical field.”

To learn more about the high school Girls Go CyberStart program, please visit girlsgocyberstart.org. To learn more about the college Cyber FastTrack program, please visit cyber-fasttrack.org.

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