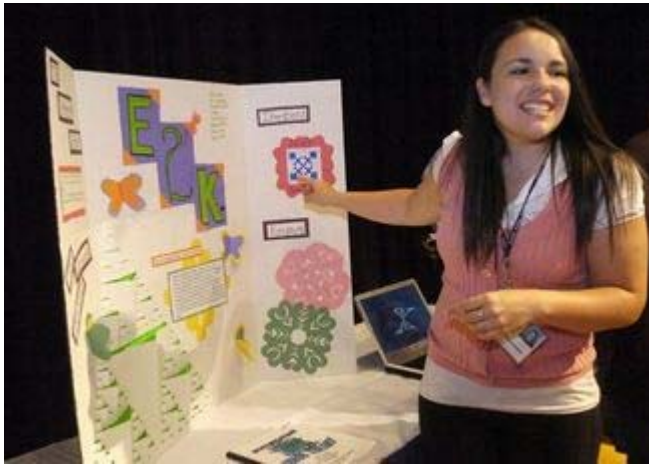


Budding teachers train at IMSA

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Kimberly Heilenbach, an Illinois State University student from La Grange Park, gives a poster board presentation during the Golden Apple Scholar program at the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora.

Marcelle Bright | Staff Photographer

By Melissa Jenco | Daily Herald Staff

Joyce Zhang always figured since she is good at math she might as well be a teacher.

But it wasn't until she joined the Golden Apple Scholar program and worked with struggling Chicago students that teaching turned into her calling.

"The kids were not succeeding, and it wasn't because they are not bright. It was because the school system and the teachers have been failing them," said Zhang, a student at the University of Illinois. "Ever since then I took the vow to change the world one kid at a time."

Zhang is one of 22 Golden Apple Scholars who spent five weeks this summer at the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora training to become teachers who will boost math and science education for the next generation.

"You make the difference," IMSA President Max McGee told them Friday at a special parting ceremony. "You are the power against ignorance. You are the power against social ills and the diseases of our society."

College students in the program participate in summer training programs and receive \$2,000 plus an additional \$2,500 toward their college tuition. In return, they promise to teach for five years in Illinois schools with low tests scores and low-income families.

Although the program has been in place since 1989, this was the first year of Golden Apple's partnership with IMSA. The partnership was made possible by a \$341,000 federal grant secured by U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin.

In addition to attending workshops, the prospective teachers worked throughout the summer with high-performing middle and high school students attending IMSA's math and science programs.

Brandon Thornton, a Golden Apple Scholar from Rock Island who attends Illinois State University, said he was inspired by the potential he saw in young students at IMSA's summer programs.

"You think you know what you want to do but not until you actually experience it ... and I know I really want to be a teacher now," he said. "There's nothing else that's right for me."

Dominic Belmonte, president and CEO of the Golden Apple Foundation, said budding teachers in the program believe they can change the educational injustice so many children face just because of where they live.

He reminded the prospective teachers that parents are entrusting their children to them.

"Maybe you're going to be the first adult that's going to touch them, get them, understand them, inspire them," Belmonte said. "Get them to see they can be better than they are and that a brighter tomorrow exists."