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ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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News Release

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Pilot Project to Focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education Preparing Students for Job Demands of the Future

LITTLE ROCK — Governor Mike Beebe and his Workforce Cabinet today announced a pilot program — STEM Works — focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education in high schools and universities, so that the state's workforce will be able to meet the escalating demand for employees in high-tech fields.

STEM Works specifically seeks to overhaul the ways in which Arkansas high school students receive STEM education and to increase the number of well-qualified STEM teachers.

“The STEM fields offer stable, well-paying careers for the 21st century, and the demand continues to grow at a rapid pace,” Governor Beebe said. “These are positions that companies are struggling to fill, even in tough economic times. If we are to continue to attract these types of companies to Arkansas, we must prepare our young people with high-tech skills and build a workforce that will help our state prosper.”

The first component of STEM Works will accelerate and transform secondary STEM education to better prepare high-school graduates to pursue college degrees in STEM disciplines. This will be achieved through the creation of New Tech High Schools and Relevant Education for Active Learning (REAL) Schools, an initiative of Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) schools.

The second component, UTeach, provides special secondary teacher training for college STEM majors, ensuring that Arkansas produces a steady stream of qualified teachers.

Initial implementation of STEM Works is affordable and can begin largely within existing budgets. The Workforce Cabinet agencies, for example, currently support project-

based learning and in-service professional development — all of which can be aligned with STEM Works implementation. Grant funds can be applied toward accelerating STEM Works implementation as well. Currently, more than \$2 million has been committed to STEM Works by private businesses and the state.

The first private grant comes from the AT&T Foundation, providing \$35,000 in support of the UTeach component of STEM Works.

“AT&T recognizes that a skilled, high-tech workforce is vital to the future of our company and our country,” said Ed Drilling, president of AT&T Arkansas. “This is one of several STEM-related education grants we’ve made in Arkansas since 2008, totaling more than \$500,000. We’re pleased to join with Governor Beebe and others to support this new initiative and we encourage others in the business community to support it as well.”

Workforce Cabinet agencies have committed more than \$2 million in funding to implement the New Tech, REAL Schools and UTeach programs:

- **Governor Beebe**, \$500,000 in General Improvement Funds;
- **Department of Career Education**, \$500,000 in project-based learning program start-up funds;
- **Department of Education**, \$500,000 in Technology Grants;
- **Department of Workforce Services**, \$500,000 from the Workforce Services Training Trust Fund; and
- **Department of Higher Education**, \$250,000 from the federally-funded College Access Challenge Grant.

Artee Williams, chair of the Governor’s Workforce Cabinet and director of the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, said, “The financial commitments from the private sector and the Workforce Cabinet will enable us to leverage and balance the initial implementation of STEM Works throughout the state to achieve our statewide goals.”

The STEM Works high schools will be based on models that are known to be effective. One is the New Tech High School model that integrates STEM education and extensive project-based learning throughout the curriculum. Cross County High School, in Cherry Valley, and Lincoln High School, in Washington County, are the first schools in the state to adopt this model and will implement it during this school year. Other high schools have expressed an interest in becoming New Tech High Schools and are invited to attend an information session on Aug. 31, 2011, at the Arkansas Activities Association.

Matt McClure, superintendent of Cross County School District, recently visited a New Tech High School in Texas. “The engagement and energy level of students was impressive,” said McClure. “We observed student-directed learning, high levels of student ownership, and high levels of student achievement. I see project- based

learning as a vehicle that will help students excel in the Common Core State Standards and in developing the 21st-century skills needed beyond high school.”

Another model currently under development, REAL Schools, is based on an EAST strategy that will connect more schools with the STEM curriculum.

The goal of STEM Works is to have 10 high schools implementing extensive project-based learning by the start of the August 2012 school year.

The second aspect of STEM Works is UTeach, which is a model program to recruit college students majoring in STEM disciplines to become teachers. Several of the state’s universities have indicated interest in bringing UTeach to Arkansas.

The Governor’s Workforce Cabinet will be responsible for implementing STEM Works. This includes the Governor’s Office, the Department of Education, the Department of Career Education, the Department of Higher Education, the Department of Workforce Services, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Arkansas Science and Technology Authority, and the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges.

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