

FEATURE STORY

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Engineering a Vision

Sara Stapleton, Principal, Wayne High School, Wayne County

Sara Stapleton understands the challenge of “creative disruption” issued by The Education Alliance at the first SEEDS meeting. Having just started a robotics program at Wayne High School, she decided a \$50,000 SEEDS grant was the perfect tool for taking STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education to a new level for her students. “I was certain the students would change, that test scores would rise, and that learning would be fun and challenging,” says Stapleton. “We had high expectations for what we termed *Project Lead the Way (PLTW)*, a combined curriculum for math and engineering to complement our robotics program. The student, faculty, and community response to PLTW resulted in positive change beyond our greatest imagining.”

Stapleton worked with Dr. Cockrille from RESA II to plan and prepare the SEEDS grant application. Instructor Greg Miller was key to program implementation and Dr. Bobbi Nicholson of Marshall University offered strength and encouragement as Stapleton’s coach. A. Michael Perry was the business partner with Wayne High School, and made repeated on-site visits to help establish the robotics program. (Mr. Perry helped guide Key Centurion Bancshares, West Virginia’s first billion dollar banking organization, through a number of transitions in its growth toward becoming Banc One West Virginia Corporation, later becoming Bank One.)

The success of the SEEDS grant led to five students receiving scholarships, another high school in Wayne County implementing PLTW, and many of the local elementary and middle schools initiating robotics programs. Stapleton is awed and humbled by the way her one school’s vision has rippled into new programs and achievements in other schools.

Stapleton has special memories of one student whose life course was altered by the SEEDS grant. Committed to dropping out of school, he had poor grades but average test results. He was recruited into the engineering program, and within six weeks he showed improved attitude and overall performance; by the end of the year he was on board with engineering as well as robotics. He is enrolled at West Virginia University this fall.

“If you are not growing, you are not doing your job correctly,” says Stapleton. “Our vision is to build partnerships between our school and various elementary and middle schools to develop high school mentors for the younger students in engineering and robotics. We planted this seed, and we will be there as it continues to grow.”

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