



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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OPPORTUNITY RETURNS GRANT WILL FUND ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY SKILLS TRAINING IN EAST CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

SPRINGFIELD - To help better prepare East Central Illinois high school students for careers in science and technology, Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced that Danville High School Career Academy has been chosen as the introductory school in the region to implement the dynamic, nationally recognized program known as Project Lead The Way. This grant will be a part of his *Opportunity Returns* program for East Central Illinois – the Governor’s pro-active, comprehensive plan that will be unveiled shortly to promote economic growth and create more jobs throughout the region.

Danville High School will receive a **\$40,000** grant to cover equipment, software and other start-up costs associated with teaching the Project Lead The Way curriculum. The high school will select twenty students from a pool of applicants in the freshman and sophomore classes who show a strong interest in engineering and have demonstrated a proven record of academic achievement and leadership. Project Lead The Way will build upon the success of Danville High School’s MERIT (Manufacturing Engineering Robotics and Industry Technology) Academy, a technical track education designed with the help of local business and economic development leaders that gives students a hands-on orientation in technology, manufacturing, and engineering principles through a combination of customized course work and out of classroom experience.

“The manufacturing industry is changing in the East Central region and throughout the country today. To compete in the global marketplace tomorrow, our workforce will need a diverse set of technical skills, as well as problem solving skills, that will enable them to adapt and respond to ever-changing technologies and industrial innovation. Project Lead The Way is a great teaching model to employ at Danville High School because it will build upon the tremendous technical education base these students are already receiving through the MERIT Academy, sharpen their problem solving skills and prepare them to go on to advanced education in the field and, ultimately, form the backbone of a dynamic new workforce,” Governor Blagojevich said.

“Project Lead The Way is a terrific program that has proven to be a great success nationally and will really be an ideal fit at Danville High School. This program is arming students with the set of skills that will prepare them for leadership positions in a field that remains critical to the economic well-being of our region: manufacturing. By engaging our young people in a rigorous, hands on, technical academic program, Project Lead The Way is opening their minds to the endless number of rewarding career opportunities that await them down the road,” State Rep. Bill Black (R) of Danville said.

(more)

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.

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 grants to purchase computers and equipment and provide additional funding support for teacher training. Illinois school partnerships will send teachers to training in the summer of 2004 so they are ready to start their first courses this fall.

"We are excited to be able to offer a pre-engineering program of this kind. This is truly a compliment to our business partners and the community to be selected for Project Lead The Way. It is a perfect fit for Danville High School, as much work has been done through Vermilion Advantage with the Danville Area Manufacturing Cluster to better prepare students for careers in manufacturing and engineering. Our students will benefit greatly as they prepare to enter the challenging curriculum of engineering," said Danville High School Principal Mark Denman.

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.

"The Governor's workforce development programs for the 21st century economy are designed with an eye toward giving our emerging workforce the comprehensive set of tools they will need to qualify for jobs in the industries and professions growing and prospering in their area, so a host of career opportunities will continually be available to them. The Project Lead The Way program takes a pro-active approach to finding well-paying jobs for tomorrow's workforce by providing high school students with an excellent education in engineering and technology principles; the very skills that will continue to be most in demand by next-generation manufacturing companies that will act as a great engine of growth for the regional economy," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

The *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 with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. *Opportunity Returns* contains tangible actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business.

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

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