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Golden LEAF awards NCEast Alliance \$150,000 for STEM Northeast Network

The NCEast Alliance (NCEast or The Alliance) announced it will receive \$150,000 from Golden LEAF over two years to support the development of a STEM Northeast Network in several northeastern North Carolina counties. The grant will support the design of a regional professional learning program that initially focuses on Career-Connected Project Based Learning (PBL) for middle school teacher teams.

Mr. Todd Borghesani, Esq. (<https://www.nceast.org/alliance/staff/>) has been retained by NCEast to lead the effort to develop a Series of one-day Career Connected PBL workshops in support of middle school educator teams from nine districts across the region. The Career Connected PBL Workshop Series will start with teaching basics of PBL: how to design projects and manage a PBL classroom. Teacher teams will advance their mastery, learning how to develop quality assessment practices. As the series concludes, teacher teams will have surveyed several industries and share an understanding of how to develop and lead development school-wide, multi-subject PBL projects. Teacher teams will be given the tools and knowledge to help their students acquire skills for the future workforce.

Each workshop blends an industry theme--construction, manufacturing, marine trades, etc.--with PBL learning strategy and practice. Teacher teams meet and learn from regional industry experts, gaining valuable, authentic insight. Central to PBL project design is the authentic connection to our eastern region," said Todd Borghesani, Director of the STEM Northeast Network.

PBL is centered around students learning through experiential "projects." The Buck Institute (www.buckinstitute.org) describes the PBL method of teaching through a key set of design elements known as the "gold standard". The gold standard includes a challenging problem or questions, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and public product. The STEM Northeast Network hopes to focus on authenticity in Career-Connected PBL projects by getting students to solve problems that are authentic to industry.

To support the PBL Workshop Series, a Career-Connected PBL Communications program will be developed. The communications program will involve regional PBL advocacy, PBL communication tools as well as advisory board management. It will support middle school PBL projects with regional industry professionals from a variety of industry sectors. "We know teachers want and need support to develop their practice so their students can succeed. With GLF's investment, we gain insight into rural district roadblocks to implementing effective professional learning," Borghesani emphasized.

According to Mr. Borghesani, "We are better together. For rural school districts in northeast North Carolina, regional collaboration is not a choice, it is a necessity. Collaboration offers unique financial opportunities. Collaboration helps to elevate the voice of rural districts, uplift

and empower isolated teachers, administrators, and students. We are fortunate to build upon the best practices of STEM East."

STEM Northeast hopes to help northeastern school districts take advantage of some of the programs that have benefitted STEM East school districts as well as promote all programs that are available to school districts. STEM East members currently benefit from programs such as STEM East Connect, the E2(Employer & Educators) Summit, Eastern NC Museum Collaborative, Smithsonian STEM Education Summit and strategic planning, and many more. To Learn more about these programs please visit www.stemeast.org. Mr. Borghesani already assisted several northeast NC school districts with successful Golden LEAF applications that will elevate their STEM education offerings.

NCEast Alliance is a regional economic development agency that serves 28 counties in eastern North Carolina. The organization, and its many partners, is involved in marketing and advocacy and supports company recruitment/retention, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and STEM education through STEM East, and the recently organized STEM Northeast. (www.nceast.org).

STEM East is a consortium of public schools, businesses, STEM organizations, out-of-school organizations, science centers, and other educational institutions focused on improving student-learning pathways leading to employment. Through this collaborative effort, STEM East students engage in real-world learning that directly aligns with career opportunities in eastern North Carolina. STEM East is focused on K-16 opportunities for all students to become more aware of and better prepared for future employment. For more information visit www.stemeast.org.

The Golden LEAF Foundation is a not for profit organization based out of Rocky Mount, NC. Golden LEAF works with North Carolina local governments, educational institutions, economic development organizations, and others to continue to improve the North Carolina economy. Golden LEAF was the first to commit funds to the STEM East project in 2011. It was then known as the Eastern Region STEM Lab project. Originally \$350,000 was invested over three years.