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STEM A.C., state superintendent partner on virtual teacher training

Cancelled last year due to COVID-19 pandemic, i-STEM Institutes are back this year online

BOISE, Idaho (June 14, 2021) — Educators statewide are convening the next two weeks to learn STEM content and network at the Idaho STEM Action Center’s annual i-STEM Summer Institutes. The agency cancelled the professional development workshops last summer due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is holding them virtually this year in an expanded partnership with the Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction’s office.

According to STEM Action Center interim executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire, the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s office is sponsoring 18 of the 29 workshops this year.

Workshops range from “Cracking the Code: Computer Science for K-2 & Beyond,” “Game Design & Virtual Reality in the Classroom with Blocksmith,” “Paper Circuits and Energy FUNk,” and “Using STREAMpower to Explore Outer Space” to “Wildlife Conservation in Your Backyard,” “Cultivating Citizen Scientists in Elementary Grades,” and “Teaching Mathematics Through Gaming.”

College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls, Idaho State University in Pocatello, and Lewis Clark State College in Lewiston are livestreaming workshops June 15-17. College of Eastern Idaho in Idaho Falls, College of Western Idaho in Nampa, and North Idaho College in Coeur d’Alene are livestreaming workshops June 22-24.

Unlike prior iterations, teachers can attend any institute this year because the events are virtual, and more than 300 are registered to attend. However, like in past years, participants will receive kits of materials related to the workshops they attend, ready to implement what they have learned into their classrooms.

Dr. Maguire said there’s never been a greater need for the i-STEM Summer Institutes.

“This partnership with the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s office, our community colleges and universities, and local businesses is an incredible way to help hundreds of formal and informal educators throughout the state — especially those in rural settings,” she said. “And although the delivery is online this year, i-STEM still offers exceptional professional development opportunities that will bring hands-on STEM activities into the classroom. The curriculum and kits will be especially welcome coming out of a rough year due to the pandemic and will help equip educators with the materials and skills to hit the ground running in the new school year.”

Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra agrees.

“I am delighted that the STEM Action Center’s i-STEM institutes are back this summer, offering ideas and inspiration to Idaho teachers at a critical time,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “After a year disrupted by the pandemic, it is essential to develop skills, tools and strategies for overcoming learning loss — particularly in the STEM fields so important to students’ academic and career success.”

Melissa Stroupe, a first-grade teacher at Centennial Elementary in Lewiston and a longtime i-STEM participant and workshop leader, said the professional development workshops are hugely important.

“It’s the one professional development course you can take as an educator where you’re not only learning about the strategies and instructional tools you need to utilize, but you’re also given those materials so you can go back and teach it in your classroom,” she said. “A lot of times we hear all these great ideas at PD courses but we don’t actually get the materials to do it so it ends up coming out of our own pockets.”

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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