

Regional Advisory Committees Help Ensure Success for the FloridaLearns STEM Scholars Project

Participating School Districts



Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

Patrick L. McDaniel, Executive Director

Calhoun
Franklin
Gadsden
Gulf
Holmes
Jackson
Jefferson
Liberty
Madison
Taylor
Wakulla
Walton
Washington



Heartland Educational Consortium

Tom Conner, Executive Director

DeSoto
Glades
Hardee
Hendry
Highlands
Okeechobee



North East Florida Educational Consortium

James Surrency, Ph.D., Executive Director

Columbia
Flagler
Gilchrist
Lafayette
Levy
P.K. Yonge
Putnam
Union

A very important component of the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project is the provision for advisory groups. These groups provide valuable input and guidance, and work with project personnel to seek solutions to various issues in order to ensure effective implementation. Each consortium has identified individuals who are willing to serve on a Regional Advisory Committee, along with representatives from their area who serve on the Statewide Advisory Board. Members of the Regional Advisory Committees address local issues and make recommendations to the Statewide Advisory Board.

The valued volunteers who serve in this advisory capacity are from school districts, higher education, military, workforce and economic development agencies, industry, and business. They meet in regional locations three times each year, and some portions of the Regional Advisory Committee Meetings are held jointly using interactive videoconferencing technology.

A Joint Regional Advisory Committee Meeting was held on October 8, 2013 in Chipley. Using interactive videoconferencing technology, the Regional Advisory Committee for the Heartland Educational Consortium (HEC) joined the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) Advisory Committee for the opening activities. After a welcome and comments by Pat McDaniel and Tom Conner, the Executive Directors of PAEC and HEC, and a *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project update by Project Manager Brenda Crouch, the Committees went into their individual meetings.

In addition to their usual business and advisory tasks, including a review of the Year Three Work Plan, the PAEC Regional Advisory Committee enjoyed hearing from STEM Scholars, mentor teachers, and STEM professionals who served as STEM Talent Developers this summer by providing workplace experiences for students. STEM Scholars used PowerPoint presentations they had produced to share with Advisory Committee members an overview of their participation in STEM Scholars Project-sponsored activities this summer. These included the 2013 Summer Challenges, a week-long Immersion into STEM experience at the University of Florida, and Field Site/Workplace experiences. Students also described regional forum activities which take place during the academic year.

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These STEM Scholars presented highlights of their STEM sponsored summer experiences to the Regional Advisory Committee. Back row, Left - Right: Morgan Willis, Marianna High School; Tyler Head, Freeport High School; Ben Bridges, Chipley High School; Nick Butler, Chipley High School; Richard Davenport, Chipley High School. Front row: Jordan Sparks, Freeport High School and Olivia Saunders, Chipley High School.

Comments from Advisory Committee members and STEM Scholars emphasized the value of the experiences that have been provided to students through the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project. STEM Scholar **Morgan Willis**, a senior at Marianna High School in Jackson County, spoke about the many benefits of her participation in the Immersion into STEM Experience this summer at the University of Florida. She focused on the career opportunities she was introduced to, and added, “STEM in general has just basically opened me up to a world of different opportunities. With the UF experience, I went in thinking I knew everything, but when I got done with it, I realized there were so many different careers I could do.”

Jordan Sparks, a senior at Freeport High School in Walton County, said being in the STEM program has been a valuable experience for him. He spoke at length about projects and activities he has enjoyed during Regional Forums

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at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, and concluded by saying, “The best thing has been that I’ve had the opportunity to explore the different fields that use Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. It’s just been a wonderful experience. I’ve been able to find out what I’m good at, what I’m not so good at, and find out what it is that I really want to pursue in life.”



Sarah Boullard is a STEM Scholar at Vernon High School in Washington County. She shared about her Summer Challenge experience, “The Great EcoDebate,” which was held at the Bear Creek Educational Forest in Quincy, Florida. She also received a STEM Project scholarship to attend an environmental camp this past summer.

Regional Advisory Committee member **Vicki Davis** is the Assistant Superintendent for Calhoun County Schools. She also appreciates the career awareness provided to students through the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project. She commented, “This has been the most wonderful grant for students. I can see how our students in Blountstown and Altha have just blossomed. There are so many opportunities. They’re able to see you don’t have to be a doctor or lawyer or teacher. There are so many STEM-related jobs out there for students.” “It’s just been a great grant,” she added, “and I hope



*Vicki Davis, Assistant Superintendent
Calhoun County Schools*

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we can extend it. Not only have our gifted and talented students benefitted, but so have many other students. Because of the equipment the grant has provided us, we have been able to provide our high schools with a dual enrollment math teacher, which we've never been able to do before."

Frank Kreis is a Professional Engineer with the Florida Department of Transportation. He served as a STEM Talent Developer for a Field Site/Workplace experience this summer for STEM Scholars, and is also a Regional Advisory Committee member. He talked about how much his involvement with the STEM Project has meant to him personally. He said, "Serving on the Advisory Committee has been very eye-opening for me. With grandchildren in the school system here, I've been very interested in the opportunities that are available for our high school students to go to college and on to professional careers. It's really been a blessing to me to be involved."



Professional Engineer Frank Kreis, from the Florida Department of Transportation District Three Materials and Research, is pictured with four STEM Scholars from Chipley High School who participated in a Field Site/Workplace Experience with his agency this summer. Left – Right: Olivia Saunders, Ben Bridges, Frank Kreis, Nick Butler, and Richard Davenport.

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Regional Advisory Committee member **Dr. Nicholas Comerford** also served as a STEM Talent Developer this summer. He is the Center Director of the North Florida Research and Education Center for the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. He spoke about the importance of STEM in agriculture. “STEM is really important to agriculture. It’s not always very much appreciated, but if you go into a farmer’s field, it’s biology, chemistry, physics, and it’s engineering. For example, if you’ve ever looked at a cotton picker, it’s how intricate the spindles are in removing the cotton balls and putting them in the back of the machine. A tremendous amount of engineering is involved. If you look at how a plant grows, both the physics of growth and the biology that’s required for growth is incredible. And so the opportunity to see what’s going on in STEM education, and in our case to work with some of these young STEM Scholars, I think is very helpful to the future of our industry, both agriculture and natural resources. We’re going to need young students like this who have that knowledge, because without it we will not have the replacements for the folks like us who are just about ready to look at retirement. “



*Dr. Nick Comerford, Center Director
North Florida Research and Education
Center
University of Florida, Institute of Food
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The *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project is funded through the Florida Department of Education's Race to the Top award and involves a partnership among Florida's three educational consortia, which provide critical educational support services to Florida's small and rural school districts. The consortia are Panhandle Area Educational Consortium in northwest Florida, Heartland Educational Consortium in south central Florida, and North East Florida Educational Consortium in the northeast part of the state.

The Project is focused on serving gifted and talented students in grades 9 – 12 who reside in the small and rural school districts served by PAEC, HEC, and NEFEC. It affords rich opportunities for the participants, including collaborative problem-solving experiences, leadership development, and information and experiences which ensure that the students and their families are well informed about STEM higher education and career options in Florida.

Members of the STEM Regional Advisory Committees make valuable contributions toward helping meet the goals of the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project. They make recommendations to ensure project activities are implemented effectively at the regional level. They review project activities, documents, policies and procedures, provide input and make recommendations to the Statewide Advisory Board, and they address important areas of concern, such as STEM curriculum, workplace experiences, and project sustainability. All of this is accomplished through the gift of their valuable time. Their dedicated service to our STEM Scholars, who will be Florida's leaders tomorrow, is greatly appreciated!