

Craig

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To the DRSC Committee,

Last year was a life and career altering year for me. Before my time with the Fellowship, I felt as though I was being put inside of a box in terms of my teaching. I felt stagnant but ready for more despite not exactly knowing the route or resources I would need to continue. My experience with the Fellowship was exactly what I needed in order to take that next leap. I've already put my newfound learning and resources to use in Centerville. I've never felt so fulfilled as an educator as I have since being a part of the STEM Fellowship last season and broadening my horizons deeper into the world of STEM, and instead of writing a letter asking to be a part of the Fellowship again this year (which I'd love to be), I'd rather share the impact it's had on my teaching and my school.

One of the quickest effects the Fellowship had on my teaching and school was through the STEM Club I was asked to run during the winter of last school year. For several years prior, my Principal, along with other teachers, ran an after-school math club for under-achieving students. These students were hand-picked, invited, and put into the club where they essentially extended the school day solely to do Math remediation. My Principal dealt with lots of behavior and attendance issues with this club and it was a burden to run, so she wanted to change things up. After a short conversation in which I thought she just wanted to add in a simple "STEM Challenge" to the club each day, she asked me to revamp the program into a full-fledged STEM Club. I assembled a team of teachers and gave them a quick-hit session on the principles of STEM and even had them participate in a STEM challenge similar to the ones we would do with the students. From there, we formed a club of about 80 students and taught them about the Engineering Design Process and had short challenges to teach them concepts of STEM. The challenges, such as designing a boat to carry a measured weight across a baby pool or creating a way to remove a pig figurine from a pretend well, were one or two sessions and were designed to get them in the right mindset for the longer experiences they had waiting for them. The longer sessions had more of a math backdrop to them, but still were very hands-on and engaging. Students created balloon racers and measured their travel, used coding and measurement to program robots, and even designed bridges that incorporated math operations in a scoring system based on the weight held and span of their bridge. The best part of the whole experience is that we didn't have a single behavior problem and we had a fraction of the attendance issues, plus countless parents and students have asked to be a part of it for this year! I wouldn't have felt confident enough in my abilities to pull this off before my time with the Fellowship.

Another way the Fellowship has changed my teaching and classroom is through the money earned from participation. I chose to use the money and invest directly back into my classroom and students by purchasing some materials that would facilitate more STEM initiatives. Through this opportunity I was able to purchase a 3D printer, several 3D pens, a class set of Makey-Makey boards, 6 Ozobots, and the materials to design my own Breakout Rooms. I've already put many of these to good use not only in terms of just plain fun, but also to make my classroom more like a Maker Space and allow students the freedom to design on their own time. I've also built them into curriculum; whether teaching the Writing Process through Ozobots or using Makey Makey boards to explore Place Value in Math, the students have been amazed and eager to try out these new teaching toys, all thanks to the Fellowship

Lastly, the Fellowship has begun to change my teaching team and colleagues. My 4th grade team has asked for me to help them redesign a unit to be more STEM driven for this school year. I've had numerous teachers ask how to build more STEM into their classrooms. This has been a huge shift, not only for me but the whole building, and hopefully is the beginning of some big things for our district. I would love the opportunity to be a part of this program again and to see what more it has in store for me, but if not, the Fellowship already has made a lasting impression on me and countless others who will benefit as I find more ways to share my experience.

Sincerely,

Craig [REDACTED]