STEM Pathways Evaluation: Interviews with Minneapolis Public Schools Leaders

Executive Summary

STEM Pathways aims to increase youths’ long-term interest, learning and achievement in STEM through a deliberate and interconnected system of STEM learning opportunities. STEM Pathways is a partnership of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), The Bakken, The Bell Museum of Natural History, Minnesota Zoo, STARBASE Minnesota, and The Works that tests a model for collaboration that could be expanded and replicated across more grade levels, schools, organizations, and communities. STEM Pathways serves fourth- and fifth-grade students at six elementary schools in MPS. This report summarizes findings from interviews with MPS leaders (district staff and school principals) involved with STEM Pathways and/or who work closely with STEM education in the district.

Key findings

MPS leaders believe that STEM Pathways:

- Provides students with good experiences in science and math
- Expands student access to STEM learning activities and promotes career exploration
- Increases ability within schools to integrate science and literacy requirements
- Provides modeling for teachers, inspires them, and increases their interest in STEM topics—giving them new ideas for ways to incorporate STEM education into their classroom
- Connects and aligns informal education opportunities to state standards and MPS learning targets
- Increases resources available to schools and the district and helps them use these resources more strategically
Successes of STEM Pathways include:

- **Strengthened relationships** between the MPS district, including individual Pathways schools, and STEM Pathways partner organizations resulting in better alignment of programming

- **Growing enthusiasm and engagement** in STEM learning from students as a result of STEM Pathways activities

MPS leaders identified challenges related to STEM Pathways including:

- **Finding funding for schools to participate**, particularly funding for the cost of buses and site visits

- **Lack of consistent communication**—communication between teachers and informal education sites prior to the field trip visits varied for each partner organization

- **A lack of alignment with the district’s goal related to serving all students** because it only provides the experience for fourth- and fifth-graders at a fraction of Minneapolis Public Schools

To improve STEM Pathways, MPS leaders recommended:

- **Securing funding** for buses for STEM Pathways schools

- **Involving teachers** in a kick-off meeting at the beginning of the year

- Giving teachers the **opportunity to give feedback** on their experiences with the partner organizations

- **Providing professional development opportunities** for the teachers involved in STEM Pathways

A separate full report presents detailed findings from the interviews with MPS leaders involved with STEM Pathways and/or who work closely with STEM education in the district.