PMSN

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Office of Secondary School Support

GEAR UP! / Career and College Guidance

gearupnews@phila.k12.pa.us (215) 299-7807

Stanley R. Pokras
Nonprofit Technology Resources
1524 Brandywine Street
Philadelphia PA 19130

October 27, 2002

Dear Mr. Pokras,

The Philadelphia GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Network and Urban Systemic Program (USP) are pleased to work with Nonprofit Technology Resources to help children from low-income families cross the Digital Divide.

GEAR-UP: is a federal initiative funded by the US Department of Education with the goal of increasing the city's capacity to provide comprehensive early intervention services to low-income and academically at-risk students and to ensure that these students are prepared for, pursue, and ultimately succeed in post-secondary education. Currently, GEAR-UP provides college awareness and preparation to twenty-three middle schools and seven high schools across Philadelphia. At the various sites, GEAR-UP sponsors after school tutoring and mentoring programs, enhanced college visits, college guidance workshops, robotics training for teachers and a variety of other programs to help reach the goal of preparing Philadelphia students for excellence in school and in the workforce.

We are looking forward to partnering with NTR to provide our young students with refurbished computers from NTR and a year of free Internet access from Philadelphia FIGHT. These resources will add greatly to the impact that our program will have on the lives of the children and families we serve. Furthermore, computers will help both the young people and their families to increase their technology and programming skills.

For the past three years, The Philadelphia GEAR-UP Network and USP have provided science, mathematics, and technology professional development to teachers of middle years' schools. Robotics reenergizes science and technology programs, engaging both students and teachers in active learning. A survey conducted in 2001 by Velda Morris, Robotics Education Specialist

found that a student's enthusiasm for science and technology increased when robots were used. It creates a comfortable, informal setting where students can actively explore problems, ask questions, test theories, and perform activities. This hands-on approach to learning keeps students engaged in science, mathematics and other subjects. Many students turn off to textbooks, but robotics is a powerful teaching program that has the ability to keep most students interested and involved in class. Over eight hundred students have been served in the robotics program to date.

This past summer two Robotics Institutes were open to sixth through ninth graders in the West and Central regions of the city. Students were involved in mathematics, reading, technology, career and college guidance, entertainment arts and robotics activities. Innovative, veteran teachers implemented the curriculum. Students were engaged in hands-on-learning while building their technology, teamwork, problem- solving, and thinking skills. Sixty students participated in a child-parent technology workshop held at NTR. Middle school families attended a customized technology workshop teaching them computer literacy and basic computer skills, then as a result received computers for home use. Students will now have additional access to technology which, they may use during the school year and beyond.

Students who participate in the Robotics-NTR program will be given unique opportunities to gain access to computing technology, overcome the "digital divide," pass on their knowledge to others, and become inspired to pursue math, science, and engineering careers. We look forward to a continued relationship with NTR and its staff to continue the upward struggle of making technology connections and providing its access to Philadelphia children and their families.

Sincerely yours,

Nathania Johnson
USP Director

Velda V. Morris
Robotics Education Specialist

Armita B. Sims
GEAR-UP Project Director