



Looking At The ISSUES

Stark Education Partnership

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*"That's the key to a positive, well-developed, supported, and empowered middle schooler: instilling in them the confidence to know **they matter, their ideas matter, and they have the ability to put their dreams into motion**... when you see a middle schooler realize someone is listening to them and recognizes their ideas are real and valid, that makes all the difference. **It's why we do what we do."***



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TomTod Equips Middle School Students to Impact Their Communities

TomTod Executive Dreamer, Joel Daniel Harris's work with middle school students takes some by surprise. They remember their own middle school years as awkward and challenging - as neither a child nor a teen. TomTod (tomorrow's ideas today) provides a space for preteens to explore and launch imaginative ideas to enhance their community while gaining transferrable skills.

Patrick Gerber, TomTod Adventure Curator, works with sixth grade students at Oakwood Middle School. He partners with social studies teachers to enrich student experiences during the semester-long *What If* curriculum.

"During the first four weeks, the students are introduced to the ideas of exploring community, goal setting, design thinking, and working collaboratively," Patrick explained. The students are alive with energy and enthusiasm as Patrick talks with them in short bursts followed by quick tasks - design a closed ended question; write an open ended question and a follow-up; ask ten questions to guess who I am; and practice thanking a volunteer.



To learn about community assets and challenges, students meet with volunteers. Armed with the skills they have gained in TomTod, students have highly interactive and empowering experiences. A fact-finding field trip follows where students may help brainstorm, plan, or address a real-life problem. The final weeks are spent creating and sharing new ideas using critical thinking, communication, collaboration, innovation and empathy. Student groups are empowered to develop an idea, share it with others and receive real-time feedback. At the *Pitch Fest* culminating event, students present their ideas using best practice to communicate clearly and respond professionally to questions and feedback.

What is the impact of TomTod? One of the measures may be in the 29 students who have chosen to continue eight projects after the semester finished. They meet with Patrick three days a week during lunch to continue to bring their ideas to fruition. "We want to continue our project to help new students at our school," one group declared. Three others added, "We're working on an afterschool gaming group to bring together kids who play alone. They'll be able to come to tournaments and meet other students who enjoy the same games."



The Stark Education Partnership - a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in Stark County, Ohio - is a catalyst, engaging and collaborating with education, business, civic and community stakeholders to drive sustainable improvement and innovation to provide all students with education and career success.
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