



## Pathway To the Top: SC Regional Career and College Fair

The *Pathway To the Top* regional career and college fair sponsored by the South Central STEM Network Team took place on Oct. 12, 14, 15, 2021 from 8:00 am - 11:00 am each day. The event was hosted via NOVVA Tech's virtual reality online platform. This year, 25 high schools and approximately 4,200 students from the ESD 105 region participated in the event. NOVVA uses a virtual reality platform in which matches pre-registered students to post-secondary opportunities according to their levels of interest, skills, and aspirations.

The platform allowed students to virtually enter a College Fair as if they were entering into a college fair lobby. They enter into specific exhibit booths which have been created by Colleges, Universities, Technical Schools, Military, and Industry representatives. Students are instantly greeted by a representative and a personal conversation begins. Additionally, students can view photos, videos, and review program information at their own pace while visiting each booth. Brochures can also be viewed and saved in a virtual backpack which a student can access for an entire year and share with family members and peers. Another incredible feature is that the whole platform can immediately be translated into several languages, thus removing language barriers for participants.

As a STEM Network, we depend on data to inform program effectiveness and improvement as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Upon completion of the fair, several data points are collected. As a host organization, the STEM Team has access to data illustrating how many students participated, the percentage of male and female participants, and other demographic data. Furthermore, the team can access student preferences for housing, university size, rural, suburban or urban location, and if a student is planning to apply to a particular school. Representatives and students both receive transcribed messages if they used the chat feature.

The STEM Team is looking forward to showcasing this platform again next September to allow students the opportunity to learn about their post-secondary options before in-person college fairs, visits, or open houses are scheduled later in the school year.