Gov. Cooper Encourages NC High School Girls to Join Innovative Cybersecurity Competition

Girls Go CyberStart provides opportunities to explore careers in cybersecurity

RALEIGH: Governor Roy Cooper today announced an innovative opportunity for high school girls to explore the field of cybersecurity through a competitive online game called Girls Go CyberStart. North Carolina girls in grades 9-12 can sign up to compete with girls from 16 other states and territories for a chance to win prizes—and potentially discover their future career.

By participating in the online competition, girls will learn cybersecurity skills and test their aptitude for future studies or work in this crucial field.

"Business and government face cyber attacks daily, and the threats are only expected to grow in the future," Gov. Cooper said. "We need to recruit the next generation of skilled cyber professionals, including more women. Girls Go CyberStart is a great way for high school girls to explore cybersecurity careers in a fun and interactive way."

North Carolina is partnering with the SANS Institute, a cybersecurity research and education organization, and Cisco, a leading global IT firm with a strong presence in the state, to offer the program. Governor Cooper and the NC Department of Information Technology (DIT) are working with schools, youth organizations and technology firms to encourage as many young women as possible to register beginning January 29 for the online competition. The contest starts February 20, 2018.

"Information technology is the career focus of the future, and it is essential to have a diverse workforce in this field so that not only North Carolina, but the United States, has the support it needs to contend in the cybersecurity industry. Women and girls can make that happen," said Secretary Eric Boyette, North Carolina's Chief Information Officer and head of DIT.

Each year, the United States has 40,000 unfilled cybersecurity positions, according to an analysis by cybersecurity job tracker CyberSeek. By 2019 alone, experts with IT governance association ISACA project a shortage of 2 million cybersecurity professionals around the world.

"The information technology and cybersecurity industry is growing in North Carolina, and companies' biggest challenge is finding enough qualified talent," said N.C. Department of Commerce Secretary Anthony M. Copeland. "The Girls Go CyberStart program will help North Carolina keep up with this growing demand and set girls up for success in challenging, fulfilling IT careers."

How the Contest Works
Participating students will work in teams of one to four students and do not need prior cybersecurity knowledge or IT experience to compete. Participants do need access to a computer with an Internet connection.

Students will get a chance to experience being a cybersecurity superhero by competing in a series of online challenges that cover cybersecurity, programming, computer forensics and web attacks.

High school girls in North Carolina who excel in the Girls Go CyberStart game will have the chance to win tech prizes and gift certificates, as well as a trip to the 2018 Women in CyberSecurity (WiCyS) Conference in Chicago.

"Worldwide, we have two critical shortages to contend with. Statistics show a shortage of women in IT and an even greater shortage in cyber professionals. It is imperative that we promote security practices and build security practitioners from an early age. This project will hopefully be one of many to fan the flames of interest in our young female students and create a pipeline for cybersecurity within the State of North Carolina," said Maria Thompson, State Chief Information Risk Officer.

How to Sign Up
Young women who attend high school in North Carolina will compete with girls in Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming and American Samoa this February. The contest is open to students who attend public, charter, private or home schools.

High school girls in the participating states can register from January 29 through February 16. Teams will play the online game from February 20-25. The first 10,000 young women who register will be able to play.

More information about the competition and a sample challenge are available online at GirlsGoCyberStart.com. For North Carolina specific information, please visit
nc.gov/girlsgocyberstart.

About Girls Go CyberStart
The program, known as Girls Go CyberStart, was initiated by SANS following the recent launch of their CyberStart program, which helped 3,500 students in seven states discover and demonstrate their aptitude for cybersecurity. However, only five percent of the students who participated in the first round of the program were female. SANS launched Girls Go CyberStart specifically to attract young women i to the field of cybersecurity.

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