

IDAHO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

i-STEM 2026 Impact Stories

Region 1 - Zachary Russell

“Through my i-STEM learning with DataBots, I plan to bring hands-on technology and coding experiences into my classroom to help students see how STEM connects to real-world careers. I will use the DataBots lessons, robotics tools, and instructional strategies to give students opportunities to build, program, troubleshoot, and work collaboratively. These activities will help students develop problem-solving, computational thinking, communication, and persistence skills that are valuable in today’s workforce. I also want to use DataBots to increase students’ awareness of STEM career pathways by connecting classroom projects to careers involving robotics, engineering, computer science, automation, and technology. Ultimately, I hope my students leave these experiences with greater confidence in their ability to use technology creatively and with a clearer understanding of how STEM learning can translate into future education and career opportunities in Idaho.”

Region 2 - Cheyenne Gregg

“ I will be implementing 3D printing in my gifted/talented 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classes. My students will get experience with 3d modeling, troubleshooting the printer and errors in printing, 3d printing models and tools that are designed by the students and tangible to take home.

I also was provided with so many new math resources and supported practice with those websites (some AI integrated even), as well as practice from a learners perspective on math protocols and some really great ones I know I can implement in my own GT classroom.

A new avenue of thinking that I gained from this strand was the idea that I can 3D print my own math manipulatives that are relevant to the content I cover with my GT kids. Those are not necessarily things that I have to purchase from another company, I can design and print exactly what I need.

Another concept that I gained confidence with by taking this strand was more strategies for math discussions. The value of communicating through elaborate or playful math problems. Communicating teacher-student and student-student. There is so much value in the discussion around the math problem that I feel I will be better equipped to handle because of this strand.”





Region 3 - Jessica Johnson

“Through i-STEM, I gained hands-on experience and resources that I plan to directly implement in my 7th–9th grade technology, engineering, and career exploration classes. One of my biggest takeaways was learning how to use tools such as Arduino microcontrollers and engineering-based problem solving activities to help students move beyond simply using technology and begin understanding how technology is designed, built, and applied in real-world industries. Students will have opportunities to build circuits, program devices, troubleshoot designs, and engage in collaborative problem-solving activities that mirror authentic STEM and manufacturing careers. This learning will also allow me to better connect classroom experiences to Idaho’s in-demand industries, particularly careers in semiconductor manufacturing, engineering, advanced technology, and skilled technical fields such as those represented by companies like Micron Technology. My goal is to help students build confidence in problem solving, increase awareness of future career pathways including technical certifications and apprenticeships, and help students begin seeing themselves as future innovators, engineers, and creators rather than simply consumers of technology.”

Region 3 - Maddy VanLom

“As a special education paraprofessional working with students in grades K–5, I plan to use the DataBots activities I learned through i-STEM to create engaging, hands-on STEM experiences that are accessible to students with a wide range of learning needs. One activity I would like to implement involves using DataBots to help students learn about plant growth. Students will observe plants, collect data on factors such as temperature and light, and use the information to make predictions and answer questions. This will give students the opportunity to practice science, technology, and math skills in a meaningful way while also building problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

I also hope to use these activities to introduce students to STEM-related careers that involve data collection, technology, agriculture, and environmental science. By participating in real-world investigations, students can begin to see themselves as scientists and engineers. My goal is to increase student confidence, engagement, collaboration, and career awareness while helping them develop skills that will support future educational and workforce opportunities.”





Region 4 - Tom Schmitt

“Next school year, I plan to implement an interactive robotics and automation unit using the specialized kits and STEM tools provided during the i-STEM workshop. This program will directly impact my eighth-grade science classes, introducing them to fundamental engineering and coding concepts. Through hands-on building and debugging, students will explore real-world problem-solving while developing critical thinking and collaboration skills. I will explicitly connect these classroom activities to Idaho’s in-demand careers by inviting local manufacturing and tech professionals to speak with the class. Ultimately, this experience will strengthen my students' STEM identities, boost their confidence, and help them understand clear pathways toward future technical certifications and engineering degrees.”

Region 5 - Dixie Kaufman

“Students will learn both 3D and 2D shapes with the tools I received from I-STEM. They will be able to touch, and manipulate the magnet tiles to have a engineer thought process in critical thinking. Students will gain exposure to careers like architecture through building, failing, and coming up with new ideast to support the visions they are trying to create. This will help students be able to better understand future pathways in apprenticeships, workforce opportunities by understanding and being knowledgeable through the basic shapes and how to use them in things like construction, engineering, architecture, and math. The learning resources I will use are the picasso magnet tile kits I received to help students get a good foundation mathmatically as well and kinisthetically in building, thinking, reasoning, and through trial and error. Students will have an understanding of how critical failure is through learning what works and does not work. Students will understand trying again in a different approach you will get a different outcome giving them the opportunity to learn and grow from failing in attempts. This will increase student confidence because the struggle will access their critical thinking and encourage them to discover new ways of thinking, and learning how to problem solve. This may encourage students to go into a variety of careers or opportunities by learning the scientific process. This may encourage students to go into hands on experiences and learn to enjoy the opportunities to try again. Besides building, math, and shapes these tiles can fullfill as a STEM project, they can be used in other aspects of education as a manipulative or tool in keeping learning engaging and fun.”





Region 5 - Luz Mendez

“ Based on what we worked on and learned, I am ready to improve my lessons by incorporating more hands-on and outdoor activities involving measuring and estimating. I also gained many movement-based activities that will get students actively engaged and moving around the classroom, making lessons more interactive and enjoyable. The strategies we learned to increase student focus and engagement during math instruction will be a significant benefit to my classroom. I also learned new ways to improve instruction with word problems, which are often challenging for students because they require strong reading and comprehension skills. Throughout the training, we participated in collaborative activities and worked together with partners, which I can implement in my classroom to help students develop teamwork and communication skills.

Career and Workforce Connections: Students will be exposed to measurement conversions and real-world applications of math, which connect to what we observed during our field trip to the Culinary Arts Building. These skills are used in many careers and workforce settings, including culinary arts, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and engineering. Since farming and construction are major industries in our community, students will be able to see how math skills apply to local career opportunities.

Pathway Development: This learning will help students understand how mathematics is used in a variety of future pathways, including technical careers, apprenticeships, trade programs, college programs, and workforce opportunities. By connecting classroom learning to real-world situations, students can begin to see the relevance of math in future careers and everyday life.

Tools and Resources: I plan to use the resources provided during the training, including games, books, whiteboards, and hands-on activities, to make learning more engaging and accessible for all students. The whiteboards, in particular, will allow students who are developing English language skills to demonstrate their thinking through drawings, diagrams, numbers, and written responses. These tools will support student participation and understanding while creating a more inclusive learning environment.

Student Outcomes: These strategies will help increase student engagement, confidence, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Students will have more opportunities to actively participate in lessons, work with peers, and make connections between math concepts and real-world careers. This approach will also support the development of a positive STEM identity and help prepare students for future educational and workforce opportunities.”





Region 6 - Amber Titus

“At Rigby High School, I plan to implement a geometry framework that begins with engaging, non-math elements—such as hands-on logic puzzles and collaborative design challenges—to build crucial student buy-in from day one. This will directly impact my high school special education students, who often face heavy math anxiety and benefit the most from tactile, structured learning. Through this approach, I want my students to gain a major boost in confidence, shifting away from "I can't do math" to developing a strong STEM identity as capable problem-solvers. By working through these hands-on tasks and interactive i-STEM review strategies, they will naturally build essential workforce skills like communication, critical thinking, and spatial reasoning. My goal is to connect our classroom geometry directly to real-world applications, helping them see clear pathways to Idaho’s in-demand technical careers while gaining the future readiness skills they need to succeed.

