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SRNS Donates \$29,000 in Support of Aiken County's Public Education Partners, Advocates for Practical Learning Leading to Academic Success

AIKEN, S.C. – February 17, 2017 – Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) has increased their annual funding of \$20,000 to Public Education Partners (PEP) with an additional \$9,000 to assist this non-profit organization in their efforts to further enhance academic excellence throughout Aiken County.

Since its inception in 1995, PEP has identified unmet academic needs in Aiken County public schools and has mobilized community resources to meet these needs. PEP has been instrumental in developing innovative supplemental K-12 programs in literacy, math and science, arts and humanities and workforce preparation. In addition, PEP strongly emphasizes the importance of collaboration, leveraging available resources to improve education.

Diana Floyd, PEP Board Chair, noted that SRNS has financially supported several PEP programs and initiatives through this year's donation to include the Summer Institute, strings orchestra; purchasing a laptop for the Aiken County Teacher of the Year; providing a \$500 Grant of the Month for Aiken County teachers and assisting with the new Project Lead the Way initiative (<https://www.pltw.org/our-programs/pltw-gateway>) being adopted by schools throughout the region.



One of Jackson Middle School's robotics teams prepares for competition during a recent tournament. Karisa Bush programs the robot while Jacob Ormand pre-positions it as Tywain Smith (far right) provides direction. Savannah River Nuclear Solutions recently funded Jackson Middle School and New Ellenton Middle School through Aiken County's Public Education Partners, helping them to jump start their student robotics programs.

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Project Lead the Way's 10 units empower students to lead their own discovery. The hands-on program boosts classroom engagement and excitement, drives collaboration and inspires "aha! moments" and deep comprehension. Students begin to see a range of career paths and possibilities they can look forward to in high school and beyond.

"SRNS has a sincere passion for supporting education outreach initiatives, year-round, throughout the CSRA," said SRNS Education Outreach Program Coordinator Kim Mitchell. "It's at the primary and secondary levels of education within area school systems that our future leaders and the Savannah River Site's future employees are nurtured, shaped and prepared for life as an adult. We want to be an integral part of that process, which includes supporting the talented and highly dedicated people that make up the PEP organization."

According to Mitchell, the additional \$9,000 in funding is being used by PEP to assist "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and "STEAM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) magnet schools Jackson Middle (JMS) and New Ellenton Middle (NEM) in Aiken County, helping to jump start their student robotics programs.

Mitchell believes a cost effective method to deepen students' interest in STEM-based courses is to intrigue them with robots. She is convinced that working in teams to build, program and compete with robots greatly increases student interest and participation in math, engineering and the sciences.

"I've always been interested in computers and programming," said Logan Hopson, 8th Grade, Jackson Middle School. "Working with robots gives us hands-on experience and hands-on building. It's a completely different perspective related to learning."

Hopson has found that programming robots can be difficult. "You have to go through a lot of trial and error, mostly error," said Hopson. "But it's all worth it because over 50 percent of companies today use robots. The FIRST LEGO LEAGUE program at Jackson Middle is giving me the experience in robots and programming that will help me reach my future goals."

"STEM and STEAM programs work," said New Ellenton Middle School Principal Shunte Dugar. "The impact STEAM-based curriculum has had on our faculty and students has been nothing short of amazing. It is revolutionizing current educational theory, while evolving into a new questioning, tactile method of learning based on collaboration and discovery. We could not be more pleased with the results."

Combining STEM- or STEAM-based learning with the practical, hands-on fascination of robotics puts theory into practice through real life application. The result, students have the skills, knowledge and thinking strategies that prepare them to be innovative, creative and systematic problem-solvers in the STEM fields of study and future occupations.

"We plan to Skype with companies and a plethora of robotics engineers to introduce and inform students of future STEM careers," added Dugar.

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“Jackson Middle School recently earned national accreditation for our STEM program, one of only 54 in the world today,” said Kishni Neville, JMS STEM Coordinator. “I believe a lot of the credit for this incredible accomplishment goes to SRNS for their long-time support, both financially and through their employees who regularly volunteer to help us.”

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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