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Making a GO of it

SCI-TECH SCENE | GO Team aims to spur girls' interest in math, more

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Yesenia Amaro was so enthused about her Web-design class at GO! Team, she decided to mentor younger kids in the program.

Yesenia, a 14-year-old ninth-grader at Carver Military Academy, enjoyed writing poems and designing Web pages about animals the teacher brought to the after-school meetings to spur students' interest in science.

Andrea Velarde, 12, sixth-grader at Orozco Elementary Fine Arts & Sciences School, learned about the role of walking sticks in South American culture. "I enjoy learning new things about the computer and having new friends," Andrea said.

GO Team -- GO stands for "Girls Online" -- introduces Latina girls ages 9 to 13 to science projects and computer technology training.

The GO Team coursework covers basic programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and gives the girls experience in researching homework on safe Web sites and designing their own Web pages.

El Valor Corp. runs the GO Team program at its Pilsen and South Chicago community centers. El Valor is a 35-year-old nonprofit that offers programs ranging from guitar lessons to reading tutors. The programs are aimed at people with disabilities, the disenfranchised and the underserved. El Valor works with 4,000 families, of which 800 have a family member with a disability.

El Valor branched into science and technology education five years ago when it partnered with the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum to win a National Science Foundation Grant. El Valor has taken over the GO Team program and has won \$30,000 in new funding from the Motorola Foundation's Innovation Generation grant.

"The programs help girls consider a career in science or technology but more importantly, offer encouragement that if that's the future they want, they can have it," said Eileen Sweeney, director of the 55-year-old foundation that focuses on K-12 education in science, technology, engineering and math, especially for underrepresented groups. Motorola will award more than \$5 million to science and math programs this year as part of its Innovation Generation program.

"It hits on key issues for young people -- what they do in the time they are out of school," Sweeney said.

Studies show that the number of girls and boys who like math is about the same in fourth grade, but by eighth grade, girls are less likely than boys to think they are good at math and science.

The journal Science reported last year that a study showed girls measured up to boys in math in every grade from second through 11th. Researchers caution that parents and teachers who persist in believing that boys are simply better at math should realize that nearly 75 percent of future jobs will require using math and science skills necessary to work with computers, according to the U.S. Labor Department's Jobs 2000 report.

About 17 girls participate in each of the twice-a-year GO Team programs at the Rey Gonzalez Children and Family Center and the Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center. The centers also offer a technology summer camp and a computer workshop for parents.

GO Team hosts female guest speakers who tell the girls about their careers in fields such as engineering and architecture.

"We open the girls' eyes and show them there are more than just the same old jobs," as possible careers, said Natali Gonzalez, lead tutor for the youth enrichment program at the Rey Gonzalez Center.