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September 9, 2014

Media Contact:

Todd Hutchins, (614) 224-8114 or thutchins@paulwerth.com

Central Ohio Districts Get “Fab” Start to School Year

Laser cutters, 3-D printers and robots at center of education, innovation and collaboration

PICKERINGTON, Ohio – Back to school is a bit different this year for several districts throughout central Ohio as they introduce laser cutters, 3-D printing and new technology to students through mobile fab labs. For the first time, students from several local school districts will be working “on wheels” using sophisticated machines, building robots and creating designs and programs in the new MIT Mobile Fab Labs as part of the new *Innovation Generation* education and workforce initiative.

These mobile units offer the latest in technology and programming to students, right at their local schools. The Fab Labs expose students to state-of-the-art equipment, giving them a chance to experience real work situations in advanced manufacturing and robotics.

“These hands-on labs show the kind of ambitious innovation we are seeing in Ohio schools because of the Straight A Fund, Gov. Kasich’s \$250 million investment in education,” said Richard A. Ross, state superintendent of Public Instruction. “This project proves how creative our districts can be in transforming teaching and connecting our students to the workforce, so they are truly prepared for success after high school.”

School districts participating in the advanced manufacturing/robotics curriculum include Columbus City Schools, Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, Grandview Heights City Schools, Marysville Exempted Village Schools, New Albany-Plain Local Schools, Pickerington Local Schools, Reynoldsburg City Schools, Westerville City Schools and Upper Arlington City Schools.

“We are thrilled to offer hands on experiences to our students, engaging them in different ways and getting them excited about engineering, robotics and advanced manufacturing,” said Valerie Browning-Thompson, Pickerington’s superintendent. “The Fab Labs help them connect the dots between what they learn here and how that connects to the world of work. It provides training on state-of-the-art equipment while students learn transferrable skills and technical knowledge as they create industry-related products that will help them beyond high school.”

Scot McLemore, technical development manager at Honda North America, Inc., believes Innovation Generation – and the work students will do in the Fab Labs – is the type of initiative the manufacturing industry in central Ohio sorely needs.

“We are looking for team members who have strong technical, critical thinking and the soft skills that help our business grow and succeed,” said McLemore. “The training these students will gain through the Fab Lab exposes them to the types of tools and resources that will give them a head start in careers at Honda, and many other central Ohio companies. We are proud to be part of Innovation Generation.”

Superintendent Browning-Thompson says while the mobile units are part of the curriculum, she also sees them as tools to build awareness about career options and the opportunities available to students after high school. The units will be used to introduce middle school students to engineering, robotics and advanced manufacturing careers, and the community and business partners will be able to experience the mobile units and collaborate with districts on projects.

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“When you see these big mobile units at your schools or in your community, know that your central Ohio districts are engaging students in unique ways that prepare them for tomorrow’s careers,” said Browning-Thompson. “School is not like it used to be, and we are thrilled about what that means for our students.”

Innovation Generation was financed by a \$14.4 million grant from the Ohio Straight A Fund, established last year by the Ohio General Assembly at the urging of Gov. John Kasich. Statewide, the fund made \$250 million available for innovation in classrooms across Ohio.

Innovation Generation extends to 15 central Ohio school districts and focuses on long-term pathways between schools and careers in advanced manufacturing/robotics, business logistics, health care and information technology. This unprecedented collaboration allows students to earn the credentials needed to fill some of central Ohio’s fastest-growing jobs while getting a significant head start toward earning college degrees while still in high school.

Innovation Generation is supported by Columbus State Community College, the Educational Services Center of Central Ohio, Battelle for Kids, Columbus 2020 and a host of community and business partners throughout Ohio to expand postsecondary options for students and close workforce talent gaps that exist across the region in key industry sectors.

About Innovation Generation

Innovation Generation is affiliated with the national Pathways to Prosperity Network, supported by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Jobs for the Future. It consists of six sustainable high-impact projects that establish career pathways into four of the region’s most vital industry sectors: advanced manufacturing/robotics, business logistics, health care and information technology. Working together, k-12, higher education and businesses will help students earn the credentials needed to fill some of central Ohio’s fastest-growing jobs and expand their postsecondary options. For more information, visit InnovationGenerationOhio.com.

Innovation Generation participating districts include:

- Canal Winchester Local Schools
- Columbus City Schools
- Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools
- Grandview Heights City Schools
- Hilliard City Schools
- Licking Heights Local Schools
- Marysville Exempted Village Schools
- New Albany-Plain Local Schools
- Olentangy Local School District
- Pickerington Local School District
- Reynoldsburg City Schools
- South-Western City Schools
- Upper Arlington City Schools
- Westerville City School District
- Whitehall City Schools

Additionally, Eastland-Fairfield, Tolles and Ohio Hi-Point career centers are part of the collaboration.

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