

Lincoln and Ypsilanti Schools, Toyota, Eastern Michigan University Collaborate to Launch Driving Possibilities in Southeast Michigan

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YORK TOWNSHIP, Mich. (June 8, 2023) – Lincoln Consolidated and Ypsilanti Community Schools, both part of Washtenaw Intermediate School District (Washtenaw ISD), are collaborating with Toyota* and Eastern Michigan University (EMU) to prepare youth for the careers of tomorrow. The southeast Michigan collaboration falls under Toyota’s Driving Possibilities initiative as a five-year phased rollout in Ypsilanti and Lincoln communities.

As part of a \$110 million initiative dedicated to Toyota’s [Driving Possibilities](#), the Toyota USA Foundation is granting nearly \$10 million over the next five years in southeast Michigan. The initial funds will be distributed between two community partners including EMU’s College of Education for a newly created STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) Institute and Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) for a transportation study.

“Our goal is to increase awareness of future STEM careers while helping build sustainable programs in the communities where our Toyota team members live and work,” said Tellis Bethel, group vice president of social innovation, Toyota. “It’s exciting to see the expansion of Driving Possibilities near our Michigan R&D facilities, the first location announced out of the 14 additional U.S. sites planned.”

[Driving Possibilities](#) is designed to be an equitable collaboration with schools, nonprofits and community to help all student succeed – at school and in the careers of the future. The long-term initiative from Toyota focuses on PreK-12 education, building on Toyota’s existing programs across the country. The aim is to close educational gaps for all students through innovative, hands-on STEM programming that leverages unique assets and resources in the equal-partner relationship. Driving Possibilities is designed to help increase STEM awareness, excitement and interest in a promising career in a STEM-related field while addressing the essential needs of students and families.

The initiative is funded by Toyota USA Foundation, Toyota Motor North America (TMNA), and Toyota Financial Services (TFS).

“Michigan is committed to leading the future of mobility, manufacturing, and STEM and investing in our talented students,” said Governor Whitmer. “Last week, I announced the Make It In Michigan plan, a strategy to compete for projects, invest in people, and revitalize places. Toyota’s nearly \$10 million partnership over five years with Washtenaw ISD and EMU to establish a community-focused STEM institute will help more skilled workers Make It In Michigan and prepare our current workforce and future STEM leaders for the high-skilled, good-paying jobs we are creating in communities across our state. Let’s continue partnering to grow our economy and make Michigan the best place to research, develop, and manufacture the technology of the future.”

Community-Focused STEM Institute

Most of the Driving Possibilities funding will be directed to a community-focused STEM Institute with both Ypsilanti Community and Lincoln Consolidated districts for elementary, middle and high school students and their families. The institute will be led by EMU and governed by the partners. It will provide support services, curriculum and activities to integrate STEM into the daily experiences of children and families.

The community-focused STEM Institute will serve as a hub to deploy STEM resources to and from the school districts and three institutions of higher learning in the area. In addition to EMU, the University of Michigan College of Engineering and the Washtenaw Community College will serve as educational and subject matter experts to create new learning opportunities for teachers, students and families across the community.

“Through powerful learning experiences, we are excited to build on the commitments from our local school district partners to ensure student success in STEM education to prepare them for the careers of the future,” said James Smith, Eastern Michigan University president. “The sustainable model will help to relieve the

administrative tasks from the districts and bring together collaborators from both industry and institutions of higher learning to a central location to benefit young people.”

An advisory board consisting of community and stakeholder groups will be created to maintain the STEM Institute beyond the initial five-year commitment. Their focus will be on addressing emerging needs and community interests as the program grows and evolves.

Continuing Education at all levels

The proposed general programming to be offered by the STEM Institute includes both classroom curriculum and exposure to STEM in various areas of the industry through field trips, speakers, camps and exploration of Career Technical Education (CTE) for the next generation of STEM careers.

“STEM education and programs like Driving Possibilities in Michigan are crucial for preparing our students for success in the rapidly evolving job market,” said Alena Zachary-Ross, superintendent of Ypsilanti Community Schools. “By fostering skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, we are equipping our students with the tools to not only thrive but also drive innovation in their chosen fields.”

The funding will also include place-based STEM curriculum at two elementary schools, including professional and pre-service learning for elementary school teachers.

Connecting the districts to STEM activities

Toyota’s Driving Possibilities long-term initiative aims to provide a comprehensive approach that includes measures to combat other barriers that students might have, such as in transportation to and from schools. To do this and better understand the needs for these programs, Toyota USA Foundation is funding a transportation study with CTAA. The study will then be used to help provide future mobility solutions, including for the communities near the Ypsilanti and Lincoln schools.

CTAA will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the transportation needs through a multi-year research and mapping effort. The focus is to provide each district ways to successfully participate in the hands-on STEM activities from the STEM Institute at their respective schools and at the centralized community location.

“With the generous support of Driving Possibilities and support from other local partners, our LCS community is not only fostering excellence in STEM education but also advancing our collective efforts as a community towards realizing the competencies outlined in our Portrait of a Graduate,” said Robert Jansen, superintendent of Lincoln Consolidated Schools. “Together with our amazing partners, we are building a strong foundation in STEM education, empowering every child in the Lincoln Consolidated Schools community to not only meet but surpass their full potential.”

To learn more about Toyota’s \$110 million dollar commitment to Driving Possibilities, visit ToyotaEffect.com for the latest information.