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TOWERPINKSTER CREATES IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR KENT ISD STUDENTS

Members of the TowerPinkster team engaged with more than 120 students in five classrooms within the Kent Intermediate School District this past semester. The STEM Outreach project focused on providing first-hand experience in the architecture and engineering design field.

Classes from Northview Public Schools, Godwin Heights Public Schools, All Saint Academy, and Rockford Public Schools participated in a collaborative project to explore the design process. The classes from each school were assigned a discipline; All Saints Academy represented architecture, Rockford High School covered mechanical engineering, Godwin Heights High School contributed electrical engineering, and interior design and landscape architecture were added by two classes at Northview High School.

Each classroom was divided into student teams, and the teams from each school worked together across the district to create a final project with information from each discipline.

Adam Doublestein, West Michigan Chapter President of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), developed the idea for this STEM project as part of the upcoming ASHRAE conference he is organizing.

“As the Annual Conference is being hosted in Grand Rapids this year, I wanted to give back to the community,” said Doublestein. “The architecture and engineering design field can seem very daunting to high school students, so being able to introduce students to these design fields and to include multiple schools in the district seemed like the perfect opportunity for engagement. Collectively, TowerPinkster and the West Michigan ASHRAE chapter wanted to raise the awareness of creative, design-oriented career paths for students within our community.”

The goal of this project was to expose students to various architecture and engineering design fields and to teach them how a real-life collaborative design process works, with each discipline relying on the others to complete the final project. Now completed, there is a framework of lesson plans and curriculum established that can be replicated with future classrooms.

“It was very impactful to bring a group of professionals from the same field together to serve the community,” said Doublestein.

The classes were led by architects, engineers, and interior designers from three local firms who prepared lesson plans showing the design process and how to collaborate with classes from the other schools. Our team included Landscape Architect, Craig Newhouse, LLA, Interior Designers Angela Bowles and Heather Harrington, and Electrical Engineer Greg Terrell from TowerPinkster. Engineers Jim Merlino, PE, and James Harrison Jr., PE from GMB Architecture + Engineering, and Architect Greg Koenig, AIA, from Integrated Design Solutions. The volunteers spent over 320 hours on the program.

Students in the Creative Problem-Solving class at Northview High School, which covered the interior design portion of the project, said they were surprised by the level of integration required by interior design and the electrical engineers.

One student said, "I used to think Interior Design was just couches and rugs. I was surprised when we had to lay out the house to be able to get electricity to where it could support our design."

Students were also impacted by the similarities between design and their future careers; saying, "I want to be a music producer, and I can see how interior design goes along with designing music. Like a color palette, you have to figure out a sound palette. You have to equalize every sound, so they fit together. That translates to design because you have to know what goes together and how to create an appeal."

Tanya Lockwood, the teacher for the Creative Problem-Solving class at Northview High School, said, "What made this project work so well was how comprehensively the content taught in the classroom was reinforced by the experts with respect to the 'real world' and a common goal."

At the end of the project, student teams were evaluated by their peers and a panel of judges for their overall achievement in design. Students who excelled in their disciplines will present their designs at the ASHRAE conference in Grand Rapids this July 26, 2019. In addition to the student presentations, there will be a student + professional panel discussion. All educators in West Michigan are welcome and encouraged to attend.

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About TowerPinkster Architects | Engineers | Interior Design

TowerPinkster is an architecture, engineering, and interior design firm with offices in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, Michigan. Driven by curiosity, design leaders focus on creating unique environments with clients and communities throughout Michigan and beyond. Recent work includes projects for Mercy Health, Spectrum Health, Western Michigan University, Aquinas College, Northwood University, Kalamazoo Public Schools, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Greenleaf Trust, AVB Development, Catalyst Development, Kent County, Kalamazoo County, and the Gerald R. Ford International Airport. Visit TowerPinkster online at towerpinkster.com.