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NJOHSP**OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND PREPAREDNESS**

Governor Murphy Encourages New Jersey High School and College Students to Join Innovative Cybersecurity Competitions

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TRENTON, NJ — On February 19, Governor Philip D. Murphy encouraged young women in New Jersey's high schools to take advantage of an opportunity to explore their aptitude for cybersecurity and computer science by trying to solve the challenges of the 2019 Girls Go CyberStart program. Previous knowledge and experience in information technology or cybersecurity are not needed to participate. A computer and internet connection are the only requirements to take part in this program, which comes at no cost for schools and students.

Open to female high school students, the Girls Go CyberStart initiative encourages participants to explore their interests in cyber studies, learn core cybersecurity skills, and build confidence in problem solving. Students will also have the opportunity to win cash prizes for themselves and their schools, and at least 10 New Jersey high school girls will receive \$500 scholarships to help pay for college. In 2018, 453 girls in 44 schools throughout New Jersey participated in Girls Go CyberStart, and the goal for 2019 is to triple those numbers.

Students use the CyberStart Game, an online series of challenges that allows students to act as cyber protection agents to solve cybersecurity-related puzzles and explore exciting, relevant topics such as cryptography and digital forensics. Boys will also get a chance to try out CyberStart in New Jersey high schools where at least five girls in the Girls Go CyberStart program master six or more of the challenges. These girls will win access for their schools to the full CyberStart Game, extending the competition to both male and female students for the remainder of the school year.

"Technology is transforming every sector of New Jersey's workforce, and today's students need an education and experiences that will prepare them for the jobs of the future," said **Governor Philip D. Murphy**. "These CyberStart competitions are fun ways for young women and men to explore and learn about the high-tech, high-impact field of cybersecurity."

In 2018, the SANS Institute piloted Girls Go CyberStart, a program designed to inspire the next generation of cybersecurity professionals while identifying talented youth. The 2018 program provided the opportunity for 6,650 young women in 16 states to discover and demonstrate their aptitude for cybersecurity.

NBC News published an [in-depth analysis](#) of the 2018 Girls Go CyberStart program last year. In the piece, one of the young women who participated spoke to the program's success by stating, "Right now, I'd say I've gone

from pretty much zero interest in cybersecurity to really being pulled in that direction. And I'd love to play the game again if it happens again next year."

One teacher also said, "Before I recruited girls to be a part of this wonderful program, I struggled to get girls to realize they could be computer scientists. I had girls actually saying they were too stupid to do this until I said, 'Just try it.' Some of my girls found out they were good at puzzles, some found out they liked programming. I now have girls asking our counselor about computer science degrees at our local community college."

College students, both male and female, will also be able to play this year in a companion program called Cyber FastTrack, which allows students who excel in both the CyberStart Game and CyberStart Essentials (an online course that extends the learning of CyberStart Game) to be eligible to win \$2.5 million in scholarships for advanced cybersecurity training, as well as receive introductions to employers for internships and jobs in the field.

"One of our Office's strategic priorities is to develop and enhance the cybersecurity capabilities throughout the State," said **Jared M. Maples, Director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness**, which is responsible for cybersecurity in New Jersey. "By bringing Girls Go CyberStart and Cyber FastTrack to New Jersey, we are providing young people with the opportunity to join in our efforts."

Complete details may be found at www.girlsgocyberstart.org for Girls Go CyberStart and www.cyber-fasttrack.org for Cyber FastTrack. High school girls may pre-register for Girls Go CyberStart through March 20, when the games begin. College students may pre-register for Cyber FastTrack beginning on February 18, and they will be able to start playing on April 5. To see the types of challenges the students will face in the games, please visit go.joincyberstart.com.

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The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP), a Cabinet-level agency, was created in 2006. The Director serves as the Governor's Homeland Security Advisor, and is responsible for leading and coordinating the State's counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and emergency preparedness efforts while building resiliency throughout the State across all levels of government and the private sector. NJOHSP oversees and distributes discretionary State and federal homeland security and emergency preparedness funds on behalf of New Jersey. More information about NJOHSP can be found at www.njhomelandsecurity.gov.