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CLOSE-UP REPORT
**Innovation in
Collin County**

COMPANY CULTURE
OPINION

Local firms offer TexPREP students a field trip

7/9/2001

By [Jeffrey Logsdon](#)

Field trips rule.

Students enrolled in the Pre-freshman Engineering Program, which focuses on math, science and engineering through Texas Tech University-Lubbock, came to Dallas June 29 to see business in action.

The students toured Fort Worth-based Bell Helicopter Textron Inc. and Plano-based **Paragon** Innovations Inc., an electronics company.

The academically heavy program, or TexPREP, allows seventh- to 11th -grade students, who are exceptionally advanced in math and science, to take classes at the university.

This year's class began June 4 and ends July 27 with sessions from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Qualified students must have nominations from two instructors and write a 100- to 200 -word essay.

"These kids aren't the ones who are going to be flipping burgers," said Mike Wilkinson, **Paragon**'s founder and chief executive.

Tuition is free to prevent any economically disadvantaged students from being discouraged.

Students take courses based on how many times they attended. First-year students can take classes such as Mathematical Logic or Science I while third-year students can take calculus and fourth-year students have the option of Robotics or Computer Programming IV.

Wilkinson led the tour at **Paragon** that introduced the students to the workplace. He and the **Paragon** staff answered questions ranging from "Do you like C or C++ better?" to "Where do you



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order your parts from?"

With help from **Paragon** staff, the students soldered wire, worked with a gas pump model and played with the 3M Corp.'s new wall projector, which uses several moving mirrors to allow presenters to move in front of the projector without disrupting the image.

"I think it's real important for the kids to find out how things operate in the real world, especially in small business," Wilkinson said.

Since **Paragon** is a small company, Wilkinson said it often has trouble recruiting because people don't know what the company does. By introducing the students to a small-business environment, they realize there are alternatives to working for big businesses.

University of Texas-San Antonio professor Manuel P. Berriozabal founded the program as PREP in 1979 to attract high-achieving middle and high school students with an interest in becoming scientists and engineers. Derald Walling took over as director in 1986 when the program became TexPREP. Jo Anne Temple, the developmental mathematics coordinator, was appointed to director in 1999 and still holds the position.

Previous field trips for the students have included Palo Verde Nuclear Power Generating Plant, 40 miles east of Phoenix; Yucca Mountain Test Site, 100 miles north of Las Vegas; and Hoover Dam.

Paragon was contacted by the TexPREP staff to be a field trip site.

"I think the program is great," Wilkinson said. "We're going to (participate) again, and we encourage other small business and local colleges to do similar things to get small-business exposure."

Applications for next year's class currently are being accepted and can be found at www.texprep.ttu.edu.

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