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Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell



ILLINOIS
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Mentor Matching Engine (MME) was the focus of a Teacher Tuesday event held last June, which helped spur more schools in downstate Illinois to get involved in the STEM mentoring program. Extension's role in sharing this resource with local STEM educators also led to Caterpillar offering funding support for local schools to become MME members.

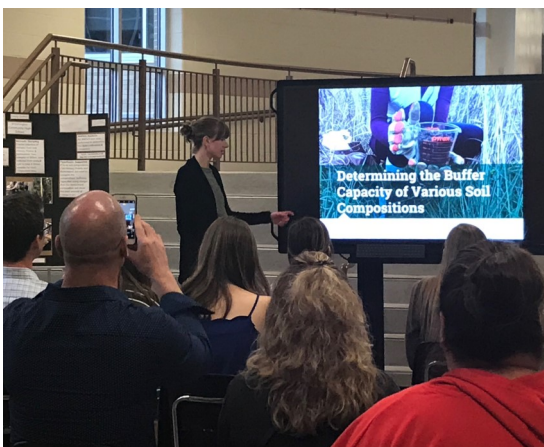
Teacher Tuesdays Program Builds Partnership with Illinois Science & Technology Center

Teacher Tuesdays programming continues to work towards building on the priority of supporting science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) education by improving connectedness among organizations and individuals. Twelve months ago, Laura Frerichs University of Illinois Research Park Director and Director of Economic Development for the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign campus asked if University of Illinois Extension could assist promoting schools' engagement with Mentor Matching Engine, a program supported by "1871", one of our state's leading Centers for Technology and Entrepreneurship. Mentor Matching Engine (MME) is an invitation-based web platform that connects Illinois high school students and their teachers to STEM professionals who serve as online mentors.

Extension began to investigate the program and opportunities for engagement, and quickly discovered that very few downstate schools were taking advantage of this exceptional problem-based learning curriculum. "In conversations with MME program managers, we learned that Washington High School was one of the few downstate schools who has been active participants," mentioned Kathie Brown, Extension educator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. "Together we developed a special event as part of our Teacher Tuesdays network in June 2018. As a result, 25 teachers and industry leaders learned about the power behind Mentor Match Engine."

Washington High School science teacher, Jennifer Miller actively engages 210 students each year utilizing this web-based platform. Developed by the Illinois Science and Technology Institute, the MME is an online collaboration tool that connects Illinois high school students and their teachers to STEM mentors. MME allows for long term engagement with professionals and graduate students in the STEM fields, providing students a line of sight into STEM careers. The platform prioritizes student safety by completing background checks for mentors and placing teachers at the center of the student-mentor relationship.

Based on the positive feedback at the June Teacher Tuesdays event, Extension and Caterpillar STEM Education Outreach Coordinator put together funding and application process for sponsorship to cover half of the enrollment expense for the first year of programming. Allysa Walser, Illini Bluffs High School quickly signed on to participate in the programming for the 2018-2019 school year. Within their first year of involvement in MME, Illini Bluffs High School was selected to present at the statewide Student Research Showcase, a celebration recognizing exceptional projects that have been nominated by their mentor. Students came away from this experience with knowledge, improved problem-solving and interpersonal skills, and, most importantly, increased confidence.



"We have continued our quest to engage more schools and have conducted additional outreach program activities to recruit additional schools for the 2019-2020 school year," Brown stated. The total program cost is \$1,500 per year. To help reduce costs and bring on additional schools, Caterpillar has agreed to offer grants in the amount of \$750 each to three area schools for the upcoming school year.