

Earlybirds

Boeing's support for learning in the early years helps prepare kids for school—and life

PHOTO: Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship endorses programs such as the Family and Child Education Center in Diyarbakir, Turkey. MOTHER CHILD EDUCATION FOUNDATION

(RIGHT) To inspire early learning, Boeing supports the "Sid the Science Kid" TV series. TM & © 2008 THE JIM HENSON CO.

In this ongoing Lifecycle of Learning series, *Boeing Frontiers* explores how Boeing, itself a continuous learning organization, collaborates with primary and secondary schools, institutions of higher education, and government, industry and community organizations to promote and guide learning over a lifetime. In this issue, *Frontiers* focuses on nurturing development and learning during the early childhood years—in children around the globe.

By Eric Fetters-Walp

Working together to accomplish tasks and creating effective learning habits are skills that serve people well from the earliest days of school and throughout a career.

That's why Boeing's support for lifelong learning efforts includes programs that help children well before they set foot in a classroom. Childhood development specialists and educators have come to recognize how crucial those early years are for future success.

"Really, the first three years of life is when all the brain development happens—when you learn and develop things like

trust, relationships and learning habits," said HyeSook Chung, Early Care and Education Program officer for the Washington (D.C.) Area Women's Foundation, which receives support from Boeing.

Making sure children are ready to learn by the time they reach kindergarten requires plenty of help from any parent. For families facing financial difficulties or other added challenges, having the time or skills to do that can be doubly tough. Joyce Walters, who directs Education and Workforce Initiatives for Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship, said that's why Boeing has turned its focus toward early education efforts in the past eight years.



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"So many children are showing up one, two, three years behind their peers when they are starting kindergarten," Walters said. "We wanted to address that issue by providing support for parents and others who are caring for young children, so they can maximize the learning opportunities in the early years to help get kids ready for school and for life."

SMALL SCREEN, BIG IMPACT

Perhaps the most visible symbol of Boeing's commitment to helping young children learn is its support of "Sid the Science Kid," an animated series starring Sid, a preschooler who possesses a great helping of the natural enthusiasm for learning.

"Sid the Science Kid" launched in fall 2008 on PBS television stations across the United States. Boeing is one of two major supporters of the program, which is produced by KCET-TV in Los Angeles and The Jim Henson Co.

"The show is a science-readiness program for preschoolers and kindergartners that celebrates the natural curiosity of that age range and gets them excited about science and science learning," said Lisa Henson, chief executive officer of The Jim Henson Co. "We were very excited that immediately upon launch, this new show connected strongly with kids. We have had excellent ratings and good feedback from both parents and kids."

Henson said the show's elements, which include live-action segments with real kids at school doing simple experiments, are designed to reinforce that science can be understandable for young children—and their parents, who themselves may not always feel knowledgeable about science. That ability of the show to engage parents and caregivers is the main reason Boeing is sponsoring the program, Walters said.

"This ensures that children aren't watching TV alone but rather the adults in their lives are engaged in helping nurture their natural creativity, curiosity and exploration," Walters said. "The research indicates adults who watch the show with young children were more confident with science content and reported increased comfort and interest in engaging in science activities with their pre-school-aged children."

The series already is airing around the world in countries including Mexico, Brazil and Canada, with more international premieres expected in the next year.

Additionally, PBS affiliates are leading workshops that expand on the show's curriculum—Preschool Pathways to Science—for parents, caregivers and preschool educators around the United States.

PROMOTING SYSTEM CHANGE

Boeing GCC also is backing local programs that aim to spark learning in young children. One example is the Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative in the greater Washington, D.C., area.

In 2008, Boeing, PNC Bank and a number of charitable foundations dedicated a multimillion-dollar fund to improve early childhood education in the region around the U.S. capital. The collaborative fund is managed by the Washington Area Women's Foundation.

With the new fund, 40 percent of Boeing's 2008 charitable giving in the Washington, D.C., area was focused on early education efforts, up from 12 percent two years earlier. That large increase was enough to get others interested in early learning, said Dale Rainville, Community and Education Relations focal for GCC.

"There was really an opportunity to bring attention to this," Rainville said. "So far, in that way, it's worked, but there's much more we hope to do."

Chung, of the Washington Area Women's Foundation, said help with early learning readiness is a big need among low-income families, especially those headed by single mothers. The commitment of backers such as Boeing, along with more research into early learning, helped create momentum to expand such programs, she said.

The Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative has ambitious goals to improve early childhood education (including increasing the size and stability of such programs in the Washington, D.C., region) and to help early education organizations better use their resources. It hopes to encourage systemic changes in early care and education programs to make lasting improvements, Chung said.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Companies are realizing that such efforts aren't just part of being a good corporate citizen. Children who start off on the right foot in the early years of school are more likely to become promising employees in the next generation. "I think that whole work force approach has helped industry understand the importance of this," Chung said.

Around Chicago, home to Boeing's corporate headquarters, the company is nurturing early education in several ways. Through GCC, Boeing is building the early learning field by supporting the Erikson Institute, a national leader in child development.



Boeing also is a lead partner training a new generation of experts in that field through the Illinois Early Childhood Fellowship, which gives a diverse population of emerging leaders firsthand experience in early childhood advocacy and related public policy through two-year fellowships with qualified nonprofit organizations in Illinois.

"Innovative and creative leadership is critical to any field, including early learning," said Nora Moreno Cargie, director of GCC programs in Chicago. "Both the Erikson Institute and this fellowship honor the idea that strong leaders are critical to the success of our children."

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— Nora Moreno Cargie, director of Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship programs, Chicago

PHOTO: A grant to Leap Learning Systems from the Employees Community Fund of Boeing Chicago supports the nonprofit group's Language Through Science program—designed to help early childhood educators build their students' literacy skills. Boeing volunteers have expanded the partnership with Leap: Here, Katherine Willems, a programmer and analyst in Corporate Finance Systems, quizzes an elementary school student on vocabulary. LEAP LEARNING SYSTEMS



GLOBAL REACH

Boeing's support of early education programs extends overseas as well. In Turkey, the company is supporting the Family and Child Education Center in Diyarbakir. Located in the nation's rural southeastern region, the center's preschool program aims to improve readiness for learning math, literacy and language skills in 5- and 6-year-olds.

The center also holds meetings with fathers to make them more aware of their role in their children's development. A support program for mothers touches on parent-child relationships, nutrition, hygiene and other vital topics.

"An equal opportunity in education, especially in disadvantaged areas, must be created for all individuals," said Greg Pepin, president of Boeing Turkey. "This program strives to accomplish this objective."

Walters added that from the many nations in which Boeing has a presence, lessons can be learned on innovative ways to prepare children for a life of learning. "When you nurture children's imagination and curiosity, they can do amazing things," she said. "And that's exactly what our company is about—building amazing things that others can only dream about." ■

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Early learning

Parents are the most important teachers their children will ever have

Child development experts and educators now recognize that the first six years of a child's life set the stage for success in school and beyond.

"I see tangible business and societal value stemming from educational investments in early childhood," said Rick Stephens, senior vice president of Human Resources and Administration. "Accordingly, Boeing is shifting some of its educational monies to expand our impact in this area."

Stephens challenged parents of young children "to take an active role in creating an environment that nurtures learning and creativity. Parents are the key to helping children reach their full potential," he said.

The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, a nonprofit educational organization, agrees. It teaches parents how to enhance child development because its experience indicates that "parents are the most important teachers that their children will ever have."

"Early learning is a part of our emphasis on lifelong learning, which starts at birth and continues through one's senior years," Stephens said. "It is also the first step in ensuring that we have a work force that allows us to remain competitive."

For more information, visit The Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential online at www.iahp.org