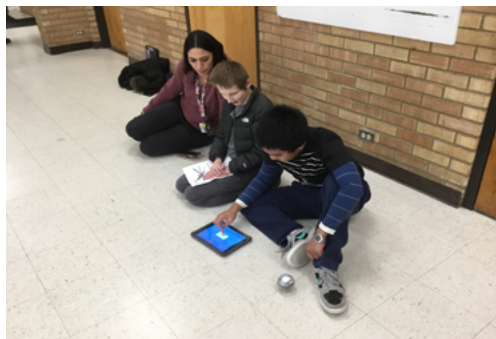


"SPARK" Class Ignites Opportunities

Paul, Idaho



PEER MENTORING PROGRAM SPARKS EXCITEMENT AND FUN

Four years ago, at West Minico Middle School in southern Idaho, a unique STEM class was formed through the vision of principal Tim Perrigot, counselor Nikki Sayer, and STEM teacher Brandi Milliron. This inclusive class known as SPARK: STEM Peers Applying Relevant Knowledge pairs students with experience and knowledge of Drones and STEM classes with students from the Self-Contained Special Education (SCSE) classroom. Students in the Special Education program benefit from peer mentoring, guidance, and support to learn about the most popular topics at West Minico - STEM!

Up to 30 STEM students from a wide variety of backgrounds are selected as mentors and paired with mentees during second semester. Students work closely together on projects that include robotics and coding, indoor drones, 3D design and printing, green screen video production, and outdoor science activities.

STEM and Drones classes are in high demand at West Minico and difficult to get into, but SPARK is an opportunity for SCSE students to use problem-solving skills and higher-level thinking in a fun way with their peers. One favorite activity is "Sphero Olympics," where students code Sphero robots to complete a series of Olympic-themed activities, bringing together coding skills they've learned using Sphero in a fun, engaging way. SCSE students and their mentors win student designed 3D printed trophies awarded at the end of the semester.



**STEM is about engaging with the world
through creativity, collaboration,
and innovation.**

**And STEM skills give Idahoans a
competitive edge in the workplace;**
preparing them for high-paying, high-
demand careers in agriculture, healthcare,
computer science, and more.

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STUDENTS BUILD LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Student mentors have shared just how much this experience has meant to them. They love applying the knowledge they have learned to teach other students. Most of all they enjoy getting to know their peers and sparking joy through STEM topics they are passionate about. The excitement and pure fun of the SPARK class make it an experience that all students will remember for a long time. A student mentor, Andrew, remarked, "this is my favorite class!" Sergio, a 6th grader in the SCSE class commented, "They (mentors) are helpful and nice. They help us do things that are hard for us." Cassie, a 7th grade SCSE student remarked, "It's helped me improve meeting new people."

SPARK class is a favorite of co-teachers Brandi Milliron and Nicole Manning and they believe the special relationships which develop between students is the best part of this experience. Students who usually don't have the opportunity to collaborate are given the chance to partner and learn together. "Students begin to see their similarities, such as music, video games, YouTubers, and favorite movies. Differences are put aside, and relationships develop," Milliron said. Outside of class, students call each other by name and hang out, bringing inclusion to the halls of West Minico Middle School.

"I have seen SCSE students make connections with students that they otherwise would never even talk to," said Manning. "This class over the years has helped my kids so much. It gives my students confidence that they have made new friends."

West Minico Middle School's SPARK class is a great example that STEM IS FOR EVERYONE!

Building STEM through:

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to STEM professional development throughout Idaho.

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focused partnerships with industry and universities.

STUDENT STEM COMPETITIONS

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**STEM IS EVERYWHERE
AND FOR EVERYONE!**



GET INVOLVED TODAY!

Your participation is essential for Idaho's success! There are many ways for you to engage with STEM education. Mentor. Volunteer. Donate. Partner. Help us build a path to prosperity for all Idahoans.

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



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