

August 26, 2019

John Eglehaaf
Lee Adams
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Dear Sirs and SWMPI Committee Members:

Our team has been hard at work to “encourage a culture of learning” in our region. We believe that education must connect students to the “real” world in a tangible and profound (perhaps even life-changing) way. The need is great and the result of finding the way to connect the classroom with the world of work positively impacts our students, their future, and their community. Many students are disengaged in school and are unaware of the choices available for them in the workplace because of this lack of connection. We have seen the difference that awareness of these relationships makes in both teacher and student enthusiasm for their learning. Add project-based learning (PBL) to the mix and stand back! Learning becomes deep, rich, meaningful.

This past summer, we held three PBL workshops. In addition, three different employers representing three different career pathways hosted three teacher externships in three different parts of SW Michigan. The feedback from the participating teachers was enthusiastically positive. We are making forward strides toward remodeling the traditional classroom into a place of deep learning.

PBL is a teaching methodology in which learning is placed into the hands of the students, and the teacher becomes a facilitator, guide, resource, and assessor. Students are engaged because they are allowed to pursue learning that has meaning for them, they have a say in what their final product will be, and in true PBL, there is a requisite connection with community and their world through presenting their product to an authentic audience.

Our teacher experiences are designed to give teachers an inside look at what kind of problems regularly occur in the workplace and how they are solved. Problem solving skills are not always taught or not taught well in traditional classrooms, and it is one of the skills employers ask for. Teachers saw how important this skill is, how much collaboration takes place in problem solving, and that it is ubiquitous in industry. The goal was to give them reason to allow their students opportunity to practice these skills and other employability skills to both prepare them to be problem solvers and to give teachers an answer to the question, “When will I ever need to know this?”

Approximately 150 teachers participated in these six events. Next summer, we will take the experiences to a deeper level by combining both PBL and teacher externships in industry into one session (offered three times). We think that teachers/educators and business/industry members working together will create an experience that will give teachers a new perspective on what they teach. By working through what this could look like in their classroom and how beneficial it will be for their students, they will be taking another step into changing what school looks like for students and how prepared they are for life after high school.

It is not without benefits for the business/industry folks, either. We have heard from many employers of this region that they are hungry to help but are unsure how. This will give them not only a way to

give back but will allow them to market apprenticeship programs to teachers. They will gain the assurance that what is happening in classrooms is meaningful and they may make connections with the schools/educators in their backyards to serve as experts or judges or audience. These business/industry partners can help ensure that students have the employability skills that will make them candidates for the many openings employers have that aren't being filled. That's what I call 3D learning.

The plan:

- Offer and run project-based learning training that are accessible to teachers/instructional coaches/administrators in every corner of the region. Specifically, in our eight-county region, we will hold one training in the western counties, one in the eastern counties, and one in a central location.
- Connect with MiSTEM partners to provide Career and Tech Ed connections, career readiness pieces, and employability skills.
- Connect with business/industry partners in these sections to contribute to the trainings. This is open-ended and live. Partners may offer problems to the educators to use in the classroom so that learning is authentic. We expect this to be robust and to yield depth to learning and satisfaction for the partners in helping.
- Participating teachers will receive stipends for their time and work. Business/industry partners will contribute their time and personnel.
- Data will be collected before and after the events, and ongoing in order to evaluate the effectiveness of our work. We will seek qualitative and quantitative data from participants and supporters.
- All sessions will be held summer 2020 to not interfere with in-school time for teachers.

Organizational Description

The Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency exists to transform lives by inspiring educational excellence. We provide a continuum of educational services and support to students, families, school districts, and communities. We have been doing this since it was mandated in 1965. The trainings will be run by Debra Kolberg, who was a teacher in Kalamazoo for 15 years, and has been at KRESA for 8. The team consists of our MiSTEM partners, business and industry contacts, and others here at KRESA. As stated elsewhere, we have been doing professional development for years, and are competent and trustworthy to make an impact with this project.

Partners

Our MiSTEM partners are ISD personnel, business/industry leaders, non-profit partners, and school district leaders. We have a group of 20 or so people we meet with regularly that will provide input and help do this work. Debra Kolberg will be leading the trainings and providing follow-up support to participants.

Business/industry partners have yet to be identified. Last summer Spectrum Lakeland Hospital in St. Joseph, Secant Technologies in Kalamazoo and Autocam in Marshall were the hosts for our three teacher externships. While I will look for employers in the other pathways first, I am confident that all three of these employers would love to participate again.

Teachers will be invited from all over the region through our MiSTEM connections. First come, first served, and we will cap the events based on the host and the region.

Budget

The monies spent will be thus:

- \$500 stipend each for 100 teachers.
- Trainings will be two days in length. The trainings will assist teachers in writing a project-based learning session for students, including planning and assessments. The business/industry partners will help to connect these projects to their work in real ways. Our partners will serve as resources to students in their projects and their input and contributions will help make the learning relevant, deep and meaningful.
- Lunch will be provided on site each day so that the learning is not interrupted by travel off site. There will be at least three sessions, two days for 35 participants each. The cost for this food will be approximately \$2500.
- Meeting spaces and supplies will add another \$1000. We will look for spaces that will be donated first.
- Coordinator salary and travel stipend for all these events will total \$1500.

Thank you for your consideration. I will wait expectantly for your decision.

Yours sincerely,

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