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Photo by Heather D'Augustine

Young people exchanged information about scientific experiments at the new Iridescent Science Studio.

New studio stresses math and science

Educational venture helps kids catch up with rest of world

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NYCityNews Service

Students and parents banged, built and buzzed through the BankNote building and several party-sized tents outside it, on Nov. 4, building boats with plastic and Play-Doh and shooting laser beams.

Some of the students stood around an inflatable pool filled with water. With what looked like a remote control for a toy car, they navigated a SeaPerch, a remotely operated water vehicle, about the pool, brows furrowed in concentration.

Some of the parents squeezed between kids at a table covered with spools of yarn. Using the yarn, construction paper and scissors, they manipulated the material into various "inventions," seemingly unfazed by the pileup of hands.

This was no school science fair. This was the grand opening of the Iridescent Science Studio – a program for students and parents to interact with science together after school and on weekends.

"What I like about science is that you invent things – stuff like that – experiments," said Carla Marin, a sixth grader

at M.S. 223, the Laboratory School of Finance and Technology in Mott Haven. She came with her mother and translated from English to Spanish for her throughout the event.

"What I like about math is that um, you add and subtract – all that stuff," she added.

Getting parents and kids like Marin and her mom, to learn about science and math together is exactly what the studio was created to do.

"Science, technology, math, engineering all the jobs of the future – that's what it's going to be about," said Geoffrey Canada, the President and CEO of Harlem Children's Zone.

"We've got to get our children, here in the Bronx and in Bed Stuy and in Harlem, and in all the communities of people of color ... connected to science, technology, math and engineering. It is the wave of the future," said Canada amidst balloons and the boisterous voices of kids running through the building.

Iridescent Learning, a nonprofit science education organization, teaches students about technology and engineering, but also allows them to apply what they learn by creating in the science studio.

"Science and engineering can be fun, it can be interactive and it can be something that they can do in the future as a career," said Silvestre Algos, a sixth through

eighth grade math and Algebra teacher at M.S. 223.

Iridescent has another science studio in Los Angeles, and will house this newest studio in the BankNote building.

A better job of teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM to educational bureaucrats—has become the holy grail of U.S. education.

The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics reported that health jobs will account for 26 percent of all new jobs created by 2018 and professional science and technical service jobs will account for about 19 percent. But students in the U.S. are being out-paced in the subjects by their counterparts in other countries.

In a globally competitive economy, the U.S. is falling behind. The National Science Foundation reported that only about 33 percent of U.S. undergraduate degrees earned are in science and engineering compared to 53 percent in China. The NSF also reported that ethnic minorities are even less likely to pursue an undergraduate degree in science and engineering.

Kellie Terry-Sepulveda, the executive managing director of The Point, marveled at the turnout at the event, and said she thought the science center would have a major impact on Hunts Point, by creating awareness of the neighborhood. "Thousands of kids were there," she said,

"bused in from God knows where. That's amazing, because when I was a kid (growing up in the Highbridge section) I didn't know what Hunts Point was."

"The reason why we chose the Bronx is so that we could bring lots of resources to an area that does need resources," said Tara Chklovski, the Founder and President of Iridescent Learning.

Chklovski partnered with the U.S. Office of Naval Research through a Department of Defense campaign to increase diversity in science, engineering and technology. The studio will receive an estimated \$2 million each year through a three-year grant from the naval research office to serve about 1,500 students from more than 31 schools across the city. A large number of ethnic minorities will be recruited in the Bronx.

But the hard work does not end with the opening of the science studio, according to Canada.

"People should come here every weekend," he said. We should just get our kids so they know everything that's here and then demand more," he said.

Chklovski hopes to offer field trips as well as afterschool programs for school groups, in addition to the family science courses. The studio is set to open to the public in early February.