



HUBER HEIGHTS CITY SCHOOLS

Weisenborn Junior High Receives National Recognition for STEM Program



March 12th, 2018 – Weisenborn Junior High is receiving national recognition by being named a Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Distinguished School for its STEM and career learning program. Weisenborn is one of just 110 middle schools across the nation to receive this honor. PLTW is a nonprofit organization that serves millions of K-12 students and teachers in more than 10,500 schools across the U.S.

In order to be eligible for the designation, Weisenborn had to offer at least one PLTW Gateway unit at each grade level, have more than 50 percent of the student body participating during the 2016-17 school year, and have 25 percent of students advancing to high school

participate in two or more units.

The PLTW Distinguished School recognition honors schools committed to increasing student access, engagement, and achievement in their PLTW programs. PLTW empowers students to develop in-demand, transportable knowledge and skills through pathways in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science.

According to the three teachers instructing PLTW courses at Weisenborn, the program has been transformative in how students analyze and solve problems. For starters, PLTW takes a drastically different approach to learning in the classroom.

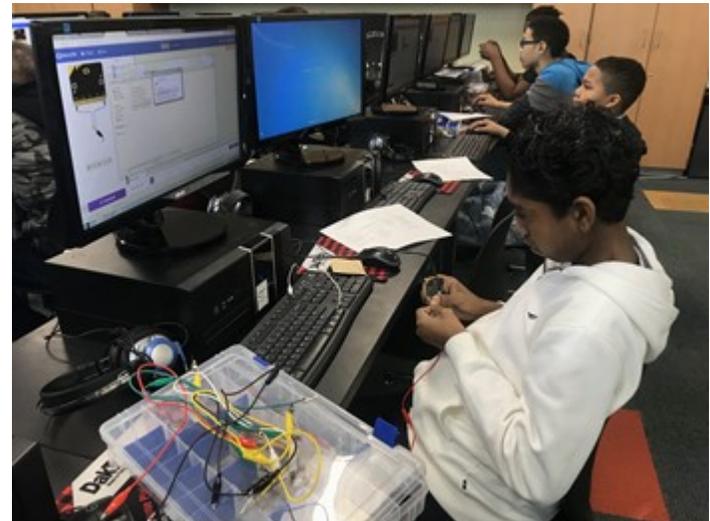
“All of our classes are project-based, very much work at your own pace so if you need more time to do something, you have more time. And it’s hands on: they’re active from the time they come in till they leave,” says Shannon Ross-Davis, the PLTW engineering teacher at Weisenborn.

This significant departure from traditional learning can be difficult for students at first. “It’s a real struggle for some of those kids. In the beginning, at least, they don’t like to have to think for themselves. They don’t like to have to just solve it. They want you to tell them how to solve it,” says Lori Strong, Weisenborn’s computer science PLTW teacher.

Despite the early learning curve, some students develop a real passion for their PLTW studies. “I’ve had students in the past miss it so much they ask if they can leave study hall to come back in and just teach themselves how to do things,” says Ross-Davis.

Another plus to the PLTW program is how it complements and builds upon the current curriculum at Weisenborn. Angie McNerney teaches biomedical PLTW courses at Weisenborn and she sees how her classes help students become better scientists. “In the science department they don’t have a chance and they don’t have the time to dissect, so we get to dissect and do something they never get to do. We get to take what they’re learning and then expand on it in a whole other way.”

Strong concurs. “I think it’s very helpful to their other classes as it helps them become better problem solvers and it makes them more persistent at finishing something instead of just giving up,” she chimes in agreement.



The benefits don't end there. McNerney says students having the freedom to choose their own courses are part of the reason why PLTW resonates so well with them. "Mine is medical so if they like the medical side, they would like that; if they liked the computer side, they have that choice. [Ross-Davis'] program introduces engineering to the kids because a lot of the time they don't know what it even is or what it offers," she said.

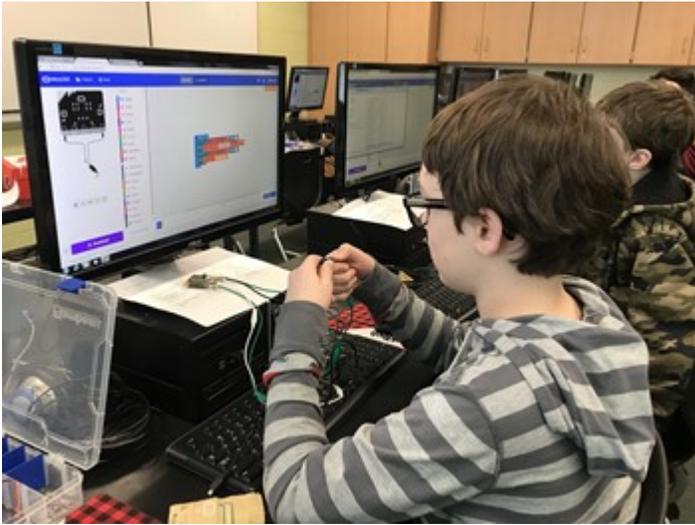
On top of that, McNerney points out that PLTW is constantly updating its curriculum, something not usually seen in other areas of education. She says the curriculum updates, "month by month, they'll change and tweak the lesson. They'll also see something was in the news and then add it to your curriculum."

Huber Heights City Schools (HHCS) superintendent Sue Gunnell saw the need for a quality STEM program in the district and made a concerted effort to make it happen. "Wayne High School currently has nationally recognized programs in the areas of pre-engineering, biomedical sciences, and computer science," Gunnell said.

Gunnell further explains, "In order to strengthen those programs, I thought it was important we provided students beginning in the 7th grade the opportunity to experience those programs." Gunnell also took the time to personally recognize Ross-Davis, McNerney, and Strong for their impact on students at the March HHCS Board of Education meeting.

Ultimately, the three teachers can see PLTW being the launching point for students utilizing useful STEM skills while pursuing any kind of career. Strong says the computer science track prepares students for computer science and programming fields, while McNerney says her classes prime students for a wide variety of biomedical careers ranging anywhere from being an athletic trainer to any kind of work in a police academy.

Ross-Davis on the other hand has seen students have 'aha' moments while taking her classes. She notes, "it's the perfect combination for those kids who think that they're not good at science and math, but they're really good at design and art and they start to realize. 'Hey, I could make a career out of doing this.'"



At the end of the day, PLTW is all about helping students learn valuable STEM skills they can use in any career path. Ross-Davis says students rise to the occasion to successfully meet the challenges of her PLTW classes. "We teach every kind of kid and it's always just us in the room and they can always find a way to be successful. I never have a kid, and I teach every kid in the 7th grade, not leave my class and not be successful," she said.

Click here to see the full gallery of PLTW students and their projects on display. You can also copy and paste the following link into your browser <http://www.huberheightscityschools.org/2/Gallery/240>

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Huber Heights City Schools
5954 Longford Rd
Huber Heights, OH 45424

View Map & Directions
Phone: 937-237-6300