

# Toyota's Driving Possibilities Program Invests in Future STEM Leaders

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A powerful thing can happen when a student's confidence, preparation and skills collide. That is why Toyota is working to ensure students are aware countless post-graduate STEM opportunities are awaiting them.

The Driving Possibilities initiative puts students in the driver's seat and sets them up with access to educational programs that are inclusive, future-focused, and responsive to workforce demands. The initiative is funded by Toyota USA Foundation, Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) and Toyota Financial Services (TFS).

"We need to help prepare the workforce of the future by providing a broader education and getting the next generation ready for high-growth careers," says Ted Ogawa, chief executive officer at Toyota Motor North America. "In addition, addressing inequities that create barriers to success will help improve lives throughout the U.S."

For Toyota, this education- and community-led approach lends itself to supporting local groups to contribute to student success in a holistic way.



The program is being rolled out across the company’s operational communities nationwide — with pillars that address food insecurity, literacy, mobility solutions, career readiness, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education.

Driving Possibilities is modeled after the program at the [West Dallas STEM School \(WDSS\)](#). Through the development of a STEM-based school program, Toyota, SMU, Dallas ISD, and the West Dallas community partnered to create a successful concept that is now being adopted in communities across the country. The long-term initiative of Toyota USA Foundation 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.

### **Accelerating Career Readiness**

Students in [Southeast Michigan](#) will be able to participate in a similar program to help propel them toward a future STEM career.

With so many STEM resources in the region, the Driving Possibilities team identified a critical need to improve the access and coordination of three key areas to underserved students. These include a newly-created STEM Institute, with both classroom curriculum and industry exposure; professional and preservice learning for teachers; and a multi-year transportation study.

Based on the program, funding is being administered between Eastern Michigan University (EMU) College of Education and Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA).



“We are proud to partner with Toyota USA Foundation’s Driving Possibilities initiative as it puts community expertise and voice at the center of community engagement,” says Ryan Evely Gildersleeve, Ph.D., dean, College of Education, EMU. “Collaborating across educational institutions and school districts will bring the greatest resources and best coordinated efforts to support and sustain the Ypsilanti community’s legacy for STEM innovation, particularly through education.”



### **Continuing a Path for Success**

In [Kentucky](#), the working team learned there is a critical need to connect school systems more closely with Industry partners and resources to increase access to key programs. In partnership with Scott County, Fayette County, and the Ignite Institute in Northern Kentucky, the three focus areas are: expand literacy and language resources; build education and industry partnerships; and address transportation barriers.

In collaboration with community partners and businesses, specific programs will focus on STEM/STEM Career Technical Education (CTE) curriculum, field trips, job shadowing, apprenticeships, and mentorships. What is

more, programs will provide additional resources through equipment, staffing and support for English-learner students and families.

“Over the last 32 years, Toyota has partnered with National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) to spread and scale high-impact, evidence-based practices to support families learning together,” says Shea Coughlin, SVP, Operations & Strategy, NCFL. “Toyota USA Foundation’s Driving Possibilities initiative has challenged us to take another step forward in engaging with families and communities. with additional supports alongside school- and community-based learning experiences.”

Dia Davidson-Smith, the chief communications and public engagement officer for Fayette County Public Schools, agrees with other educators.

“It is my hope that students will gain increased awareness of future STEM careers and access to sustainable programs in their communities,” she says. “I believe this program will empower and inspire students to pursue rewarding and lucrative STEM careers, preparing them for success in the classroom and in life.”



### **Creating Limitless Possibilities**

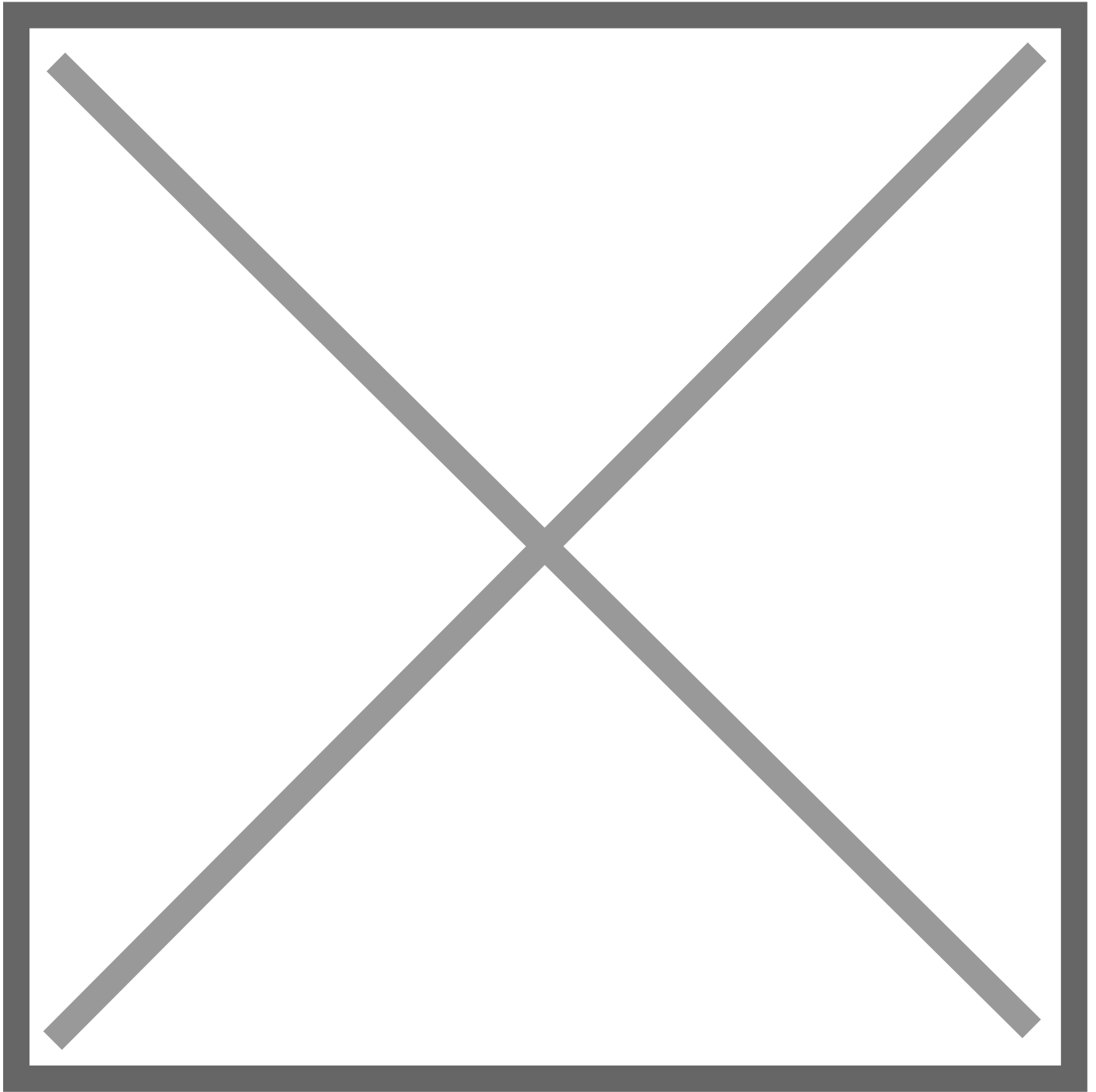
In [Southern Indiana](#), the Driving Possibilities team learned that many students fall behind before they even start kindergarten. While the STEM curriculum is strong, students and teachers need additional support to fully participate in those programs.

Focusing on specific schools in Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation and North Gibson School Corporation, Toyota is working with community partners, such as Building Blocks and Youth First Inc., to help increase access to quality PreK education. The Southern Indiana program will also provide additional access to



student mental health services, multi-language learning and hands-on STEM programs for students and teachers.

“Toyota USA Foundation is always looking to the future by introducing new innovative community initiatives like Driving Possibilities,” says Toyota Indiana president Leah Curry. “Driving Possibilities sets the foundation for powerful learning experiences to prepare area students for future STEM careers.”



### **Connecting STEM and Career Technology Education**

In [Alabama](#), the Driving Possibilities team learned about the two opportunities that lie in connecting students to

STEM-based Career Technology Education programs and continuing to support new teachers with the tools and skills needed to educate students across grade levels.

“Huntsville City Schools is committed to excellence, and the Driving Possibilities grant comes at a pivotal moment as we work together — industry and community — to prepare our students for success,” says Dr. Clarence Sutton, superintendent of Huntsville City Schools. “By supporting teachers and students, we will build a sustainable model for advancement and workforce preparedness for future generations.”

Driving Possibilities is providing funds to the Huntsville Chamber Foundation as its coordinating partner to support the recently announced HCS Career Tech Center.

“High-quality education is essential for a well-educated and capable workforce,” says Elizabeth Goodson, induction program specialist & director of public development, Huntsville City Schools. “When companies support new teacher induction programs, they contribute to the development of effective educators who, in turn, can provide a better education to students.”

Through the New Teacher Center, up to 70 new teachers at both Jemison High School and Lee High School will receive training and mentorship. Goodson adds, “Supporting teacher induction programs not only benefits students but also contributes to the overall health and vitality of the community.”

### **Building a Solid STEM Future**

While many locations are following in the tracks and implementing the know-how of West Dallas STEM School, there’s more to come as Toyota USA Foundation continues to roll out the Driving Possibilities initiative across the U.S. Collaborating with school districts, nonprofits, and local communities to address barriers to learning and to help improve educational programs for future STEM professionals is a top priority for Toyota.

“Through our active partnerships with communities across the U.S., we collaborate to improve education and help shape the future for the next generation,” says Mark Templin, chief executive officer, Toyota Financial Services. “We invite other businesses to join with us in this shared purpose.”

Check out the map below to see how Toyota USA Foundation is driving this initiative forward:

