

Schools partner with new local business BioSci

Coventry Superintendent Craig Levis
calls collaboration with STEAM
incubator a “win-win” for all

By **KENDRA LOLIO**

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COVENTRY — The school department has announced a partnership with Coventry-based business BioSci to offer students a chance to get real, hands-on experience working with award-winning startup businesses and alongside up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

The district plans to begin offering opportunities for students to work at BioSci’s 141,000-square foot Main Street facility as part of their work in new pathways that are being created.

Coventry Superintendent Craig Levis calls the collaboration a “win-win” for the school district and for BioSci, who held a ribbon cutting back in May.

“We want to make sure we have the best experiences and educational opportunities that will lead to success for our students,” said Levis. “The missing link for us is having

this real world exposure.”

The team at BioSci is just as excited about the partnership. Members of the management team visited Coventry High School at the end of 2017 and were particularly impressed with what they saw in the school’s Regional Career and Technical Education Center.

“I’m really impressed that Coventry Public Schools have a superintendent who is willing to change the paradigm,” said BioSci Founder John Jarrell, Ph.D. “The problem we’ve had is the best people - we train them and send them off to other states. We train all these kids in the lab, so you invest all this time and then they go to consulting firms or somewhere outside the state and we want to keep them here.”

He said he believes the opportunity will help prepare students for careers in fields like Biomedical Engineering and Manufacturing and

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BioSci

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expose them to innovative entrepreneurs.

“What people have found is we’re training folks in college for jobs that don’t exist,” he said “We’re preparing them for nothing and that’s a problem.”

“We wanted to see what we could facilitate,” said Elizabeth Stone. “It fits in really well with the initiatives of the STEAM fields, so that’s initially why we wanted to reach out.”

Stone said the partnership will offer students a look at the passion and innovation fueling startup companies and the entrepreneurs who create them.

“A lot of people here are working on projects that they want to be working on,” she said. “So they might be working 70 or 80 hours a week but it’s what they’re passionate about. So we show them they have to work hard and find

something that they’re passionate about and like doing.”

Levis said he would like to eventually open the program up to students at the middle school to start getting kids more career oriented at a younger age.

“If you have a dream you have to commit to it,” said Jarrell. “But these are realistic dreams.”

“Taking risks is a skill we struggle to teach,” said Levis. “But this allows us to do that and allows kids and teachers to push their horizons. We’re trying to change how we teach but we need real world partners to do it.”

BioSci Labs is home to businesses like Materials Science Associates and BI Medical, Pepper’s Closet and other startup companies in a variety of STEAM fields.

“The best part of this is we don’t know where it will lead to,” said Levis. “There are a lot of opportunities and sometimes a linear path is boring.”

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