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STEAMPOSIUM educates West Virginia educators

by Chase Hughart STAFF WRITER
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ROANOKE, W.Va. (WV News) — Nearly 200 K-12 educators met at Stonewall Resort on Monday for the second STEAMPOSIUM conference to expand their skills in leading hands-on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics learning.

The STEAMPOSIUM started in 2018 as a small program that taught K-2 teachers new approaches to learning. It included interactive STEAM workshops that expanded teachers' skills so they could take them back to the classroom.



An experiment conducted during a lecture by Ryan Rydzewski and Gregg Behr.
Staff photo by Chase Hughart

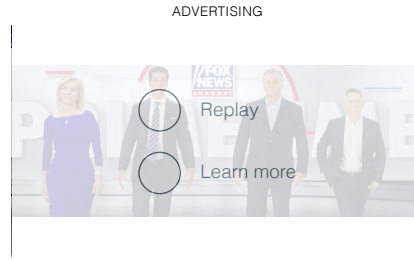


Marshall University's June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development is one of the conference sponsors.

"We're a support mechanism for public education, so we want to bring the cutting edge and this training to inspire our teachers to embed this stuff into the classrooms," said Tarabeth Heineman, the center's director. "And I think our workforce is changing. We have to engage children early. We know this. We have to get them involved in making decisions about what's available."



Heineman



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“Like when you were in school, you probably we’re aware of half the positions you could have gone into. So we’re finding out that we need to engage children earlier, and that’s what a conference like this can give teachers to bring back to their school districts,” Heineman said.

In addition to educators, attending the STEAMPOSIUM on Monday were members of the House of Delegates, STEAM integration specialists, representatives from the state Department of Education and higher education specialists.

The conference is a collaboration among the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, STEAMTAC, the state Department of Education and the June Harless Center.

This year’s STEAMPOSIUM also offered a keynote presentation by Gregg Behr and Ryan Ryndzewski, co-authors of “When You Wonder, You’re Learning,” a book that examines teaching styles inspired by TV personality and child development specialist Fred Rogers of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” fame.

Behr and Ryndzewski have backgrounds in youth education. Their book, as well as their presentation Monday, gives educators new approaches to connecting with their students and providing environments that promote healthy learning situations “in a way that supports the teachers, the kids and their families,” according to Behr.



Gregg Behr during his lecture.

Staff photo by Chase Hughart

Ryndzewski said good teacher-student relationships are key.

“We’re at a STEAM symposium, right? So technology, engineering — that can sound sort of technical and cold,” he said.

“But what makes this stuff work is the relationships these teachers build with their students. They build relationships by accepting and loving their students just the way they are.”



Ryan Rydzewski during his lecture.
Staff photo by Chase Hughart

“Kids come with all sorts of strengths and all sorts of challenges. When we adults accept those kids with their flaws, joys and strengths, and we love them — not despite them but because of those things — that’s when we start to build relationships.”

The STEAMPOSIUM program had hands-on sessions in which teachers could learn more about everything from robotics to how to implement outdoor learning — all to help promote STEAM learning in West Virginia classrooms from elementary to high school.



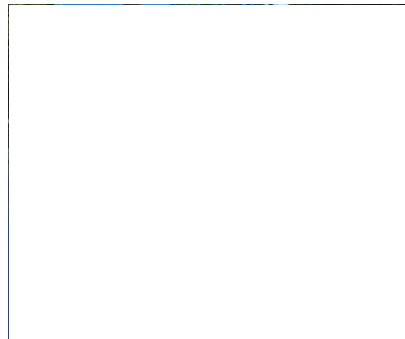
NASA booth at the STEAMPOSIUM
Staff photo by Chase Hughart

The conference even sent some of the educators home with resources and kits they can use in their classrooms.

“It just seems like everyone knows the skills of STEAM are the ones that all students need, but there has to be a mechanism to get it out there for students,” said Donna Peduto, executive director at West Virginia Public Education Collaborative.



Peduto
Submitted photo



“Lots of times, when I was in the classroom, I knew about careers that my relatives had, but I didn’t know about anything like data scientists or that sort of thing. So teachers need to learn so they can expose students to it,” Peduto said.

