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Middle School Receives STEM Donation from Educational Talent Search

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The Three Rivers College Educational Talent Search program has donated a stockpile of gently used STEM kits to the Poplar Bluff Middle School for its hands-on elective.

The recent donation included “two cars worth of drones and other really cool gadgets,” reported sixth grade guidance counselor Britney Stahl, who serves as the Middle School’s ETS point person. She noted that program representatives offered the items to enrich the science, technology, engineering and math program out of the “kindness of their hearts.”

The new tools for classroom activities include Animation Labs, Vortex Labs, KiwiCo Tinker Crate Glowing Pendulums, Laser Projectors, Light-Chasing Robots, Electroluminescent Wire Sculptures, Drone and Test Tubes for Mentos Geyser Experiments, Snowmaking, Jelly Marbles, Water Absorbing Polymer Cubes, Growing Plants in Test Tubes, Rainbow Tubes, Magic Sand, Energy Beads, Water Gel and Orbs, according to STEM instructor Melanie Schalk.

The kits were left-over from the end of the program’s five-year grant cycle, during which officials applied for additional funds to start a STEM club to help keep Junior High students engaged, and used the products for weekly Zoom sessions through the pandemic, according to ETS Director Brandi Brooks.

“We were asking around to see who could possibly use the kits, and ‘Bingo,’ this was the perfect fit,” Brooks said. “I’m excited to see what they do, and thrilled that someone can

use it; it’s really cool for the students. I was terrified it would sit here.”

Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, the ETS program provides monthly in-school workshops, college campus tours and cultural enrichment opportunities for Poplar Bluff students, beginning in grade six. Established locally over three decades ago, ETS at Three Rivers is the largest such TRiO program in Missouri, with a seven-person team of outreach specialists.

Eligibility is based on whether students will be first-generation college attendees, their free or reduced school lunch status, and if significant assistance would be needed in order to finance higher education. Around 1,000 students are served in the region, comprised of 10 school districts, with Poplar Bluff being the largest.

“We provide that link for them—whether it’s exposure to college campuses, or helping them go through the application process—to show the importance of something postsecondary in terms of education or a certification program that will advance whatever training it is that you need,” Brooks explained. “We work with the whole student, not just college heavy stuff; tutoring services, soft skills. And every year we build just a little bit more until they get to that [pivotal] junior year.”

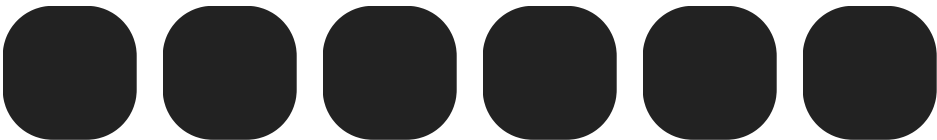
Pictured: STEM students of the Poplar Bluff Middle School pose next to a representation of the activity kits generously donated by the Three Rivers College ETS program.

Photo and article provided by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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