American Falls School District  
Planting STEM, Growing Roots

A scan of the surroundings from the small community of American Falls reveals the legacy of Idaho’s most traditional industry and that of an innovative Idaho icon: acres of potatoes. Thanks to students at American Falls Intermediate, owls emerge from their modern housing to begin the evening vole patrol. Owl houses built with computer numeric controlled (CNC) routers are the latest student creation to attract a welcome and natural pest control solution. More owls mean fewer voles and more productive crops, thanks to these STEM-curious students.

American Falls School District is building a STEM foundation that will impact students at every level. The new J.R. Simplot Elementary, named to recognize an important catalyst of local innovation, will be inspiring young minds with STEM learning tools and opportunities. The focus of the new school will be centered around technology and project-based learning with a high-tech makerspace, virtual and augmented reality, robotics, video production lab, and four additional STEM Labs. A new Maker Space for District schools started as an idea after principal Chris Torgensen brought one 3-D printer into a classroom to tinker with. Curiosity took hold of students one by one, inspiring a 5th grade 3-D club. Torgensen brought in more 3-D printers for 4th graders to join the club. “This wasn’t just a one-off, we were seeing a STEM movement here”, said American Falls Intermediate School teacher, Nathan Lammers. District superintendent, Randy Jensen worked with industry leaders to retrofit an unused woodshop into a makerspace for an expanded STEM-based program.

Idaho STEM Action Center’s i-STEM and Educurious project-based professional development programs provided American Falls School district teachers the tools and resources to build new STEM learning infrastructure and encourage a new mindset. Simplot and INL became enthusiastic supporters, helping American Falls School District gain the equipment and educator skills to connect students with equipment and instruction in 3-D printing, laser cutting, and computer-aided design (CAD) projects with an additional 2 classrooms dedicated to this effort. Idaho Community Foundation also supplied funding and Jenson’s team now has plans for integrating long-term STEM project-based learning into the local curriculum. The old abandoned woodshop is now a pathway to career training with 3-D printers, engineering software, 2 laser cutter engravers, a CNC router machine, a full wood shop and 15 3-D pens for kids to work in pairs. STEM competitions are the next step with a robotics challenge in progress.

As part of a long-term STEM-inclusive strategy, American Falls Intermediate is working toward achieving Idaho STEM School Designation and educators are part of the state STEM leadership cohort. At least 150 kids have been directly impacted in just one short year with access to this growing program, connecting them to 21st century skills. With strong community support and industry investment, American Falls grew from a single STEM seed planted to a field of career possibilities. Idaho’s now diverse economy is ready for the innovative students of American Falls.
We build STEM through:

**EDUCATOR ACCESS**

to STEM professional development THROUGHOUT IDAHO

- 17,000 EDUCATOR INTERACTIONS

**WORKFORCE**

development-focused partnerships with INDUSTRY and UNIVERSITIES

- 8,000 STEM EDUCATION interactions through communities and businesses

**Student STEM Competitions**

and camp support

- 500,000 STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Today’s students will be tomorrow’s workforce, and STEM AC has been created to develop the STEM-skilled talent that Idaho employers need.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

![Partnership Logos]

**TODAY’S EFFORTS. TOMORROW’S SUCCESSES.**

Industry participation is essential for success, and we’re here to help make that participation easier. We’ve created many ways for Idaho businesses to engage with STEM education. From mentoring and volunteering to donating and partnering, you can help move the economy forward by closing the gaps in Idaho’s workforce. Let us help you help Idaho!

**LEARN MORE**

To learn more about the STEM Action Center’s strategies, success stories, and positive impacts in your community, email: admin@stem.idaho.gov.

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