



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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OPPORTUNITY RETURNS GRANT WILL FUND ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY SKILLS TRAINING IN NORTH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOLS

SPRINGFIELD - Delivering on an *Opportunity Returns* pledge to help better prepare North Central Illinois high school students for careers in science and technology, Governor Blagojevich today announced that two North Central region learning centers will receive **\$80,000** to administer the dynamic, nationally recognized program known as Project Lead The Way.

The Bloomington Area Vocational Center and the Peoria Educational Region for Employment and Career Training (P.E.R.F.E.C.T.) will each receive a **\$40,000** grant to cover equipment, software and other start-up costs. P.E.R.F.E.C.T. will coordinate the program curriculum and promote it to 28 high schools in the Tri-county area of Peoria, Woodford, and Tazewell, while the actual instruction will be provided at Illinois Central College in East Peoria. The Bloomington Area Vocational Center, housed within Bloomington High School, will team up with the high school to teach Project Lead The Way courses to students from high schools across McLean County.

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.

“The new generation of businesses emerging in the North Central region require a new generation of workforce training programs to fully support them,” Governor Blagojevich said. “Project Lead The Way is a critical component of our “21st Century Jobs” Training Initiative because it provides a highly technical education that many of our students are missing, yet couldn’t be more critical to the vitality of this region’s future. By offering this nationally recognized program at the high school level, we are creating a world of opportunity for our young people to pursue, while strengthening the economic capacity of the entire region in the process.”

Project Lead The Way Inc. (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 \$40,000 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 are making their formal commitments and will send teachers to training in the summer of 2004 so they are ready to start their first courses in the fall.

Project Lead The Way administrators in Peoria and Bloomington lauded the Governor's announcement. "We are excited to offer the Project Lead The Way (PLTW) pre-engineering curriculum to students in the Peoria region. The implementation of this PLTW curriculum will benefit our community by providing a trained technical workforce. High-wage, high-skill jobs require high academic skills, as well as advanced technical training. This PLTW curriculum will help us meet these needs," said Carol Leach, Director of Peoria Educational Region for Employment and Career Training (P.E.R.F.E.C.T.).

"For Bloomington High School, this will be an opportunity for our students and staff to continue to be involved in project-based instruction where core curriculum standards can be applied to help students prepare for exciting careers in science and technology," Bloomington High School Principal Cindy Helmers said.

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, community colleges, business and industry, and professional organizations.

"The North Central region is becoming a hotbed for some of the most advanced and innovative research taking place throughout the state and across the country. As more young businesses utilizing this research and technology grow and prosper, they'll need to draw from a workforce that is highly-skilled in engineering and technology principles. Project Lead The Way is engaging young minds in these disciplines, giving them the interest and the ability to go and pursue higher degree programs, and, ultimately, contribute to a thriving regional workforce," 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 for the North Central region is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The more than 40 specific projects that the Governor announced in December for the North 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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