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Future engineers are getting younger

Career-finding program now in local middle school

JODI KERR
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Michelle Linscheid used to doodle and draw angles and houses on scratch paper in fifth grade. Now, as a freshman at McNary High School, she has taken her doodling to new heights in the school's Computer Aided Design class.

"I just finished designing a bridge and want to become an architect," she said.

Because of Project Lead the Way, middle school and high school students are being given the opportunity to focus on their academic talent and interest in a career in engineering. The result is a strong program that is about to become \$95,000 stronger. The Engineering and Technology Industry Council awarded Salem-Keizer School District a pre-college grant for its Keizer Engineering and Applied Science Pathway through PLTW.

The grant will be used to create an integrated pre-engineering and applied science pathway in Keizer beginning with the sixth grade, extending through high school and connecting with Oregon universities and community colleges. PLTW will provide the curriculum and focus recruitment on female students and minorities.

North Salem High School has been a PLTW site for the past four years, but Keizer is the first in the district to bring the program to the middle school level.

"We will be the only site in the district to have the program in the middle schools as well as the high schools," said Doug Stuivenga, PLTW engineering, manufacturing, drafting and design instructor at McNary High School. By identifying students such as Michelle, the program provides an opportunity to turn their love for drawing into a lucrative career.

Currently, McNary is offering two PLTW classes, introduction to engineering design and principles of engineering, to 45 students.

"I am hoping we can build enrollment in the program to the point that we have at least three of my introduction to engineering design classes for freshmen, and two of the principles of engineering, digital electronics, and computer-integrated manufacturing," Stuivenga said. "Finally, in the 2009-2010 school year, we will add the PLTW capstone class for seniors. It's basically a senior project class where students pull together all that they've learned in each of the previous classes. I hope to teach it"

The program prepares students for a career that is solid and needed in the United States.

"The program means that more students are leaving high school gung-ho and prepared for college and a career," Stuivenga said. "These are more than cool classes. Colleges are saying that students are not arriving prepared for college-level math and science classes. The classes get them excited about a career, and that motivates them to do well in other classes."

Senior Juvencio Hernandez is planning to attend Chemeketa Community College for two years and then transfer to Oregon State University to study mechanical engineering.

"Once he (Stuivenga) showed us how to make a finger engine (a small mechanical desktop model), I got motivated. I took computer-aided design, one, two and three, and it is very fun."

In addition to being homework, engineering projects became Hernandez's hobby, and he started working on things outside of class.

PLTW classes gave senior Jacob Stewart direction and an educational and career goal.

"The PLTW classes helped me make a career choice and pick a college," said Stewart, who wants to study industrial design at Brigham Young University.

His long-term goal is to design cars. With his high school engineering classes backing him and his ability to speak fluent German, he is on his way to success before he walks on campus as a college freshman.

Building strategic partnerships among middle schools, high schools, colleges, universities, businesses and industry is the aim of PLTW.

"We have an incredible demand for engineers," Stuivenga said. "The pay is rewarding, and if we are going to remain competitive we need to have high schools prepared. Engineering is about problem solving, and we need more people who can rationally solve problems in leadership positions."

Jodi Kerr is a freelance writer and can be reached at Jodikerr@meritel.net.



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McNary sophomore Chris Love works on a model bridge in his engineering class.

Fast Facts about Project Lead the Way

- States with programs: 46 states and the District of Columbia
- schools involved: 1,700
- teachers trained: 6,200
- counselors trained: 3,600
- students enrolled: 175,000
- students who have experienced PLTW: More than 250,000 students have taken at least one course.

For more information visit www.pltw.org

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