Project Information

Name of Project: The DIGITS Project

Type of Project: Student Interest

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Description of Project:

DIGITS is a classroom program that pairs STEM professionals with sixth-grade classes throughout the state to increase students’ interest in STEM subjects and careers. STEM volunteers meet and talk with students about their careers, lead students in interactive STEM-related exercises, and serve as role models, encouraging students to study math and science and urging them to consider STEM careers. The program, which is based on a uniquely designed alphabet with STEM icons embedded in each letter, takes place in a math or science class during the course of a typical school day. There are four key elements to the classroom experience: an interactive DIGITS alphabet sticker sheet exercise to encourage students to envision themselves in STEM careers; presentation of the personal career story of a STEM professional to inspire students as to what is possible if they study math and science; a DIGITS poster discussion to highlight the attributes and benefits of STEM careers and underline the diversity message that people of all ethnic backgrounds can be successful in STEM careers; and an interactive card sorting exercise, based on the DIGITS alphabet, to reinforce student awareness of the wide range of exciting STEM career options. The program is rolled out on a regional basis across the state, with classroom visits scheduled over the course of the academic year, and is provided free of charge to all schools (including all classroom materials). All schools with a sixth grade are invited to participate; only those that “opt in” to the program are matched with a STEM volunteer. Volunteers are primarily recruited from among the member companies of supporting associations which represent a variety of STEM sectors. Volunteers are trained by project staff via a one-hour conference call. Three training tools have been developed to facilitate volunteer preparation: a STEM Guide which summarizes research about middle school students and their feelings about math/science/STEM careers; a PowerPoint slide deck which highlights best practices for presenting to middle school students; and a script which volunteers use as a guide in the classroom to ensure that the primary program messages get delivered and to aid in the implementation of the interactive exercises. DIGITS also has its own theme song/music video, provided to participating teachers on DVD, to be used as a follow-up to the classroom visit.