

Schools step up math, science learning

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Shannon McMillon has always wanted to help people through science.

Courtney Johnson wants to be a forensic scientist.

And Bossier High School has implemented a biotechnology program this year to help students reach their goals. McMillon and Johnson are among seven students participating in the high school's biotechnology program. The Bossier City school and Shreveport's Southwood High School Biotechnology Magnet program are the only programs in secondary or elementary education of their kind locally.

"They should offer these types of programs at different schools," said Johnson, 17, a senior at Bossier High. "Since I want to be a forensic scientist, I thought this program would be the best fit for me. It's exciting to learn about all these things, and it gives us an opportunity to get different experiences."

Bossier and Southwood high schools aren't the only schools aiming to beef up technology, computer, math and science-oriented programs. Many area schools like Southfield School, Loyola College Prep and many others are working to better prepare students for careers in math and science by enhancing existing programs and making technology a normal part of the classroom.

And with Barksdale Air Force Base being the provisional headquarters for Cyber Command, area schools are hoping they'll be able to train their students to fill related jobs.

"Science and technology is a new and booming business in this area," said Michael Stacy, lead biotechnology teacher at Bossier High School. "There are several opportunities for the kids to continue their education here or they can get jobs in the field. If we can get them in those jobs, they'll do well and it means we've actually done something."

The biotechnology program curriculum consists of a survey of biotechnology class and a forensic science class that students take in the fall semester. In the spring semester, students take chemistry for biotechnology and a molecular biology course.

The classes earn the student seven college credit hours that will transfer to Bossier Parish Community College and LSU.

The program is a partnership between BPCC, LSU Health Sciences Center, Louisiana Tech and LSU in Baton Rouge.

"All of this just depends on how much science you want to take," said McMillon, an Airline High School senior who's in the Bossier High program. "I've always been interested in this, and science is my favorite subject."

Curtis Smith, science coordinator for Bossier schools, said the biotech program is another way of getting science and technology at the forefront of all schools.

"This is the first stab at trying to get technology courses in conjunction with some schools, and something with Cyber Command could be developed in the future," Smith said. "Barksdale is on our doorstep. There's no way we're going to know how (Cyber Command) could impact



Amy Washington, a forensic science teacher at Bossier High School, talks with her class before they performed a luminol test for blood recently. (Jim Hudelson/The Times)

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us directly, but I'm sure we'll be looking at that in the future."

Loyola College Prep is the first high school in the area to join the Cyber Innovation Center, which will host the Air Force Cyberspace Symposium in late November at the Shreveport Convention Center. The gathering is to highlight major users and vendors of products relative to Cyber Command, said Principal Frank Israel.

The Catholic private school has also stepped up technology use in the classroom. About half of the school's teachers now have new Gateway Tablet computers. Teachers use these, along with LCD projectors, in writing and literature classes, in math instruction, and in science.

"We are very excited about the possibilities Cyber Command could offer to our area and to our students," Israel said.

"I believe this is our best shot at helping to stop the brain drain created by the departure of bright Louisiana kids who leave our state in search of better jobs and economic opportunity. This could be the beginning of a progressive expansion of our city."

Even elementary and middle schools are stepping up their efforts in science, math and technology.

Linwood Middle School in Shreveport has a math and science magnet program that boasts courses in robotics and video technology. Jeff Stokes, headmaster for the private Southfield School, said the school is also enhancing technology, science and math in classrooms.

"We began to put programs in place long before any talk of Cyber Command, but it was just common sense because we were aware of foreign competition and the growing interest in the fields," Stokes said. "We'd be absolutely thrilled if Cyber Command decides to locate here, but even if it doesn't, we have tools here to prepare students."

Fairfield Elementary School Principal Kathy Barberousse said her school offers a program called accelerated math, which uses technology to help students learn the subject. The school also participates in the Starbase science program held on Barksdale's base.

"It's not specific to Cyber Command, but we want our kids to be prepared in those areas because it's going to be our future."

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