

THE MOBILE TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER: STEM CAREER INSPIRATION ON WHEELS

By Sarah Kurtz McKinnon

TODAY'S YOUTH ARE TOLD THEY CAN BE WHATEVER THEY WANT TO BE—BUT MANY DON'T CONSIDER

or even understand the benefits of a career in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). A new initiative: The Mobile Technical Education Center (MTEC), a mobile, interactive exhibit will inspire youth to pursue careers in STEM and change that paradigm.

STEM jobs are growing in number; according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 9 million STEM jobs will be added to the U.S. economy between 2012 and 2022. On top of the increasing availability of these jobs, workers in STEM

careers make a median annual wage of \$76,000, which is more than double the median wage for all workers. Despite these attractive statistics, a shortage of workers in STEM careers is reported in many areas of the country. This gap is because students have not been introduced to the available opportunities in STEM. The MTEC will help narrow that gap.

But here's the catch: Students will not have to come to the MTEC—it will come to them. The center is housed in a specialty semitrailer manufactured by Triune Specialty Trailers in Madison Heights, Michigan. The trailer will be hauled to

schools, libraries, summer camps, special events and community centers around the country, bringing inspiration and education about STEM careers directly to students.

When traveling, MTEC will look like a normal semi. However, when parked, the trailer engages special hydraulic equipment to expand its interior space to three times its original size, providing 1,000 sq. ft. of space for students to visit—bringing STEM skills and career opportunities to life. The custom design will include a hands-on learning environment with stations such as welding simulators, public safety monitors, CNC equipment, robotics





Mobile STEM lab coming to a district nearby will bring inspiration and education about STEM careers directly to students.

experiments, graphic art design and drone flight simulators.

Up to 20 students at a time will enter the trailer and experience this project-based curriculum. Each station will be related to career possibilities, and students will be given the chance to examine career paths, certification and education requirements, salaries and practice interviewing skills. Also, at each stop, MTEC will connect students with mentors from local manufacturing companies.

Shiloh Slomsky coordinates the North Central Michigan College Fab Lab, a high-tech mobile classroom Triune built

that travels to schools across the region to deliver STEM programming. Slomsky says the program has inspired students interested in jobs in STEM-related fields—and opened their eyes to options they've never considered.

"These programs are vital for our youth," Slomsky says. "One of my favorite stories is about a student with Asperger's syndrome. If you would've asked him two years ago about his academic plans after high school, he would have said he had none. And now his goal is to get a master's degree in manufacturing. And I have no doubt he's going to get it."

The trailer will launch later this year and is scheduled to appear at ACTE's CareerTech VISION in Nashville from December 6-9. **Tech**

RESOURCE TO EXPLORE

Bureau of Labor Statistics
www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/spring/art01.pdf