

Young Entrepreneurs Consortium looks to build next generation of minds

A \$13.6 million state Straight A grant is helping area schools develop students as young entrepreneurs by developing these types of problem-based learning projects that incorporate science, math and English, along with the skills associated with being an entrepreneur such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication and self-motivation.



Olivia Costello and her team construct a building model that will be designed to withstand the forces of an earthquake in Haiti during a class project at Sandy Valley Middle School Wednesday. Get more For more information about the Young Entrepreneurs Consortium, visit www.youngmindsgreatfutures.org/

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In Sandy Valley Local Schools, eighth-graders are helping local missionaries create earthquake resistant buildings for people in Haiti, which has yet to recover from the massive earthquake in 2010 that killed 230,000 people.

At Osnaburg Local Schools, seventh-graders are helping a doctor develop a plan to decrease a recent spike in student absences at Stark County schools, which the doctor suspects could be linked to a rapid bacterial growth within the schools.

In Massillon City Schools, sixth-graders created their own mini-business and sold their wares during lunch time.

Along the way, the students are learning concepts of math, English and science as well as the skills associated with being an entrepreneur such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication and self-motivation — which educators say is the real mission behind the hypothetical scenarios.

“It’s not just, ‘Let’s do a neat project,’ ” Sandy Valley Superintendent David Fisher said. “It makes the curriculum come alive.”

The lessons are among the more than 300 problem-based learning projects that will be developed over the next few years by educators participating in the Young Entrepreneurs Consortium, which is a 31-member partnership designed to emphasize business and technical education. Participating Stark County members include Massillon, Minerva, Osnaburg and Sandy Valley school districts, R.G. Drage Career Technical Center, Stark County Educational Service Center, Stark State College, Junior Achievement of Ohio, Kent State at Stark’s Small Business Development Center, Stark Development Board, Stark Education Partnership and the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Last year, the Young Entrepreneurs Consortium received a \$13.6 million grant through the state’s competitive Straight A Fund to offer roughly 26,549 students in sixth grade and above experiences in working with businesses, lessons that increase their skills needed to be an entrepreneur and additional

opportunities to earn college credit while in high school. Three summer programs designed to help students start their own business ventures are planned for this summer.

Barbara Cockroft, a retired Lake Local Schools teacher and one of the grant managers, said the goal of the multiyear initiative is to stop students from leaving Stark County when they graduate and to help them develop the skills they need to start jobs in area industries.

She noted that Ohio ranks among the states with the lowest rates of entrepreneurial activity. According to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's research, Ohio had 190 entrepreneurs per 100,000 adults in 2011. In contrast, Montana had 530 entrepreneurs per 100,000 adults.

TECHNOLOGY

Of the \$13.6 million from the grant, roughly \$7.3 million was given to districts to upgrade their technology, according to Mike Bayer, curriculum director and math consultant at the Stark County Educational Service Center who is helping manage the grant. He said each district received money based on their middle school and high school enrollment.

Massillon received \$1.1 million to buy Chromebooks for all students in grades 6 to 12 and to improve its wireless access. Sandy Valley, which moved into its new school buildings roughly seven years ago, used its allocation to purchase roughly 300 Chromebooks and to update its wireless and technology infrastructure. "Even though (the building) looks brand new, when you talk about technology, it's not," Fischer said. The remaining portion of the grant has been allocated toward providing dual enrollment and entrepreneurship programs to teachers and students, Bayer said.

Through a partnership with college and universities in the region, every district in the consortium could send three of its teachers back to school so they could get the credentials needed to teach college-level classes at their respective high schools.

Fischer said two of the district's teachers are pursuing advanced business degrees and one is pursuing a higher degree in Spanish.

"We have a global economy and that will definitely come into play for many of our students who are bilingual," he said.

Fischer added that by offering more college-level classes on the Sandy Valley campus ensures that every student has a chance to earn college credits. He said when students must drive to a college or university for the class, students who do not have a vehicle are excluded.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Cockroft, who taught at Lake Local for 35 years, said the problem-based learning projects allow teachers to review lessons that other teachers have developed and used in their classrooms and adjust them slightly to fit their students. She said it will save teachers time and energy because they won't continually have to come up with their own projects.

"Part of the problem with teachers is that we don't have enough time," Cockroft said.

Nicki Gordon-Coy, who is teaching eighth grade at Sandy Valley for the first time after spending 11 years teaching biology, chemistry and physics, said she looks forward to hearing from other teachers on how their problem-based lessons were received and to share the results of her eighth-grade science lesson, "Shake, Rattle, and Stand: Haitian Earthquake homes."

To tackle the housing problem in Haiti, students first researched variables that could impact their structures, such as weather, availability and cost of materials and average family size. Using the district's new Chromebooks, they also found examples of structures that failed to withstand the earthquake.

On Thursday, a day after receiving the project, some of the eighth-grade teams already were well on their way to sketching the designs of their building and making prototypes out of popsicle sticks and various types of glue.

Their building concepts vary greatly: From octagon-shaped walls to a wall with multiple triangles to a building that would have three primary walls at 45-degree angles. Some included a floor; others didn't.

Eighth-grader Kennedy DeLong and her three other team members are relying on triangles to form their building.

"Triangles are the strongest shape," she said. "They are the least likely to cave."

She twisted one of the walls she constructed out of popsicle sticks to show how the intersection of the upper and lower triangle formed a gap between them.

"They can separate but they won't break," she said.

Gordon-Coy said so far even some of her more difficult eighth-grade students have bought into the project, partly she thinks because they believe they can make a difference.

"Realistically, some of their ideas may get passed along," Gordon-Coy said.

Students will test whether their designs can withstand up to a minute of earthquake-like shaking on April 8 after they return from spring break.

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