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Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUPERINTENDENT'S EMAIL

Contact: John Hendron, 804-225-4387

DATE: November 16, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUPT'S EMAIL: Cybersecurity Competition for High School Students

The Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA), in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), is bringing the CyberStart America competition to the Commonwealth. Virginia high school-aged students are encouraged to explore their aptitude for cybersecurity and computer science by participating in the program. Winning students can earn prizes and scholarships, as well as recognition for their schools.

The competition is sponsored by the National Cyber Scholarship Foundation and the SANS Institute. The CyberStart America program is a series of online challenges that allow students to act as cyber protection agents, to solve cybersecurity-related puzzles and explore topics such as code breaking, programming, networking and digital forensics. The program is open to all, so activities can be part of assigned homework, an extracurricular club, or completed on one's own. Experience or knowledge in information technology or cybersecurity is not necessary to participate.

This free program is now open and ends in March 2021. All Virginia students in grades 9-12 are invited to participate. Building on the success of last year's Girls Go CyberStart program, this year's CyberStart game is open to all high school students, and anyone who reaches level five will qualify for the national competition to compete for scholarships. To encourage participation of young women and U.S. Army's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) cadets, specific communities have been established for those groups, offering support and community-specific awards within the overall scholarship competition.

The National Cyber Scholarship Foundation anticipates awarding \$2 million in scholarships for use at any accredited college to 600 high-scoring students across the nation who participate in the competition in 2021. For more information, [visit the CyberStart USA website](#).

High school students may register for the program and may begin playing the CyberStart Game on Nov. 15 at midnight. They may continue playing, and invite their friends to join them, through Feb. 28, 2021. [Students can preview the types of challenges in the competition](#) before formally starting the CyberStart Game.

For more information about this opportunity, contact Lindsay LeGrant, APR, at VITA at Lindsay.Legrand@vita.virginia.gov, (804) 416-6002 or Charles Pyle at VDOE, Charles.Pyle@doe.virginia.gov, (804) 371-2420.