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Peoria School District program helps students prepare for high-tech jobs

by Jay Crandall

Video report by Fields Moseley

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PEORIA, Ariz. -- Parents, if you are looking to guide your children to a brighter future, the answer is STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math courses.

And in one school district, it is already paying off for students like Jesse Caige Hernandez,

“You are going to be somebody's solution, somebody's problem solver,” he said.

Hernandez may only be a high school senior, but he already has his sights set on helping us navigate a more digital world.

"I mean, technology is great," he said. "It is a great aspect of our everyday life, but I mean, for my kids, their kids, technology is going to be everywhere."

But for Hernandez to build that future, he needs training right now, which is why the Peoria Unified School District just launched the **MET Professional Academy**.

"The MET Professional Academy is an entrepreneurial approach to education that brings together different resources for the students who want to pursue careers in medical, engineering and technology," explained Adriana Parsons with PUSD.

Parsons says the idea is to give these students not only the knowledge to succeed, but the actual experience.

"We want our students to know that they are coming to a professional immersion, meaning they will be prepared to go onto job shadows, internships, mentors with a business professional," she said. "It is another thing to come into this classroom, into our lab, and put things together, build our own Internet service, figure out how and why they work."

Parsons says the district knows technology, engineering and medical jobs are the jobs of the future, which is why it developed the academy. It is open to all district juniors and seniors through an application process.

"It is important for us to create an economic vitality by preparing our students to get the jobs here in our state and developing those high-demand industries here within Arizona," she said.

That's is exactly why Hernandez says he joined this program.

"It's going to be a foot in the door, especially with business partnerships," he said.

Also, students in the academy are already earning college credit.

"Our partnership with Estrella Mountain Community College is a dual-enrollment program, and we have students that are earning seven community college credits just this semester at a discounted price," Parsons said.

It's a huge boon for Hernandez: "I mean, tuition is a monster, and student loans are going to stay with you for the rest of your life. So, the college credits, that is really a great benefit."

The entire program designed to gives students a high-speed connection to success.

"I definitely think you are going to need to usher in a new wave of IT professionals, and I think that MET, as a start, is a great way to begin all of that," Hernandez said.

Again, the program is open to juniors and seniors through an application process. Students will get the chance to work with representatives from high-tech companies as well.