



STEM Like Me!

Washington State is facing a STEM shortage. In the past ten years, STEM jobs have grown three times faster than non-STEM jobs. While Washington state ranks 1st in the concentration of software companies and 2nd in the concentration of STEM jobs, nationally it is 49th in providing local talent to fill those jobs. STEM jobs in our state pay nearly twice the salary of non-STEM jobs, however, only one in four STEM workers in our state is a woman, and only one in five is Black or Hispanic. The leadership of the South Central STEM Network believes that every young person should have the opportunity to experience the possibilities STEM provides. Research shows that if a child hasn't considered a STEM career by 8th grade, the child is less likely to become a STEM professional. Inspiring students to pursue career pathways in STEM should start in the middle school or elementary classroom.

Enter the STEM Like ME program! STEM Like Me provides middle school teachers with the opportunity to bring STEM professionals into their classrooms to educate students about STEM careers available to them. STEM Like Me is an engaging interaction between professionals in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math and middle school students developing an understanding of who they can be in the future.

In 2019, STEM Like Me was piloted in the South Central STEM Network, and was a great success! In addition to local STEM professionals getting the chance to tell their own STEM stories and the career pathway they took to achieve their post-secondary credential, regional business leaders have the chance to share the variety of jobs available in their company. The STEM Like Me pilot took place on June 3rd at Selah Junior High School. The STEM Like Me program was implemented in all nine of the 7th-grade science classrooms. This allowed all 216 students who were present that day to participate. In order to implement the program as detailed, nineteen STEM professionals from seven local companies served as STEM Like Me mentors. Some of the quotes from the STEM professionals are listed below.

"I think there is a definite benefit for companies by introducing their trade to kids that may never be exposed to their field. WSDOT would like to model their workforce after their community. The issue is that some of the community members are never exposed to what WSDOT has to offer or how they can educate themselves to get there."

*"Having young people in your area interested in excelling in a career at your company is priceless."
"STEM Like Me develops a talent pipeline into our businesses that are sorely missing."*