STEM Education Works®

FORT WAYNE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

BUILDING A STRONGER STEM PATHWAY FROM CURIOSITY TO CONFDENCE

WHO THEY ARE

Fort Wayne Community Schools has long recognized the importance of STEM learning. Before partnering with STEM Education Works, the district already offered STEM experiences throughout its K-12 schools, supported by a team of instructional technology coordinators who helped educators integrate technology and STEM resources into the classroom.



However, the experience could look very different from one building to the next. Some schools had embraced STEM deeply, while others had fewer resources or needed additional support to confidently incorporate technology into everyday instruction.

For Sarah McClure, Manager of Learning Technology STEM/STEAM at Fort Wayne Community Schools, the opportunity was not simply to add more STEM equipment. It was to create a more consistent, intentional experience for students across the district. “Being able to partner with STEM Education Works has really allowed us to align the curriculum and truly integrate those tools into classroom instruction,” McClure says.



Today, that vision is beginning to take shape across Fort Wayne Community Schools.

THEIR GOALS

For Fort Wayne Community Schools, expanding STEM at the elementary and middle school levels supports a much larger goal.

The district already offered STEM-focused pathways in high school. McClure and her team wanted students to experience engineering, computer science, and technology earlier so they could make more informed decisions when it came time to select those pathways.

“We wanted to see an increase in those pathways that were STEM-focused,” McClure explains. “Being able to have it now pre-K to eight allows those students to really get hands-on experience and hopefully really know when they get to high school and need to choose their pathway.”
That early exposure allows students to discover what interests them before those decisions carry greater weight.

Instead of encountering robotics, coding, or engineering for the first time in high school, students can spend years experimenting, creating, collaborating, and discovering where their strengths may lead.

The district also wanted to create STEM experiences that felt different from a traditional classroom. Students needed spaces where they could move, collaborate, experiment, fail, try again, and solve problems together.

THEIR SOLUTION

Fort Wayne Community Schools' relationship with STEM Education Works began through a partnership with Purdue University.

Two years ago, the district partnered with Purdue IN-MaC on STEM programming at one elementary school and one middle school. STEM Education Works was part of that initiative, giving FWCS an opportunity to experience the curriculum, technology, and support firsthand.

Once district leaders saw how the pieces worked together, expanding the partnership made sense. "It really was just a no-brainer to keep that partnership going and expand it because of the support and the curriculum that went along with it," McClure says. "Instead of having to try to mimic it ourselves, it just made it streamlined for all of our buildings."

Today, students enter STEM labs filled with technology designed to spark curiosity immediately. They see 3D printers, Dobot robotic arms, drones, and more.

Before the lesson even begins, students start asking questions. "They walk in, and they see those tools, and I think it just sparks that interest in them of, 'How do I learn to use that?'" McClure says.

Technology is only one part of the experience. STEM labs also feature flexible seating and collaborative workspaces that encourage students to move away from the traditional model of sitting independently at a desk.

Students work together to code, build, and troubleshoot. "They know, 'I'm going to be here to collaborate. I'm not working on an island by myself,'" McClure explains. "We're working together to create something, to build something, to problem-solve."

CURRICULUM THAT WORKS WITH THE DISTRICT

Fort Wayne Community Schools did not need to replace the curriculum it had already developed. The district's curriculum team had created much of its own computer science and STEM scope and sequence, including new elementary programming.

Instead, STEM Education Works became a resource that could strengthen and extend what teachers were already doing. When teachers reach areas such as block coding, robotics, or engineering, they can pull STEM Education Works lessons and activities into the district's existing curriculum.

"It's kind of a combination of our in-house curriculum and then using the resources that STEM Education Works has provided us and blending that together," McClure says. That flexibility has been particularly valuable for teachers. Rather than recreating materials that already exist, educators can access curriculum online and connect relevant

lessons directly to district learning goals.
“Let’s not recreate the wheel,” McClure says. “STEM Education Works has got some great stuff out here that supports what we’re doing in the classroom.”

SUPPORTING TEACHERS AS THEY GROW

As Fort Wayne Community Schools expanded its STEM offerings, one challenge quickly became clear: not every teacher began with the same level of experience. Some educators had spent years teaching STEM. Others were stepping into a STEM classroom for the first time.

That made professional development and ongoing support critical.

For McClure, one recent training demonstrated exactly what that support could look like.

During a professional development session with middle school teachers, educators identified 3D printing as an area where they needed more help. Instead of sticking to the original training plan, the STEM Education Works team adjusted the session.

For two hours, teachers worked through the entire process, from CAD design and student setup to printing a finished creation. The result was immediate. Teachers left saying they finally felt comfortable bringing the technology into their classrooms.

“That was just a huge win for us that day,” McClure says.

That confidence is essential for teachers. When they feel supported, they are more likely to give students opportunities to experiment with unfamiliar technology. Sometimes all it takes is knowing someone is there when a question comes up.



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WHY STEM EDUCATION WORKS

For McClure, the technology and curriculum are important, but the relationship behind them is what sets the partnership apart. “The personalization of STEM Education Works is what really makes me confident in this partnership because I know that I can get a hold of someone very quickly,” she says.

Teachers have direct access to members of the STEM Education Works team when they need assistance. During training, educators were encouraged to call or text if they ran into problems.

That availability has made an impression. “You don’t have that with a lot of companies,” McClure says. The support has extended well beyond answering questions.

STEM Education Works team members spent time onsite helping FWCS set up its middle school STEM labs, worked with district staff throughout implementation, and continue to provide professional development as teachers grow more comfortable with the technology.

McClure says that level of involvement has created something larger than a traditional vendor relationship. “You can tell that they care about the buildings they’re working with and the people they’re working with. They want the students and teachers to be successful.”

For a district implementing STEM across multiple schools, knowing that support is available makes a significant difference. “We’re working with a company that has our back,” McClure says. “And that’s really important.”

EARLY RESULTS AND GROWING MOMENTUM

Fort Wayne Community Schools is still early in its districtwide STEM expansion, but McClure is already seeing encouraging signs. At schools that have been implementing STEM for a year or more, students are becoming more comfortable collaborating and working cooperatively.

They are learning that STEM often involves trial and error, communicating ideas, working through challenges, and solving problems as a team. McClure hopes those habits will eventually influence learning far beyond the STEM classroom.

Some schools involved in the initiative have also demonstrated higher growth in areas such as reading and math, although McClure emphasizes that the district is still in the early stages of implementation.

Community interest is growing as well. One school that originally participated in the Purdue IN-MaC and STEM Education Works partnership has seen increased enrollment as it continues working toward state STEM certification.

The district is also expanding robotics programs and building partnerships with community organizations that support students participating in robotics teams. The long-term vision is ambitious. “We’re so at the beginning stages, but that is the long-term goal,” McClure says, “really trying to get all of our schools with a STEM concentration at some point.”

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BUILDING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

For Fort Wayne Community Schools, STEM is becoming more than a collection of technologies or individual classes. It is developing into a connected experience that begins when students are young, grows alongside them, and eventually helps them make decisions about their futures.

The district's partnership with STEM Education Works has helped make that expansion more manageable by combining curriculum, technology, professional development, implementation assistance, and ongoing support. McClure believes that combination makes STEM Education Works a strong starting point for districts that are still figuring out how to begin.

"This is a great place to start with your STEM because not only do they have great tools they can recommend, but they have a fantastic curriculum," she says. "Most importantly, the support team will be there when you need them."

From helping schools choose technology and set up STEM labs to adding teachers to the curriculum platform and providing onsite professional learning, that support can continue throughout implementation. "They are there to be with you every step of the way to get the ball rolling with STEM."

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- 10 new elementary STEM labs serving students in pre-K through fifth grade
- Three existing STEM/STEAM-certified elementary schools
- STEM labs in all 11 middle schools and the district's alternative program
- Earlier STEM exposure designed to strengthen participation in high school STEM pathways
- Hands-on experiences with 3D printing, robotics, drones, coding, engineering, and design
- STEM Education Works curriculum integrated alongside district-developed curriculum
- Professional development tailored to teachers' immediate classroom needs
- Ongoing implementation and technical support for teachers and district staff
- Increased collaboration and cooperative problem-solving among students in established STEM programs
- Growing community interest in STEM-focused schools and robotics opportunities

ABOUT STEM EDUCATION WORKS

STEM Education Works partners with schools and districts to create engaging, standards-aligned STEM learning environments. From curriculum and classroom technology to professional development and ongoing implementation support, STEM Education Works helps educators build sustainable STEM programs that prepare students for future careers.