

West Dallas STEM School News

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“As we move from planning to implementation, we are in a very important phase of transition. As illustrated by the updates in this newsletter, we have deepened our commitment to continuous improvement, collaboration, community, and communication – four means of achieving the equity goals that undergird the four-way partnership between SMU, Dallas ISD, Toyota, and the West Dallas Community. I am extremely proud of the progress we have made and look forward with enthusiasm to the next phases of our journey.”

-Stephanie Knight, Dean of Simmons School of Education and Human Development

WDSS Professional Learning Team Collaborates with Gabe P. Allen Teachers

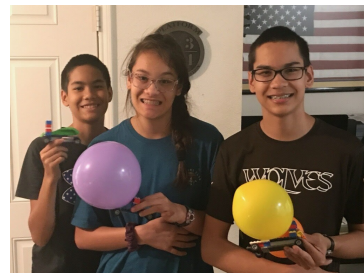
Building on the continuous improvement routines utilized with the second cohort of non-profit service providers, we are using similar routines to engage teachers in professional development that they have a voice in. We began the year, before the students returned to school, surfacing challenges that teachers wanted to collectively work on. Those focal challenges are 1) using technology, 2) engaging students, and 3) building relationships with students and families. Thus far, we have engaged with root cause analysis and empathy interviews to better understand these challenges. Given all of the demands on teachers during COVID-19, we are working to create professional development that supports long-term growth of teachers as well as supporting them as they wrestle with immediate needs, in an ever-changing environment.



Our next steps are to jointly create surveys that will allow teachers to understand these challenges from the perspectives of students and to invite experts to talk with us about solutions to the problems. The goal is to support teachers' development as well as continue to grow a community of collaboration and adult learning.

Summer STEM Activity at Buckner International

In collaboration with Buckner International, SMU's Simmons School of Education and Human Development distributed take-home Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) activity kits to 43 students who reside in the West Dallas community in August. Jeanna Wieselmann, Assistant Professor of STEM Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, developed two activities which integrated engineering design with opportunities for students to learn and apply science and mathematics concepts. Students were challenged to build towers to maximize their strength or height using foam and toothpicks, or to design a LEGO car that could move using only the air in a blown-up balloon.



Student survey responses demonstrated that the students enjoyed engaging in the STEM activities, particularly because of the hands-on nature, repeated design process, and opportunity to experience success after testing multiple designs. Parents of the participating students also reported a high degree of satisfaction with the activities and a desire for more STEM opportunities for their children. The majority of students who submitted survey responses indicated that they collaborated with family members to

complete the STEM activities, showing that hands-on STEM activities may provide opportunities for students and their families to work together to address shared STEM challenges.

Wrapping Up Another Cohort Experience

Twelve local and national nonprofit organizations participated in the West Dallas STEM School's (WDSS) Cohort 2, a nine-month learning experience designed to prepare them to meet the priorities of WDSS students, their families, and the broader community. While Cohort 1 learning focused on overarching concepts such as community context, community schools, and working together, Cohort 2 focused on equipping nonprofits to deliver their programs and collaborate to engage in continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is the organizing framework for professional learning for adults in the WDSS. By building their capacity for continuous improvements, organizations had dedicated time to work cross-organizationally to address four identified areas of improvements.

[Read full story here.](#)



Working Together to Make It Happen

Choose Dallas ISD

Dallas ISD has launched a recruitment campaign, [Choose Dallas ISD](#), which runs from November 7th, 2020 through January 31st, 2021. This campaign is to increase families' awareness of school programs, introduce the new online application and selection process, and drive applications through the application period. As parents search for the best-fit school for their student(s), we invite families to join us for information and support from district and campus leaders. West Dallas STEM School hosted their information session on Saturday, November 14, 2020. To find a recording of this session or more information, [click on this link.](#)

