

Utah STEM Action Center Funds Washington County School District Grants

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The Utah STEM Action Center recently funded two computer science grants for the Washington County School District. The grants run for 3 years and will fund afterschool 4-H computer science and robotics clubs as well as summer computer science camps.

The Hurricane Cone Site grant of \$278,392 funds five schools: Three Falls Elementary, Hurricane Elementary, Coral Canyon Elementary, LaVerkin Elementary and Hurricane Intermediate.

The Hildale Schools grant of \$149,310 funds Water Canyon School and Water Canyon High School. Paul Hill, Utah State University Extension professor in Washington County, designed the programs and helped the schools write the grants. His team will provide professional development for the teachers involved in delivering the club content.

“Our local Utah 4-H program coordinator and faculty will support the clubs with leadership and positive youth development training,” Hill said. “There are challenges of intergenerational poverty at these schools, and this is the first program ever funded in our Hildale schools. Most of the students at Water Canyon schools are former FLDS sect members. We are excited to see the good things the STEM grants will bring for these students.”

According to Shirlee Draper, licensed social service worker and director of operations at [Cherish Families](#), the

FLDS sect leader’s actions created huge needs in the population: for remedial education, proper nutrition and healthcare, family reunification and mental health services, stable housing, access to social supports and safety nets, among many others.

“As we have worked to create and bring these services into the community, the presence of extra-curricular programs such as this 4-H computer science and robotics program does wonders to help build self-confidence,” she said. “In addition, they bring interest in education and the ever-critical sense of belonging in these children. We commend the efforts of the Washington County School District and USU Extension in providing the program, and are very grateful for the interest in helping restore and stabilize our community.”

Beyond exploring programming languages, Hill said students will learn how to think computationally in order to solve complex problems.

“Computational thinking and problem solving are the critical skills needed to meet the technical demand of future jobs,” he said. “This is not just a 4-H afterschool program, this is strategic workforce development.”

Christopher Barrett, principal at Water Canyon School, said what a privilege it is to collaborate with USU Extension and its 4-H program on the design and delivery of this program.

“We recognize that exposing young people to computer science will prepare them for the ever-increasing technical jobs in the future,” he said. “We are excited for the opportunities this grant funding will provide to our students at both schools, and we are very grateful to the Utah Stem Action Center.”

Stephanie Wilber, grant writer and learning coach at Three Falls Elementary in Hurricane, said the grant will give over 750 students the opportunity to be immersed in 21st Century skills to increase their computer science skills and become college and career ready.

“On behalf of these five schools, we are thrilled to be one of the recipients of this grant through the Utah STEM Action Center,” she said.

More information about the Utah STEM Action Center’s Computing Partnership Grant can be found at: stem.utah.gov/grants/computing-partnership-grant-program/.

More information about the 4-H program can be found at: Utah4h.org.

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