Couragion

Top Approaches to Skill Building for Future-Ready Students

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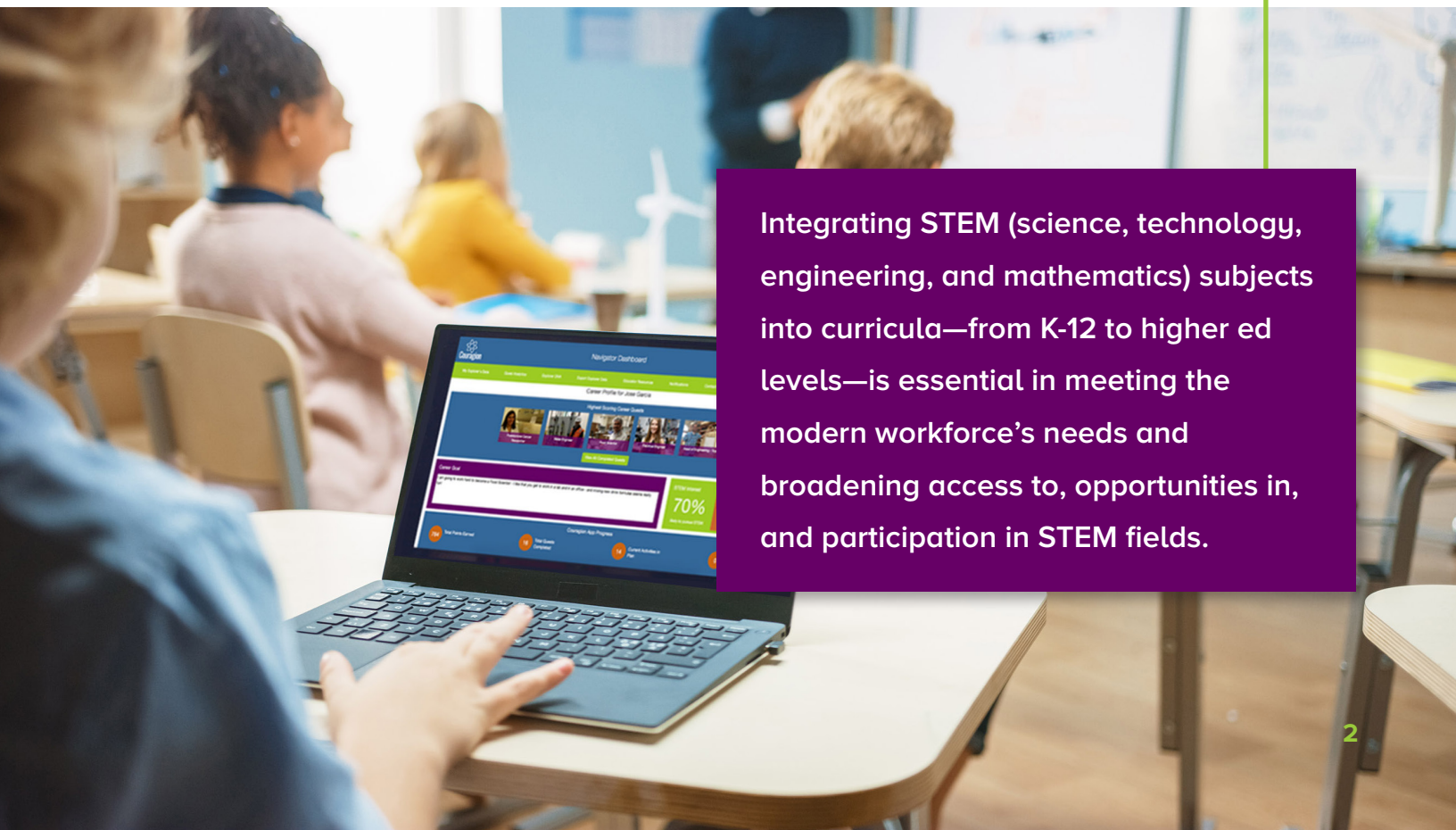
Skill Building for Future-Ready Students

Integrating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects into curricula—from K-12 to higher ed levels—is essential in meeting the modern workforce's needs and broadening access to, opportunities in, and participation in STEM fields. Students need workable and effective guidance when deciding on a career, to choose a career with which they genuinely connect. As they investigate all the possibilities, they must receive the tools necessary to plan and execute academic pathways that lead them to a future they consider successful.

This all sounds great in concept but how can schools realize these goals in the day-to-day operation of their schools? Lessons from how Crawford Elementary School (CES) and Washtenaw Community College (WCC) use the MindSpark Couragion platform for successful outcomes answer this question. Couragion provides STEM career literacy & workforce development solutions for educators and students. It includes Quests, which expose students to STEM-related careers via videos of diverse role models, self-reflection quizzes, and 'best fit' criteria to match their values, interests, and desired work characteristics. In addition, it includes industry-based, real-world challenges in which students assume job roles & practice workplace tasks to build occupational and essential skills.



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Create Career Consciousness

With Couragion, students engage with relatable role models who mirror a diverse demographic. Students cultivate interests by engaging with curated, personalized content related to their best fit careers. Schools and educators can customize the experience with hyper-local information that engages the community.

"We have found Couragion to be an extensive tool that allows students to explore various career pathways. Each career pathway showcased interviews with industry experts regarding their jobs on both a micro and macro level," says Anna Kwan, an educator at (CES), a PK-5 public school located in a large city that caters to a population whose student enrollment is 97% minority, and 94% economically disadvantaged.

Kwan runs a maker space and STEM lab at Crawford that enables students who are underrepresented in STEM-related career paths to get exposure to STEM-related work from an early age and to see themselves working in such positions in the future. This process also builds confidence when learning new things and solving new problems, which in turn affects how students engage and succeed in all their classes. Kwan says the experience includes, "a broad overview of what (STEM professionals) do, some day-to-day tidbits about their jobs, and some specifics on what kind of education and training students will need to pursue such careers. They enjoyed the freedom and flexibility in exploring jobs that interested them and trying out aspects of each career through the interactive quests."

The STEM Lab also allows Kwan's students to use Couragion to create personalized pathways to trigger new content and programming for students, which drives them to seek new skills, work-based learning activities, and volunteer and extracurricular experiences to support their continued exploration.

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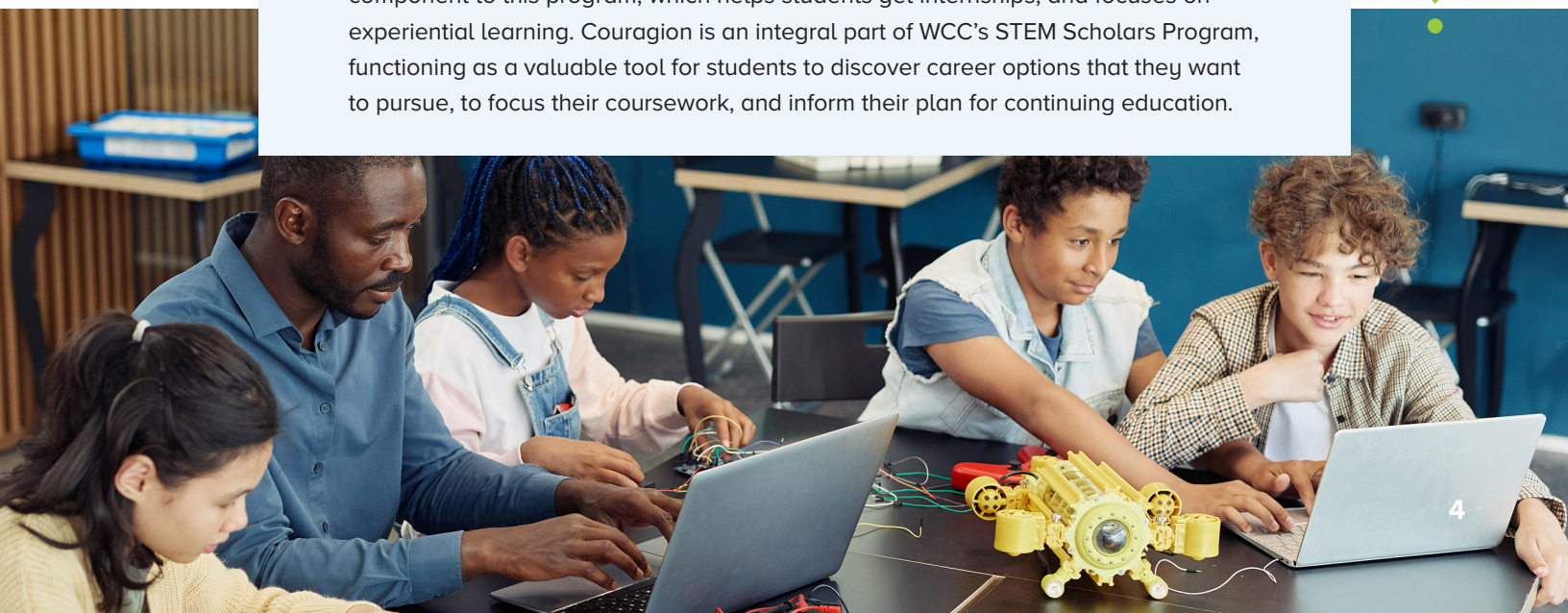
Design Credential Pathways

Many of today's reforms in the public two-year sector aim to better connect student's academic achievement and goals with careers and jobs. These alignment-based reforms are for colleges to re-orient their services and programs to offer students an opportunity to increase the coherence between their educational goals and their desired careers. Couragion creates a system that draws people in, attracting and retaining students to the community college pathway.

"It helps students to say, 'maybe I'm not interested in that'... they go and look at other things," says Susan Dentel, Dale Carnell Distinguished Faculty at WCC. "I think deciding if they like something or don't like something...is important too. They'll be all on fire about something but then they may shadow somebody and then decide 'No, I'm not really interested.' That's valuable too."

WCC is the #2 Best Community College in Michigan, a ranking based on rigorous analysis of exploring academic, financial, and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education in conjunction with millions of reviews from students and alumni. The college has an industry-leading STEM Scholars Program which helps ensure successful university transfers for students in STEM fields, creating a strong pathway into the STEM workforce. Throughout the Couragion experience at WCC, end users share their values, career interests, and preferences. This important data feeds into a predictive algorithm that gradually refines as the user completes Quests. As they do so, students get valuable information about careers that align with their purpose and values, and they can further clarify their career aspirations.

Since the STEM Scholars Program began in 2018, it has expanded to 100 students. During the program, students are assigned a faculty or staff mentor, they attend weekly lunch and learn sessions, and learn life skills. There is a strong research component to this program, which helps students get internships, and focuses on experiential learning. Couragion is an integral part of WCC's STEM Scholars Program, functioning as a valuable tool for students to discover career options that they want to pursue, to focus their coursework, and inform their plan for continuing education.



Acquire Workforce Wisdom

Career capital is an understanding of what is needed to develop a career. Couragion provides the wherewithal to facilitate career capital through a comprehensive framework which provides the why (motivation and purpose), how (skills and knowledge), and whom (relationships and networks) required for career development.

This is the work that Couragion sets out to do—empower educators who will in turn equip their students with the skills and tools to solve real-world problems and enter the workforce with all the relevant skills that a CS and STEM education provides. With the founding of the STEM Scholars Program, and the subsequent integration and implementation of Couragion, Susan Dentel and WCC saw a way to engage students in their search for a STEM career, and to provide them with a way to plan for that future.

Couragion also helps students to be informed about career options, have access to diverse role models outside of friends and family, and pursue healthier career paths in line with their values and interests. Couragion exposes students to careers and workforce skills in an engaging, cost-effective manner while being inclusive to all regardless of place, gender, race, or ethnicity—students like those in Kwan's STEM lab, who are benefitting from a quality CS education and are even more encouraged to enter the STEM workforce.

By using Couragion in classrooms, educators give their students the ability not only to see how they can thrive in careers that they might not have thought of pursuing, but also to understand the relevance of what they are learning and begin to imagine how they can use the knowledge and skills in their daily lives.

About MindSpark

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