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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STEM Action Center gives Idaho schools free access to online career toolbox

BOISE, Idaho (Oct. 6, 2020) — The Idaho STEM Action Center, with support from the Governor’s Office, is offering the online career-awareness platform Learning Blade to public schools and organizations statewide for free for the next three school years.

The STEM Action Center began piloting Learning Blade in 2017 with a small group of schools throughout the state. Participating students completed more than 160,000 online lessons during the last four years, and STEM Action Center executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire said the results have been remarkable.

“Students who used Learning Blade experienced a 26 percent increase in their interest in pursuing a STEM career,” she said. “And 68 percent of students said they learned about new technologies and STEM jobs.”

Dr. Melyssa Ferro, former Idaho State Teacher of the Year and Presidential Award Winner for Math and Science, is a big fan of Learning Blade, too.

“Students are coming out of the Learning Blade opportunity with new facts about the topic they’re given, a chance to be exposed to career fields that they’ve never been exposed to, and look at skillsets in real-life scenarios,” Dr. Ferro said. “So, that’s something that can continue to fit in really comfortably with our curriculum as we move forward.”

The Learning Blade program includes an online platform, aligned to Idaho state standards, for educating students in grades 5-9 about a wide variety of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers and computer science occupations using real-life situations in a mission-based format.

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Thinking Media, the creators of Learning Blade, recently added the Career Blade system, a new resource that connects students to high-demand careers by providing K-12 teachers with classroom-ready lesson plans. Lesson plans are customized for teachers' needs based on student age range and a variety of industries.

Learning Blade and Career Blade help develop student interest in high-demand jobs by increasing awareness of the careers and relating the academics to helping solve social issues youth care about.

"Students can't pursue a career they don't even know exists," Dr. Maguire said. "Providing educators statewide with free access to Learning Blade and Career Blade for the next three years will help increase STEM career equity and awareness earlier among Idaho students, improving the quality of our future workforce."

The Governor's Office used a portion of the CARES Act funds to support the effort. Additional collaborators include Battelle, Idaho National Laboratory, and the National Rural Education Association.

NREA president Dr. Allen Pratt said he is excited about the opportunity for rural schools in Idaho.

"Schools are the hub of a lot of rural communities and the largest workforce providers," he said. "The engagement and the opportunity to learn, no matter the zip code, is important. The Idaho STEM Action Center providing Learning Blade statewide gives students the opportunity to dream big and find out more about STEM and technology careers they can pursue from our rural, remote communities."

Learning Blade recently released a Chromebook app, the Learning Blade Backpack, to foster equity and bridge the digital divide. Learning Blade Backpack helps students access and complete the platform's interactive lessons, even with limited or no Internet access, which Dr. Maguire said can be a true game changer for both rural and urban students.

Schools in more than 40 states have deployed the Learning Blade platform, and students have completed more than 5 million online lessons.

Learning Blade and Career Blade are available at no charge to all public schools and organizations in Idaho, which can complete a form at www.LearningBlade.com/ID to request a free license.

About Learning Blade® & Career Blade®

Learning Blade®, a product of Thinking Media, is a system of interactive online lessons, teacher lesson plans, and printable at-home activities for 5th to 9th graders, where students learn about STEM, CTE, and computer science careers while reviewing academics. Students can use over 400 online lessons in human-centered “missions” or stories to explore these exciting careers aligned to all state standards.

Educators in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Louisiana, Missouri, South Carolina, and Tennessee can easily request a free license by visiting <http://learningblade.com/states> or following @LearningBlade on social media or emailing info@learningblade.com for information.

Career Blade® provides career and grade-specific lesson plans for K-12 which include hands-on activities that demonstrate career tasks to students in terms that they understand. This helps students to visualize the world of work at a young age. All lessons include an introductory narrative, two student activities, rubrics, and academic standard alignments. Visit <http://careerblade.com> to learn more.

Thinking Media is proud to have recently been named to Inc. 5000 as one of the top private growing companies in the U.S.

About the Idaho STEM Action Center

The Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase equitable access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information, and visit <https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation> to make a tax-deductible donation to the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to enhance the investment the state has made in Idaho's STEM community. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, and many other life-shaping programs.

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