



How I See It

Collaboration key to rekindled math, science interest

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Massachusetts is the hub of biotechnology and scientific research, but the unfortunate reality is that many of our cash-strapped schools are unable to inspire students' interest in the sciences. Curricula differ from school to school and affect the preparedness of students for college and the MCAS. To be competitive, we must raise academic standards, attract more qualified science teachers, increase their salaries, extend the school year, improve early education and involve the scientific community.

Without resources, the involvement of the scientific community, parental assistance and qualified teachers, progress cannot be expected. No one can argue that the education reform wave of the 90s has not produced some positive results. But the area in which our children are consistently lacking is science education and overall interest in the sciences.

In a sign of how far behind our children have fallen, last year 31 percent, or roughly a full third of all eighth-graders throughout the state, failed the science portion of the test. It should also be recognized that it is one thing to prepare a student to pass a memorized or drilled test and another to develop his or her critical and creative thinking ability.

In 2002, I founded the WhizKids Foundation to boost students' exposure and interest in math and the sciences. The program's goal is to help schools and students organize and set up science fairs, science clubs, facilitate access to the scientific community, run science days, teach students how to be entrepreneurs and offer ongoing lectures by WhizKids staff in subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics, engineering and technology.

Participating in science fairs stimulates students to develop inquisitiveness, creativity and reasoning power. Early hands-on experiments allows students to see the applicability of science in the everyday world. Science club discussions and the reading of scientific materials will help to improve reading comprehension and verbal skills. Students that lack help at home will be able to get help with homework so that they will not fall behind and lose interest even before they start. WhizKids programs are currently running in Massachusetts, California and Florida.

In the spirit of collaboration and partnership that defines effective public policy, WhizKids is collaborating with schools, community organizations, corporations and is attempting to attract governmental involvement. Partnerships and collaborations have been initiated with the following organizations: the MIT Public Service Center, the Massachusetts State Science Fair, MolySym, the Inner City Scholarship Fund, the New England Chinese Information Network Association, the Jewish Day School Advocacy Forum, the Girl Scouts of America, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council, the Museum of Science, The McAuliffe Space Center, and the Center for Engineering Education Outreach at Tufts University.

The goal of WhizKids is to play a role in exposing young people to the breadth of scientific exploration, but we cannot do it alone. It is time to revive our commitment to science education by partnering together with other organizations and providing role models and resources to encourage our students' curiosity and desire to learn.

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