



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

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news

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GOVERNOR BLAGOJEVICH BRINGS NATIONALLY-PROVEN TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING PROGRAM TO WEST CENTRAL REGION

SPRINGFIELD - Delivering on an *Opportunity Returns* pledge to help better prepare high school students in the West Central region for careers in science and technology, Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced that an innovative regional partnership has been formed to administer the dynamic, nationally recognized program known as Project Lead The Way.

A **\$40,000** training grant is being awarded to the LaMoine Valley Educational Center in Macomb, who will team up with Western Illinois University (WIU) to make Project Lead The Way available to high school students in twelve school districts located in Hancock, McDonough, Fulton and Warren Counties. The grant funds will be used to cover teacher training, equipment, software and set-up costs. The curriculum will be taught at WIU's campus in Macomb.

Since Illinois will increasingly compete for high tech business investment based on the skills of our workforce, and, in particular, the supply of highly skilled engineers, Governor Blagojevich is launching the Project Lead The Way (PLTW) program to build stronger science and technology skills and promote engineering and technology careers in middle and high schools.

"I am thrilled to announce the partnership between the LaMoine Valley Educational System and Western Illinois University. Not only are regional partnerships an essential ingredient of *Opportunity Returns*' success, but they are especially important here in the predominately rural West Central region where collaboration is critical to delivering services efficiently and effectively. By offering the Project Lead The Way program to students across the region, we are laying the foundation for a highly-skilled workforce of the future who will possess the set of skills to seize jobs at top-tier companies and the sense of innovation that will act as the driving force for a more diverse and prosperous economy," Governor Blagojevich said.

Project Lead The Way (PLTW) is a nationally recognized program that builds public-private partnerships between schools, colleges and universities, and the private sector to increase the quantity and quality of engineers and engineering technologists. The PLTW curriculum is a four-year, flexible sequence of pre-engineering courses that, when combined with college preparatory mathematics and science courses in high school, introduces students to the scope, rigor, and discipline of engineering and engineering technology prior to entering college. The specific courses are Introduction to Engineering Design, Digital Electronics, Computer Integrated Manufacturing, Principles of Engineering, and Engineering Design and Development.

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The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) have worked together to provide school partnerships with start-up grants to purchase computers and equipment and provide additional funding support for teacher training. Illinois school partnerships participating in the Governor's initiative will send teachers to training in the summer of 2004 so they are ready to start their first courses this fall.

"I'm excited that the Governor is bringing the Project Lead The Way program to our schools. This curriculum will build on the traditional education base students are receiving while fostering early interest in science and engineering careers. This critical program will allow our young people to broaden the individual opportunities they can pursue tomorrow, which helps diversify the workforce and supports the economic future of this region," State Senator John Sullivan (D-Rushville) said.

"We are very excited about participating in the Project Lead The Way program through the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* initiative. This program will enhance many of our existing courses because it recognizes the importance of having both a solid academic background and strong technical skills as it prepares students for post-secondary education. The mission of the LaMoine Valley Educational System is 'to prepare students for the future through innovative programs and opportunities' and Project Lead The Way will help us do just that," said Joyce Taylor, LaMoine Valley Educational System's Director.

PLTW teachers undergo an intensive two-week training program each summer that prepares them to teach the specific courses they will be offering in the fall. Ongoing professional development for both teachers and counselors is also an important component of the program, and will be provided by the University of Illinois. In the coming weeks, ISBE, DCEO and the University of Illinois will form Project Lead The Way's State Leadership Team, a team comprised of a diverse group of professionals who will guide the continuing implementation of the program in Illinois. The Leadership Team will include representatives from institutions of higher education including Bradley University, Illinois State University, Western Illinois University, community colleges, business and industry, and professional organizations.

"Labor market data consistently shows us that the areas of engineering and technology will continue to offer a vast number of future career opportunities. The Project Lead The Way curriculum will provide students with valuable teamwork and problem solving skills, as well as technical and academic skills, which will prepare them to go on and capitalize on those opportunities. Through this creative program, and others like it in the "21st Century Jobs" Training Initiative, the Governor is successfully building a workforce development system to match the complex challenges of the 21st century economy," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The 45 specific projects that the Governor announced in January for the West Central region are designed to be flexible and effective. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

Interview will be available at www.state.il.us/iisradio/ori.htm

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