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MVTHS examines new engineering program

*Project Lead the Way could
bring a pre-engineering
curriculum offering eight
courses to interested students*

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MT. VERNON — The Mt. Vernon Township High School Board of Education will consider taking part in the Project Lead the Way program to implement a new engineering curriculum for students.

At Tuesday's board meeting, Richard L. Greene of Bradley University described the goal of Project Lead the Way, which board member Daniel Hoffman called "tremendously exciting."

Greene referred to the initiative as a "rigorous math-based, project focused pre-engineering program for students."

In conjunction with a high school's present math curriculum PLTW would replace or alter appropriate engineering or related curriculum to encompass eight courses.

Students interested in the field would take introductory classes on engineering design, principles, and digital electronics. They would then choose from either aerospace engineering, biotechnical engineering, computer integrated manufacturing, or civil engineering and architecture courses before finishing the curriculum with engineering design and development.

Greene said the courses emphasize working cooperatively and developing problem solving skills to create designs and build proj-

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ects.

"It answers the question 'Why do we have to learn this stuff?'" he noted.

Many universities, Greene added, offer college credit for completion of the PLTW courses. Once adopted, middle school programs could also be offered through a high school's various feeder schools.

Funding for the program is available through grants from the Kern Family Foundation for start-up costs and from the Illinois Department of Commerce to implement the program.

Instructor training for the PLTW curriculum is handled by the University of Illinois.

Mary Ellen Bechtel, executive director of the Jefferson

County Development Corporation, submitted a letter of support for the project as a means of generating a more highly skilled local work force.

"We know we have the talent in Jefferson County than can be provided to industries for a highly skilled work force," she said. "It's not just about attracting businesses to the area. It's also about retention ... You would not only be supporting our current economy. You would also be supporting our future economy."

At this time, 88 high schools in 57 cities in Illinois participate in the program, according to Greene.

Hoffman said of PLTW, "It's an extremely invigorating way to get students involved."

The board directed Superintendent Terry Milt to work on a grant proposal to bring to the October meeting.

IN OTHER BUSINESS:

• Picking up tabled business from last month's meet-

ing, the board voted unanimously to deny a parent request for excused absences for students missing school for a proposed trip to Walt Disney World. Some board members noted it was a request to change policy that could open the door for more excused absences and questioned the expensive trip's accessibility for all students.

• Revised district goals reflecting students achieving their maximum potential, the fiscal responsibility of the district, and the development of interactive communication with all education stakeholders were approved. A workshop was set for Oct. 9 at 6:30 p.m. to begin devising ways to measure the district's success in those goals.

• The board agreed to continue the graduation tradition of allowing speeches by the senior class president, the student body president, and the president of the National Honor Society.

• The new three-year contract with the district's cooks, custodians, and maintenance staff was approved.

• The board accepted the resignations of Hannah Rodgers as Lifesavers co-sponsor, Heather Taaka as office clerk and typist, and Jenny Campbell as a special education aide.

• Jeremy Easley and Neal Beaty were approved as volunteer football coaches.

• The board voted in favor of employing Sheila Stowers as a speech and acting extracurricular sponsor and Sarah Smith as a social worker.

• Board members approved the letting of bids for pest management and workers compensation, property, and casualty insurance contracts.

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