

Dear Arkansas Curriculum Leaders:

Computer Science and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers in Arkansas are expected to increase by 25,000 new jobs by 2024 and nationally STEM jobs are growing at almost twice the rate as non-STEM careers. The number one reason why students do not choose STEM education pathways is lack of awareness in STEM related careers.

Through the Governor's office and the Department of Education, Arkansas schools have available a STEM awareness supplemental curriculum – Learning Blade®. Arkansas Public School Resource Center leads this effort that began with the 2016/2017 school-year to help middle school students understand Computer Science and STEM related careers and technologies.

The Learning Blade system is part of a statewide initiative to increase access for computer science and STEM careers in every middle school. This system is designed for grades 6-8 to create a foundation of understanding in STEM and is intended to be used as a supplemental curriculum. Students have enjoyed learning about careers related to their interests and values. Post-surveys indicate that a higher percentage of students want to take advanced math classes and twice as many students want to become scientists or engineers.

Learning Blade challenges students through online learning to take on problem solving strategies that expose them to different aspects of STEM. Arkansas is the second state to implement Learning Blade statewide. The system is organized into "missions" that focus on societal issues, enabling students to participate in engaging lessons that explore problems such as protecting web sites and social media from attacks, predicting a flu outbreak by using data and social media, or building an environmentally-sound orphanage after a major earthquake. Learning Blade also provides teachers with valuable feedback on student skills, while demonstrating the relevance of academics in real-life contexts for students.

It can be used in Career Development to expose students to careers in STEM or challenge young students in GT or enrichment classes. It could be used as a stand-alone class in a 6th grade wheel or ALE program to teach math, science, English and social studies. Learning Blade is continually improving with additional hands-on activities including 3D Printer lessons, TI Calculator activities and parent handouts.

Commissioner Johnny Key has supported the effort noticing “Students in classrooms around the state are changing their conversations regarding the careers due to the exposure they are getting through Learning Blade, and this increased student engagement is critical to our vision of transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused learning. Year one has been successful and given the integration of the academic standards, particularly literacy in the system, we look forward to seeing the usage grow as we focus on basic foundational skills.”

To sign up for a FREE Account – visit [www.Learningblade.com/AR](http://www.Learningblade.com/AR)

For additional information and free training in Arkansas please contact Ray Henson at [ray@learningblade.com](mailto:ray@learningblade.com)