

MiSTEM Advisory Council

# 2024 Annual Report

“The MiSTEM Network is leading efforts to make sure Michigan students have the critical exposure, knowledge and tools needed to embark on an educational path to success and excel in growing high-tech career industries. The innovative support and initiatives offered through MiSTEM are not only nurturing talent for the jobs on the horizon but also ensuring that our state remains the best place to live, work and play for generations to come.”

– **Susan Corbin, Director of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity**

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# Letter From the Advisory Council Chair

The MiSTEM Network has been hard at work this year, focused on an overarching goal that is critical to Michigan's future prosperity and the preparedness of our children to face an increasingly dynamic world: the creation of a robust STEM culture in Michigan. To that end, the Network was successful in recruiting a growing number of community partners to join educators to provide students with high-quality STEM experiences that increase critical skills while addressing real-life needs.

Building this STEM culture depends on providing authentic learning experiences for children that go beyond the walls of the classroom. Though not every child will go into a STEM field, each one can benefit from the authentic experiences that STEM 3P (place-, project- and problem-based) learning provides. Business and nonprofit partners help expose students to career possibilities they otherwise might not consider while increasing their critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. As Chair of the MiSTEM Advisory Council and Director of the Office of Sixty by 30, I believe the love of learning and critical soft skills such as motivation develop when students see how their schoolwork is relevant to wrestling with real issues and solving real problems.

While Michigan's business community continues to grow jobs in fields like the semiconductor industry, smart technology, electric vehicles, global positioning systems and more, MiSTEM and our local school districts have increased collaborations that build student interest and talent to be ready for these and other high-tech careers of the future.

Today we celebrate the role we all play in growing Michigan's STEM culture. We also must take bold, aggressive action to help our educational system truly transform. Our collective efforts must be expanded and accelerated now if we are to compete in the global STEM marketplace.

We hope you are inspired by the MiSTEM Network's 2023 successes – and we invite you to join us in our efforts to put Michigan on a path toward economic prosperity and growth for generations to come.

**Sarah Szurpicki**

Director of the Office of Sixty by 30

# Advisory Council Members

The MiSTEM Advisory Council is charged with setting a strategic vision for STEM in Michigan and moving that vision to action through the MiSTEM Network. The Michigan Legislature relies on this Council to make recommendations to advance STEM education in Michigan.

- Sarah Szurpicki, Chair
- Delsa Chapman, Ed.D.
- Gail S. Alpert, West Bloomfield
- Adam F. Zemke, Vice Chair, Ann Arbor
- Heidi Maltby-Skodack, Traverse City
- Lee Graham, Holly
- Kathleen Owsley, Plymouth
- Sen. Dayna Polehanki
- Sen. Jonathan Lindsey
- Wendy A. Winston, Grand Rapids
- Christian A. Velasquez, Midland
- Dr. Rema Reynolds Vassar, Detroit
- David Rowe, Dollar Bay
- Rep. Jaime Churches
- Rep. Tom Kunse

The MiSTEM Advisory Council was created in 2015 under MCL 388.1699s and organized under the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity per Executive Order No. 2019-13. The Council is made up of 11 voting members serving at the pleasure of the governor and four ex-officio legislators appointed from the House of Representatives and Senate.

## Specifically, the Council is tasked with the following:

- Recommend and advance a statewide strategy for delivering STEM education opportunities to K-12 students in Michigan.
- Strengthen the STEM ecosystem and address inequities through grants that meet the objective criteria set forth in legislation.
- Activate and support the MiSTEM Network to improve and promote innovation and collaboration in STEM education.



# MiSTEM Network Mission and Vision

**Our Vision:** Michigan is home to a generation of innovators who create more inclusive and prosperous businesses and communities.

**Our Mission:** Be the catalyst for equitable access and engagement in authentic STEM experiences in every community in Michigan.

- Established by the MiSTEM Advisory Council, the MiSTEM Network was created to make STEM learning more accessible across the state, bringing people and practice together to implement innovative learning experiences beyond the physical classroom.
- Through 16 regional hubs across Michigan, the Network unites education, business and community partners to create pathways for all students to consider and pursue high-wage, high-demand careers.
- Together, the MiSTEM Advisory Council and MiSTEM Network have set forth a guiding mission and vision, clearly defining our unique place in the Michigan STEM ecosystem and our collaborative purpose.



# MiSTEM Pillars



## **Create a Culture of STEM**

This culture inspires, informs and mobilizes all community members toward economic and educational success.



## **Empower STEM Educators**

Educators need research-based professional learning, resources and networks of support to provide robust STEM learning experiences for students.



## **Integrate Business and Education**

Bring together STEM-savvy leaders to co-design real-world learning experiences.



## **Ensure High-Quality STEM Experiences**

Youth develop STEM skills and learn academic concepts through project-, problem- and place-based experiences.

# Highlights

The following MiSTEM programs represent diverse approaches to advancing the statewide STEM 3P strategy. The MiSTEM State Strategy aims to create and sustain interconnected STEM ecosystems at the state, regional and local levels that empower STEM educators and integrate partnerships with stakeholders — such as business and education — and the community. The goal is to enable accessible, high-quality and integrated 3P learning experiences for all Michiganders, resulting in positive STEM self-identity and workforce readiness. Of the programs represented below, some are curriculum-level interventions empowering teachers to provide experiential learning to their students in or out of the classroom. Others are systems-level interventions that help break down barriers to STEM learning in communities. As each highlight will illustrate, 3P is a response to the needs of the geographic region and the communities being served.

The MiSTEM Network is a community of partners and cross-regional collaborations that exchange ideas and resources to foster innovation and collective growth. As each of the highlights will show, these partnerships and collaborations are integral to the success of these interventions and their sustainability in the long term.



# Establishing Community Partnerships

STEM learning is not limited to the classroom. A STEM ecosystem includes all formal and informal learning opportunities available to young people in school, after-school and summer programs; science centers and museums; at home; and in many other environments. The following program highlights are compelling examples of how community partnerships enhance learning experiences and the integral role that educators play.

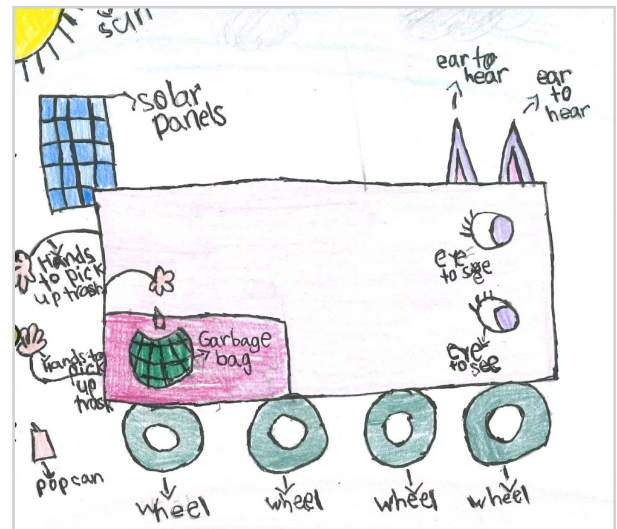
## Little Inventors Get Early Exposure to Innovation and Maker Partners

Since 2021, thousands of fourth graders in Macomb County have embarked on the journey of becoming Little Inventors. This highlight is a testament to the impact of strategic partnerships between businesses and PK-8 in delivering high-quality 3P education that empowers teachers and inspires students.

The Little Inventors program, which originated in the United Kingdom, was launched in Michigan as a student challenge by Macomb Intermediate School District in partnership with MiSTEM Network Region 4. Students create inventions based on an annual theme and the participating teachers submit five inventions each for review and moderation at [misd.littleinventors.org](https://misd.littleinventors.org).

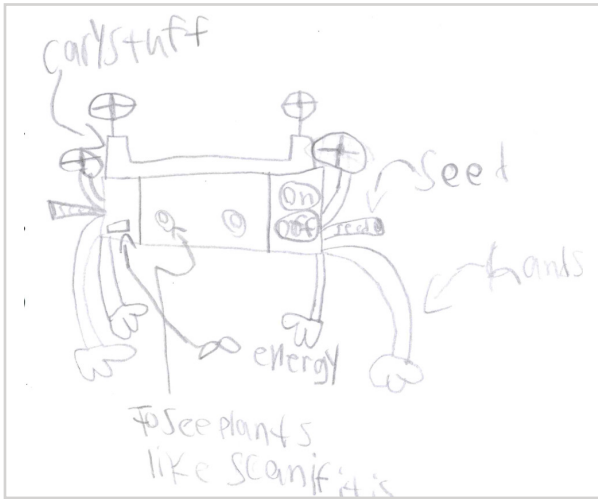
The involvement of local businesses and community partners, known as Makers, has been crucial in bringing selected inventions to life. These partners, ranging from advanced manufacturers to nonprofits and design colleges, evaluate inventions based on innovation, detail, feasibility and fun.

The program began with just two in-kind partners but has grown to include 10 in 2024, showcasing the initiative's successful expansion. This partnership has been instrumental in scaling up the program, enabling 10th graders to collaborate with elementary school inventors.



**Picker Upper Monster**  
Charlotte, Age 10, St. Clair Shores

***“The program provides early exposure to innovation through authentic challenges and validate student’s ideas,”*** according to MiSTEM Region 4 Director Mark Muzzin.



**The Plant Drone Seeder**  
Genuwine, Age 9, Warren



**Tall House**  
Lilly, Age 9, Washington Township

The Makers – currently companies and College of Creative Studies students – meet with the inventor they are matched with to bring their idea to reality in an appropriate format, treating the student as their client.

Steve Elliott, creative design director at PTI Engineered Plastics, who has been involved since the beginning, says each of the four inventions the company has made has been “pretty unique and pretty fun.” He said the program exposes students to industries as a possible career choice early in their education.

Marisa Bennett loved the program so much when she worked for one Maker partner that she pitched it to her new employer, HTI Cybernetics, where she serves as marketing manager. Not only did the company commit to creating an invention, but it also hosted the student’s entire class for a presentation and a tour of its robot cell, illustrating the strong connections being forged between businesses and PK-8 education.

Deborah Bloomhuff has had one of her student’s inventions brought to life in each of the three years she has participated.

***“There is so much creativity and problem-solving involved that it increases their self-confidence and allows them to exhibit scientific minds,”*** said the Masonic Heights Elementary School teacher from Lake Shore Public Schools. Her students work on this activity in class and then help Bloomhuff pick five inventions to submit. They have enthusiastically supported the students whose inventions have been showcased at an annual Meet the Makers recognition event.

This collaboration among high school students, elementary school inventors and local businesses not only nurtures creativity and innovation but also strengthens community ties, providing young learners with invaluable early exposure to STEM fields.

## Pilot Learning Series Provides Teachers With Tools to Form Community Partnerships

Successful execution of 3P education practices relies on community partnerships. Recognizing this, MiSTEM Region 6 partnered with the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative's Discovering PLACE hub and the Friends of the St. Clair River to create a virtual learning series to help educators forge these essential community partnerships to enhance their teaching.

The three sessions held in February and March focused on exploring different types of partnerships through regional case studies and diving into best practices for partnerships. During these sessions, 17 teachers brainstormed with facilitators and consultants from Genesee ISD and St. Clair County RESA about how and where they might integrate community partnerships in their teaching.

The series ended with a 90-minute session in which a group of community partners shared how they have engaged with educators and students through roundtable and small group discussions. **Melissa Kivel**, the education manager at the Friends of the St. Clair River, said her previous community partnership experiences made her want to work with MiSTEM Region 6 to both plan and execute the pilot professional learning series. Her partnership experiences have included working with middle school students to explore the challenge of protecting a St. Clair River tributary.

***"It has been fantastic watching learning come to life when we do use natural resources as classrooms," Kivel said. "It's all about using community as context. Plant that seed when they're young that the environment is worth protecting."***

The discussions with the teachers featured representatives from the Port Huron Museum, the National Weather Service and Michigan State University Extension. Survey data collected from participating teachers indicated increased knowledge of STEM careers, including where to send students and families to learn more about them. Teachers also reported greater confidence in their ability to increase student interest in STEM and support students who are struggling with STEM topics. One teacher commented on their takeaway from the series, "Community partnerships can serve as a way to make learning relevant and interesting for students."

Working with community partners can enhance the teaching of content standards, according to Region 6 Director Sarah Keenan-Lechel, Ph.D. "The participants were able to build community and support within the group, as well as plan so they can be intentional." This initiative underscores the vital role community partnerships play in enriching 3P education practices, creating meaningful and context-driven learning experiences for students.

# Community Impact

High-quality 3P learning experiences are student-led, allowing students to identify needs in their communities and collaborate with teachers and community partners to develop solutions. The success of these initiatives is closely tied to their sustainability, ensuring they continue to benefit communities long term. The following initiatives demonstrate how addressing community needs can lead to 3P learning experiences, systems change and intergenerational impact.

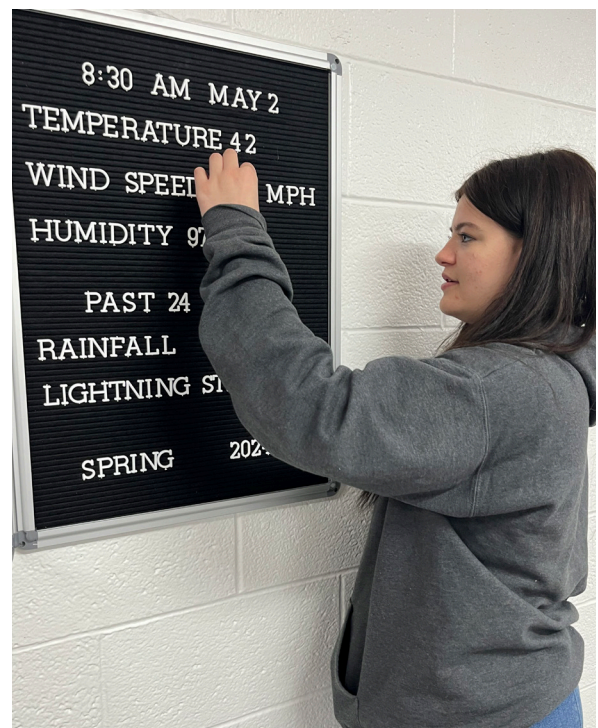
## Initiative Provides Seed Money for New U.P. School Projects

A collaborative effort between a middle school teacher and an intermediate school district instructional technologist has led to a transformative learning experience and a system-level intervention at Sault Middle School. Sault Middle School teacher John Twichel and Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District Instructional Technologist Barton St. Peter engaged their students to reengineer and update used desktop computers for the STEM program while also building esports gaming computers from scratch. This initiative not only provided the necessary technology but also expanded the esports program into an official club for middle and high school students.

Previously, the lack of high-performance computers was a barrier to STEM learning for Sault Middle School students. By building infrastructure to overcome the barrier, while engaging students in the intervention through experiential learning, this program has created a systems-level change at both the middle and high school levels. This innovative project is one of seven funded by MiSTEM Region 14's Seeds for STEM initiative in its first two years. The seed money, ranging from \$390 to \$4,200, has allowed 3P-aligned initiatives to start and grow.

***“The Seeds for STEM partnership has been a powerful catalyst for STEM innovation in our region,” said MiSTEM Region 14 Director Kevin St. Onge. “It allows teachers, students and their project partners to bring an innovative idea to fruition, ultimately allowing them to do something new.”***

The Chippewa County Community Foundation serves as a community partner and the fiduciary for any organization wishing to contribute funds to the effort. The application committee includes representatives from the foundation's board, the Eastern Upper Peninsula ISD and Lake Superior State University.



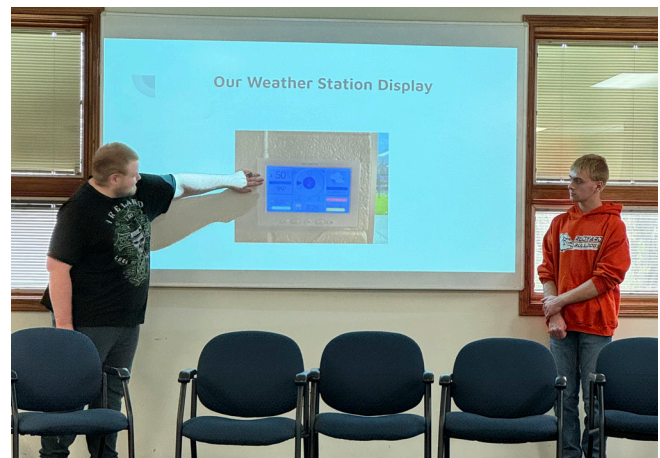
Seeds for STEM has funded other 3P programming in the region. For instance, digital business CTE students at Sault Area High School and Career Center are exploring visual storytelling and editing using digital cameras. Their teacher, Shynyn Aldridge, noted that students are excited to see their creativity and skills come together in captivating videos. ***"This grant has bridged the gap between classroom theory and real-world applications,"*** she said. In an effort to sustain this program, the digital business project team is reaching out to organizations and businesses to engage students in collaborative projects.

Pickford Elementary teacher April Brood also used Seeds for STEM funding to start a robotics program for upper elementary students. This quickly led to participation in robotics competitions with the Square One Network and FIRST Lego League. While providing engaging STEM learning for her students, the robotics project is also contributing to Pickford's larger plan for building out computer science programming systematically in their K-12 building.

In another system-level intervention funded by Seeds for STEM, Eastern Upper Peninsula ISD Learning Center

teacher Gwen Malaska installed a weather station. Students now gather and assess environmental data while growing fresh vegetables for themselves and their peers. In addition to addressing food sustainability and 3P learning, this has given students an outlet to share their knowledge with their entire school community. One student said, ***"It is cool because other people in the school look at the [weather] information we post in the hallway."***

These projects showcase how strategic funding and community partnerships can drive educational innovation and empower students with real-world skills and experiences and create systems-level change to sustain these impacts.



*"The Seeds for STEM partnership has been a powerful catalyst for STEM innovation in our region. The program provides support through the project design process and encourages partnerships between schools and community organizations. This approach has led to a braided funding model in which we have been able to increase educational partnerships with business and community partners while empowering teachers and students."*

***– MiSTEM Region 14 Director Kevin St. Onge***

## Wayne County Summer Camps Combine STEM and Literacy Learning

STEM Lit Lab pop-up summer camps are helping thousands of Wayne County students strengthen their reading, math and science skills before entering kindergarten and third grade. Over the past year, this initiative has achieved self-sufficiency, emerging as an outstanding model of sustainability.

MiSTEM Region 3 started the intervention in 2021 to prevent summer learning loss after COVID-19 protocols required online learning and to help students pass the state's third-grade reading tests. Each student receives a kit that includes materials for 12 science labs for them to use during camp and take home. The lessons incorporate reading, writing and discussion.

In fall 2023, 49.5% of kindergarten families reported having no prior early childhood program or preschool experience. Of participating parents, 76% said the six-week summer 2023 Kinder Lit Lab camp, which provided access to early literacy and early mathematics, prepared their children to start school in the fall.

***"I love that my child loves to learn more. And that the teachers love teaching my children. So, thank you!"*** one Kinder Lit Lab family shared.

The popularity and success of the program's first three years resulted in a self-sufficient funding model in which the program was no longer reliant on the MiSTEM regional grant after Wayne RESA successfully applied for external grants and took on leadership of the camps.

The program's success is attributable to the buy-in from partners and collaborators, who invested time and resources to speak to the needs of the community and have worked toward sustaining the program beyond its initial years. Indeed, Region 3 Director Greg Johnson, Ed.D., Ed.S., said MiSTEM initiatives require four things to become self-sustaining:

1. Identified as a need by constituents (parents and school professionals).
2. District and/or intermediate school district administration support.
3. At least one champion who puts it in their work plan, so it is part of their job.
4. A revenue stream that replaces MiSTEM grants to cover costs.

***"If any one of those pieces was not in place, it wouldn't continue,"*** Johnson said.

A new STEM Lit Lab camp for students entering first grade will be added in summer 2024. Camps for students entering second grade will be added in summer 2025.

*"Students and parents really enjoyed the texts and STEM challenges! We received many thank-you emails from families at the end of the Lit Lab."*

***– Lit Lab Teacher***

# Regional Collaboration

3P work thrives on collaboration. While many 3P initiatives succeed due to strong partnerships and teamwork, as highlighted above, MiSTEM Network regions collaborate with each other when their needs align, further enhancing these initiatives' impact.

## MiSTEM Regions Collaborate to Increase Project-Based Learning Capacity

Two MiSTEM regional directors are collaborating to scale up the number of educators who can benefit from Project-Based Learning (PBL) Design Workshops across the state. PBL (one of the 3P pedagogical approaches that is part of the MiSTEM State Strategy) is a way of designing high-quality learning that results in collaborative, authentic and deep learning for students.

Region 5 Director Kim Kocsis facilitated many project-based learning design workshops before her current role and built a dedicated and enthusiastic base of educators who are using PBL in their classrooms. As the demand for workshops has grown across Michigan, she and Region 6 Director Sarah Keenan-Lechel began exploring ways to meet the increased facilitation need. The result was the creation of the MiSTEM PBL Capacity Building Team composed of teacher leaders who have completed a PBL Design Workshop and have been designing and implementing PBL with their students.

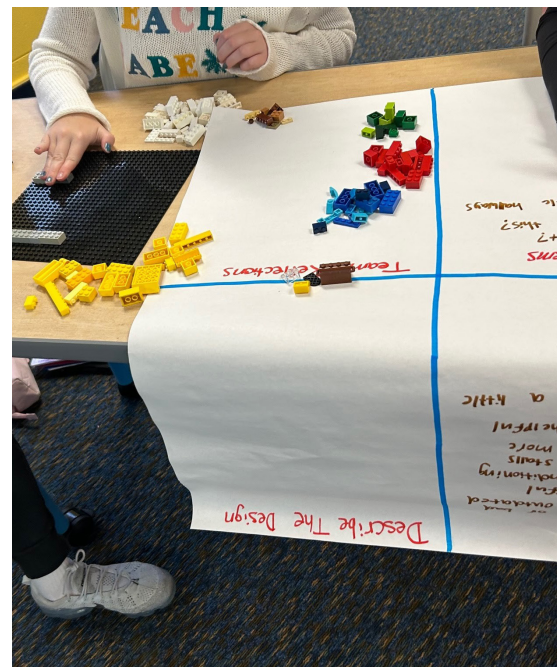
The first cohort's eight facilitators are from Clarkston Community Schools, Avondale School District, Bloomfield Hills Schools and Hazel Park Schools. They spent the 2023-24 school year deepening their knowledge of adult learning and facilitation supported by a facilitation coach through ProgressED Pathways.

Reflecting on his participation in both previous PBL Design Workshops and as part of the PBL Capacity Building Team, Mike Greve from Clarkston Community Schools explained,

***"We have really pushed our process to places that did not seem possible just a few short years ago, and that has primarily come from the inspiration that we have found in this collaborative network of incredible educators. I cannot even imagine going back to the process of teaching independently from my little silo of a room."***

The eight PBL facilitators will be in teams this summer to facilitate PBL workshops for educators in MiSTEM Regions 5, 6, 11 and 14.

Looking ahead, plans are already underway to train another cohort of facilitators from multiple MiSTEM Regions during the 2024-25 school year, ensuring an ongoing cycle of facilitator development and workshop delivery. This model of system building reflects the dedication and intentional collaboration between regions that has driven this initiative's success.



# Addressing Equity

By creating accessible educational experiences for all students, 3P education integrates equity principles into its core framework. By engaging students in real-world projects and problems relevant to their communities, 3P learning ensures that diverse perspectives and voices are valued and represented. This approach enables students from different backgrounds to contribute their unique insights and experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among all learners. Additionally, 3P learning encourages collaboration and cooperation, promoting an environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

## Students Help Develop Real-Life, Relevant Mathematics Problems

The MiSTEM Network is supporting the Tri-County Culturally Responsive Mathematics Institute in its efforts to incorporate real-life math problems that make the subject more interesting to all students — activities that are based on students' life experiences and personal interests.

The institute is a collaboration among Oakland Schools, Washtenaw Intermediate School District and Wayne County Regional Educational Agency. MiSTEM Network partnered with the institute after 25 mathematics education stakeholders from across the state developed a strategic plan for the Michigan M in STEM Collaborative, formally called the Math Action Area and partially funded by a MiSTEM Advisory Council Grant. The stakeholders identified culturally responsive mathematics teaching practices as foundational for 3P learning and advancing a sense of belonging in STEM. Regions reported an 87% increase in regional grant-supported activities aligned with the “building equity” priority from the MiSTEM operational map.

***“We don’t want students to identify as not liking math,”*** said MiSTEM Region 1 Director Diane Owen-Rogers, Ph.D. She said Michigan has a diverse student population, but minority, female and rural students are underrepresented in STEM classes.





***“We want to make sure all students see themselves as being worthy and belonging in the space of mathematics.”***

In addition to curating a variety of programs that support teachers in developing culturally responsive classrooms, the institute holds an annual virtual conference for district and building leaders to help them understand how to support their teachers in creating humanizing school environments.

An annual summer program provides high school students and teachers with two weeks of shared learning. The students work with teachers to modify lessons in their current math textbooks. Then the culturally modified math lessons are shared online so educators across the state can use them. Students who participate in the summer become peer leaders at their schools, and program organizers hope the students consider careers as STEM teachers.

***“Everyone wants the way that we’re educated and talked to and treated to be better,”*** said Lotus Lloyd, a student who participated in the 2021 Summer Institute. ***“The way to actually improve my learning is to integrate myself into it.”***

By prioritizing culturally responsive teaching practices and providing professional development opportunities for educators, this initiative not only enriches students’ learning experiences but also fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment within the STEM community.





# Key Findings

1.

## **Cross-sector partnerships continue to grow, with a notable 38% increase in partnerships with nonprofits in 2023-24.**

While partnerships with educational institutions remain prominent within the network, cross-sector collaborations with businesses, nonprofits and area career and technical education centers have increased. By inviting partners from community and industry backgrounds to commit to the shared goal of moving the Statewide STEM Strategy forward, we create a culture that allows sustained partnerships to transcend individuals and mitigates the partnership challenges associated with agency staff turnover.

2.

## **Authentic and relevant 3P experiences continue to increase year over year.**

Students who are given authentic opportunities for learning, particularly topics they are involved in selecting, appreciate both the skills they acquire and the benefit to the community. A grant allowed elementary students to study topics including micro-invertebrates, indigenous history and river currents at a local nature center, park and river. *"I love when I can see stuff in real life, not on screens,"* one student said. *"Things are more fun when you see new things, not learning about tractors in a boring classroom."* Another student saw her classmates become more engaged. *"I also think that when we are out of the classroom kids think it's more fun, so kids listen more."* And another observed, *"I thought the river stuff was really interesting and I think we should help keep the river clean."*

3.

## **About 44,100 students, 1,400 educators and 3,900 others participated in grant-supported activities aligned with the Michigan Department of Education Career Development Model (MI CDM).**

MI CDM is designed to provide all Michigan students (K-12) with the necessary knowledge and skills for success in a career of their choice and lifelong learning. The 3P Statewide STEM Strategy supports the creation of guided career pathways for STEM careers that align with Michigan industry needs.

4.

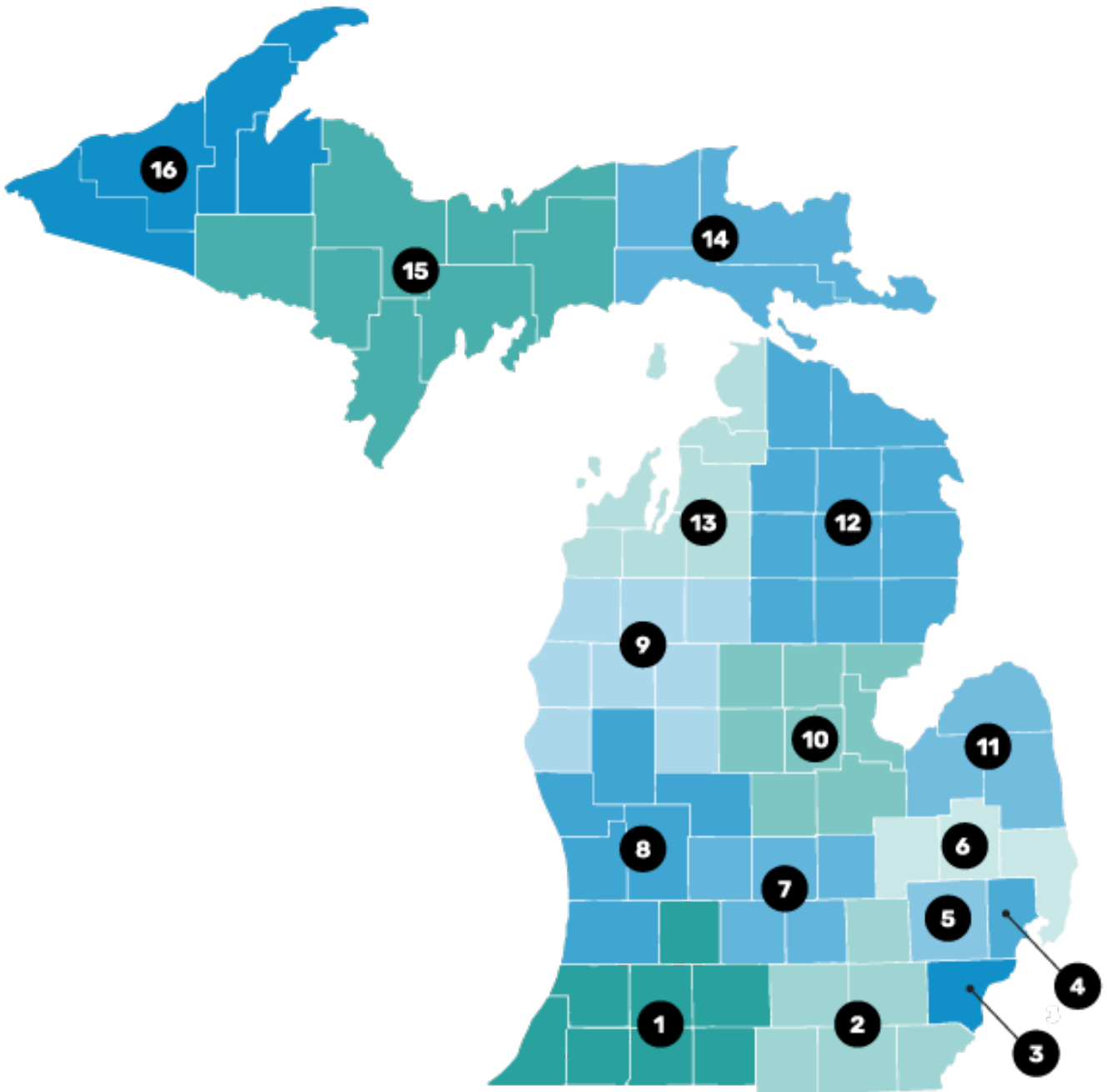
## **Grant fund pursuit increased by 161% while Advisory Council-leveraged funding increased by 127%.**

MiSTEM Network staff assisted regional partners with the submission of 16 grant proposals during the 2023-24 school year, aiming to bring in more than \$7 million in funding for initiatives if awarded. Leveraged funds – a combination of awarded grants (from the Advisory Council and Network Regions) and external funds – totaled \$1,067,178. Both demonstrate a commitment to resource sharing, including in-kind support from community partners.

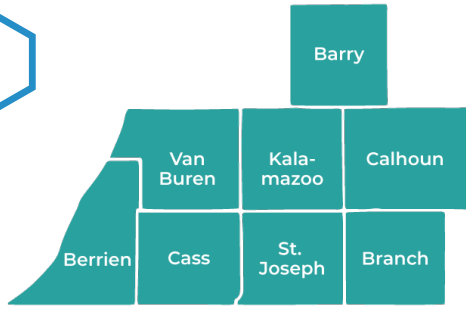


# Regional Networks

# MiSTEM Region Map



1



### Southwest Region

**Dr. Diane Owen-Rogers**

269-250-9224

diane.owenrogers@kresa.org

[www.swmistem.org](http://www.swmistem.org)

Fiscal Agent: Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency

2



### Southeast Region

**D. Scott Heister**

734-994-8100

sheister@washtenawisd.org

[www.mistemregion2.org](http://www.mistemregion2.org)

Fiscal Agent: Washtenaw Intermediate School District

3



### Wayne Region

**Dr. Greg Johnson**

734-334-1427

johnsog@resa.net

[www.mistem.resa.net](http://www.mistem.resa.net)

Fiscal Agent: Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency

4



### Macomb Region

**Mark Muzzin**

586-228-3452

mmuzzin@misd.net

[www.mistemmacomb.org](http://www.mistemmacomb.org)

Fiscal Agent: Macomb Intermediate School District

5



### Oakland Region

**Kim Kocsis**

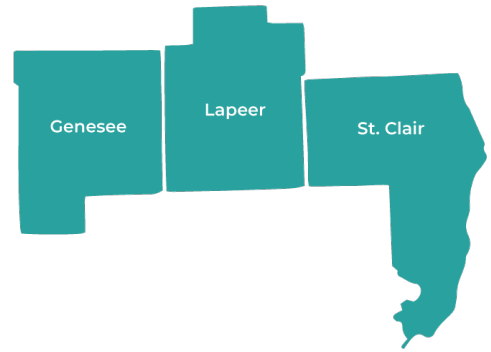
248-209-2287

kimberly.kocsis@oakland.k12.mi.us

[oakland.k12.mi.us/district-support/mistem](http://oakland.k12.mi.us/district-support/mistem)

Fiscal Agent: Oakland Schools

6



### I-69 Region

**Dr. Sarah Keenan-Lechel**

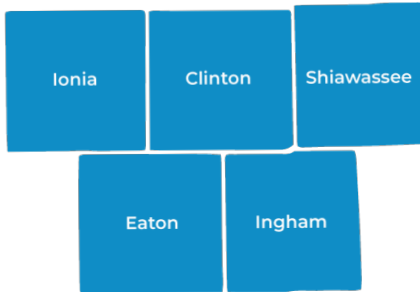
810-591-4427

skeenanlechel@geneseeisd.org

[mistemregion6.org](http://mistemregion6.org)

Fiscal Agent: Genesee Intermediate School District

7



### Mid-Michigan Region

**Lory Thayer**

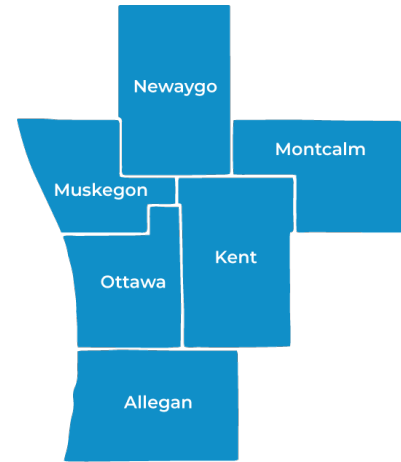
989-743-3471

thayer@sresd.org

[www.sresd.org](http://www.sresd.org)

Fiscal Agent: Shiawassee Regional Education Service District

8



### Greater West Michigan Region

**Ginger Rohwer**

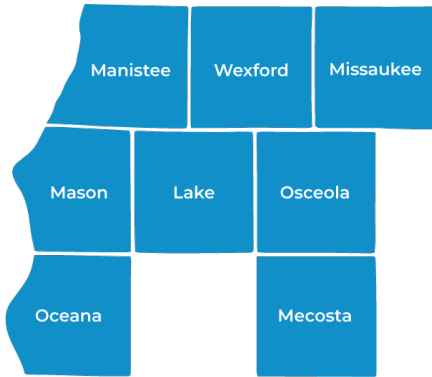
616-331-2272

Ginger.Rohwer@gvsu.edu

[www.gvsu.edu/mistem](http://www.gvsu.edu/mistem)

Fiscal Agent: Grand Valley State University

9



**West Central Region**

**Brian Dotson**

briandotson@wsesd.org

[www.mistemregion9.com](http://www.mistemregion9.com)

Fiscal Agent: West Shore Educational Service District

10



**East Central Michigan Region**

**Dr. Betsy L. Diegel**

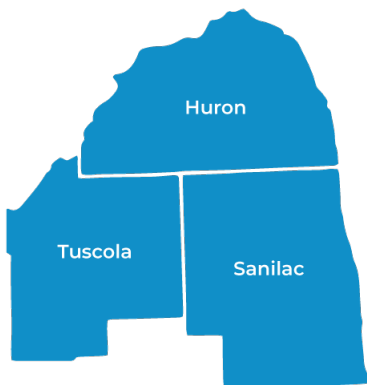
989-295-1353

bldiegel@svsu.edu

[www.stempipeline.com/glbr-mistem](http://www.stempipeline.com/glbr-mistem)

Fiscal Agent: Saginaw Valley State University

11



**Upper Thumb Region**

**Kristen Zagorski**

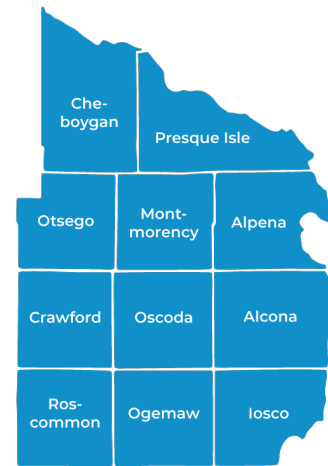
989-803-3342

kzagorski@huronisd.org

[mistemregion11.org](http://mistemregion11.org)

Fiscal Agent: Huron Intermediate School District

12



**Northeast Michigan (NEMi) Region**

**Laura Percival**

231-239-9394 x 1418

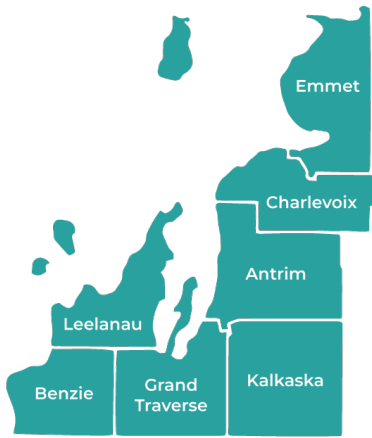
percival@copesp.org

[www.mistemregion12.org](http://www.mistemregion12.org)

Fiscal Agent: Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle Educational Service District



13



### Northwestern Lower Michigan Region

**Lisa Migazzi**

Regional Director

lmigazzi@northwested.org

[www.mistemregion13.com](http://www.mistemregion13.com)

Fiscal Agent: Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District

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### Eastern Upper Peninsula Region

**Kevin St. Onge**

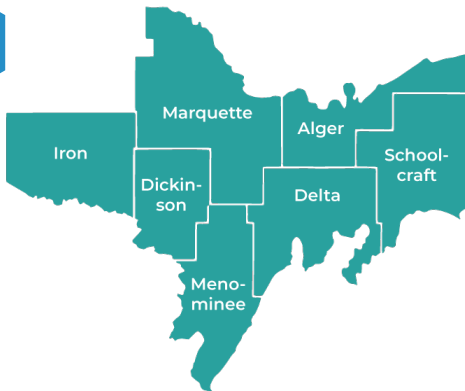
906-259-8027

kevins@eupschools.org

[www.eupschools.org/domain/63](http://www.eupschools.org/domain/63)

Fiscal Agent: Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District

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### 906-Central Region

**Chris Standerford**

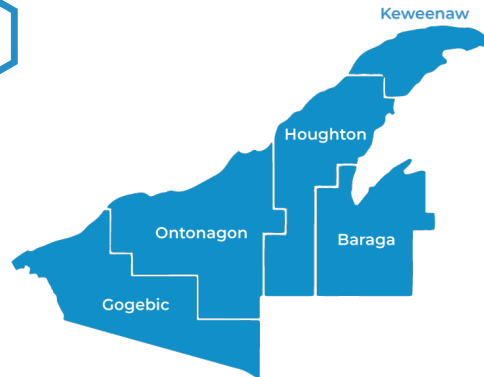
906-227-2002

cstander@nmu.edu

[www.nmu.edu/mistem](http://www.nmu.edu/mistem)

Fiscal Agent: Northern Michigan University

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### Western Upper Peninsula Region


**Emily Geiger, Ph.D.**

906-482-4250 x 188

egeiger@copperisd.org

[wupstem.org](http://wupstem.org)

Fiscal Agent: Copper Country Intermediate School District



“Working together with our business and community partners, we are creating a vibrant STEM education environment that will ultimately lead to more engaged students and a stronger Michigan workforce. It is important to provide all students with access to real-world STEM experiences and to give our educators the training and support they need in creating relevant curriculum and programs.”

– **Megan Schrauben, Executive Director of MiSTEM**



[www.michigan.gov/MiSTEM](http://www.michigan.gov/MiSTEM)