OUR APPROACH

According to the Department of Education, only a quarter of Kent County 7th graders are proficient in science, while just less than 40% of 8th graders are proficient in math. At the same time, middle schoolers are less likely than very young children or high school students to be prioritized in program funding. That’s why we invest in programs to help middle schoolers improve their understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Mastering STEM subjects is essential not only for each student as they move toward graduation, but for growing the workforce needed for a vibrant local economy.

THE PEOPLE

In the last year, Heart of West Michigan United Way’s youth education programs served 2,417 students in Kent County. In programs ranging from in-school tutoring to after-school enrichment to hands-on exploration in a summer camp setting, students receive instruction tailored to their needs and cultural backgrounds. And in recognition of the gap in STEM workforce participation among women and minorities, we support programs that are inclusive of girls and students of color. 96% of participating students reported increased confidence in STEM subjects and 76% improved their grades. Our programs touch teachers too. In the last year, United Way funding equipped 55 teachers and staff with the tools needed to kindle a love of STEM in their students.

WHAT’S WORKING?

Short-Term Interventions

Hope Network’s Math Corps places AmeriCorps members in Kentwood schools where they tutor struggling students. Through personalized weekly sessions, Math Corps tutors help students develop confidence and achieve math proficiency.

Long-Term Solutions

By training and equipping education providers the ELO Network and KISD are building a foundation for richer and more effective science, math, and art education for the whole community.

WHAT IF WE COULD DO MORE?

Education is the key to personal and community success. But how do we get there? With additional funding, we could:

- Connect providers with no-cost or low-cost methods for including STEM in after-school programs
- Offer STEAM Ahead training and educational resources to more after-school providers
- Bring a mobile Design Thinking lab to low-income school districts

hwmuw.org
Joseph’s story

Joseph and his family arrived in Grand Rapids from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018. As the school year approached, he began attending the Refugee Education Center’s summer literacy program. Joseph quickly became a leader among his peers, helping others, asking questions, and showing up every day ready to learn despite the trauma he carried. His favorite part of the program was taking field trips to places like John Ball Zoo, Blandford Nature Center, and the Children’s Museum.

While his English skills were relatively strong, Joseph had a lot of catching up to do in math, science, and social studies, so the Refugee Education Center continued to support him as he entered Burton Middle School. Every week, he met with Trace, a volunteer tutor, and attended an after-school program to work on his math and science assignments.

This December, Joseph earned the Refugee Education Center Friendship Award for his leadership skills in working with others and being inclusive in his relationships. Joseph’s dream is to become a doctor, and he’s eager to improve his science grade so that he can achieve his goal.

What we can do when we work together

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Network

The ELO Network is collaboration in action. Part of the City of Grand Rapids’ Our Community’s Children initiative, the ELO Network partners with more than 50 organizations to establish high standards in science, technology, engineering, art, and math and to make sure educators have the resources to help students attain them. ELO’s partner organizations include many other United Way-funded agencies: WMCAT, UCOM, the Refugee Education Center, Camp Blodgett, Ingenium, Jubilee Jobs, and Urban League of West Michigan. With funding from United Way, support from the City of Grand Rapids, and the participation of local agencies, the ELO Network is paving the way for a brighter future for Kent County students.

Youth Education Agency Partners

Camp Blodgett
STEM Academy & STEM Club: $99,000
Four-week overnight summer camp teaching STEM concepts in a natural setting. Weekly after-school STEM programs for 5th-8th graders.

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Network (City of Grand Rapids)
STEAM Ahead: $95,000
Training after-school staff to teach literacy, design skills, and innovative thinking in chemistry, engineering, and environmental science.

Hope Network
MathCorps: $150,000
Personalized tutoring provided by AmeriCorps members to help 4-8th-grade students achieve math proficiency.

Kent Intermediate School District
Teachers in Industry: Entrepreneurship Design Challenge: $60,000
Equipping teachers with skills needed to lead students in real-world engineering design projects.

The Refugee Education Center
Project Faulu: $60,000
In-school and after-school social and emotional support, language coaching, and math and science tutoring for refugee and immigrant students.