Project-driven program helps freshmen at Brookland-Cayce High School find their voices

December 17, 2014  By Rachel Ham

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Lexington School District Two jumped into the TransformSC movement this year with its own i2Tech program, which is driven by 1-to-1 technology for students, but it also teaches them how to be effective communicators and collaborators.

Brookland-Cayce High School is home to i2Tech, and several of the 85 freshmen in the program excitedly showcased their projects Tuesday to members of the business community during an open house. Instead of sitting in a traditional classroom taking notes, the students have been working to solve a wild boar problem, researching diabetes, creating a fair trade vendor fair and redesigning Columbia after a fictional asteroid strike.

"It's a way to produce students who are college and career ready," said Bonnie Moskos, director of i2Tech at Brookland-Cayce.

Students still are learning the core subjects of biology, algebra, English and more along with engineering through the group projects. Their communication and other soft skills are developed, too, as they develop project timelines, discuss ideas and coordinate so every person pulls his or her own weight. Students even draft their own group contracts to lay out consequences if a member does not complete work on time.

"We try to tie everything to real life," Moskos said. "It makes the learning transfer."

"It's learning in a different way," said student Owen Sease.

Educators said the freshmen involved in i2Tech were far more articulate than most others their age, and attributed that to working in small groups and having to give oral presentations in each class on a regular basis. Student Chasity Brinson said the presentations helped her build better communication skills.

"This is a really good learning start for us in high school," she said.

Tucker Poston, Andy Garcia and Miranda Brown will have the chance to present their project on South Carolina's wild boar population at the SC AgriBiz and Farm Expo next month.

Poston said the trio started with the knowledge that boars are destroying crops and leading farmers to raise their prices. Consumers are having to pay more at the supermarket as a result.

The group researched different solutions like transporting the boars to another region and hunting them, and the students worked out the pros and cons of every angle.

Their comprehensive work earned them the opportunity to share their findings with agriculture leaders from across the state.

Poston said he enjoyed learning in a much different classroom environment and that i2Tech incorporates technology in the place of textbooks, pen and paper.

"We can work at our own pace instead of having to go too fast through material," he said.

"I like i2Tech because it's mostly hands-on … and I like learning with (technology)," Brinson said.

"We got a lot (of work) done in class."

Across the room during Tuesday’s open house, Brinson and Dana Garno displayed their Algebra I project on Olympic swimming times. They hypothesized if female swimmers’ times would ever beat the men’s times and used a formula to calculate the possibilities. The outcome wasn’t good for the female swimmers, but the students liked the process of laying out their results in a newsletter, which combined English language arts, design and math skills.

Students who continue their high school education through i2Tech will earn two college engineering credits when they graduate. Moskos already is planning for the next round of approximately 100 students.
“Anyone can apply … We have honor students, special needs students …” she said.

Poston also encouraged rising freshmen to give i2Tech a try and credited the teachers for his success.

“They push us to get better and do better … they’re preparing us for our jobs,” he said.

The i2Tech program is in need of community and business partners like city planners from Columbia who helped judge the city center redesign project. Those interested can contact Moskos at bmoskos@lex2.org or (803) 791-5000 for more details.

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