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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STEM A.C., Board of Education approve designated STEM schools

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho (March 7, 2019) — The Idaho STEM Action Center board of directors and the Idaho State Board of Education have approved the state’s first cohort of designated STEM schools. Both groups voted unanimously to award STEM School Designation (Idaho code 33-4701) to Barbara Morgan STEM Academy in Meridian, Bingham Academy in Blackfoot, Galileo STEM Academy in Eagle, and Temple View Elementary School in Idaho Falls.

State education officials were in Blackfoot and Idaho Falls today to present Bingham Academy and Temple View Elementary with plaques honoring their accomplishments to advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning.

Using the AdvancED STEM Certification model, the four schools underwent a rigorous self-assessment of all facets of their educational programming followed by a three-day evaluation from a visiting AdvancED review team. Schools must meet 11 STEM-specific standards and indicators to become STEM Certified through AdvancED.

All four schools earned their STEM certification in November, and after receiving approval from the STEM Action Center’s board and the State Board of Education last month will remain designated for the next five years. They must reapply at that time, which Dr. Angela Hemingway, executive director of the STEM Action Center, said underscores AdvancED’s and Idaho’s commitment to continuous improvement.

“Barbara Morgan STEM Academy, Bingham Academy, Galileo STEM Academy, and Temple View Elementary join an elite group of 145 schools across the U.S. that have achieved STEM certification,” Dr. Hemingway said. “These groundbreaking schools are to be commended for their commitment to providing an excellent, STEM-focused education to their students.”

Dr. David Hill, who serves on the State Board of Education and is president of the STEM Action Center board of directors, concurred.

“The State Board of Education supported the creation of the STEM Action Center and the certified STEM schools designation because the Idaho economy needs more STEM educated students and having schools that focus on broad-based STEM education is an important part of that,” Dr. Hill said. “Expect to see more schools in Idaho seeking STEM designation. It’s important for parents who want their children to become STEM literate to know the education they’re receiving is of the highest quality and not just a buzzword.”

According to principal Mark Fisk, that philosophy resonates at Bingham Academy.

“STEM education is literally built into our DNA,” Fisk said. “Our school’s charter specifically states, ‘Educationally STEM instruction is viewed as a tool to successfully accomplish all learning goals.’ And earning STEM certification isn’t a quick fix. You can’t just snap your fingers and STEM is done. It takes a long time and a lot of hard work.”

Temple View Elementary principal Sarah Childers said all that hard work pays huge dividends.

“STEM learning encourages students, families, and staff to engage in learning through a collaborative, inquiry, and hands-on approach,” Childers said. “Everything we do is based off of STEM principles, including P.E., music, library, and art. Through project-based learning, our students and staff are making learning more relevant by designing solutions to real-world problems.”

Underscoring improvement is more of a journey than a destination, Barbara Morgan STEM Academy principal Ryan Wilhite said STEM school certification provides processes for ensuring his school continues to advance its offerings.

“Our school is embracing high-quality STEM education, and the State of Idaho has provided us with a vehicle to have that really mean something,” Wilhite said. “Earning our certified STEM school designation validates our hard work, but more importantly it provides us with really specific feedback about how we can continue to grow.”

Galileo Academy principal Rob Lamb couldn’t agree more.

“Since Galileo has become certified, we’ve had schools from Ketchum and Burley come visit and talk to us about their STEM programs,” Lamb said. “This allows us to develop relationships so we can help other school’s programs while learning from their programs, too, which means we’re all just going to get stronger at teaching STEM as time goes on.”

The STEM Action Center awarded \$10,000 to each of the four schools this year to continue to enhance their STEM programs and professional development. It is anticipated the schools will receive this sum annually for the next four years, too.

Expanding STEM learning opportunities is critical to the state’s continued economic prosperity, according to Dr. Hemingway.

“Access to high-quality STEM education will create an Idaho workforce that is poised to fill the jobs of the future and to replace those in existing STEM-related jobs who are retiring,” she said. “By recognizing Idaho STEM schools, we can share collective best practices, highlight successes, and continue to enhance STEM educational opportunities for all our students.”

Hemingway said the Idaho Department of Labor predicts upwards of 100,000 STEM jobs will exist in Idaho by 2024. She said these jobs will represent \$6.5 billion in personal income and almost \$350 million in tax revenue if Idaho's workforce is ready to fill them.

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 coordinate and facilitate implementation of STEM programs, align education and workforce needs, and increase awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality teacher professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity. Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information.

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