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Lindenwood University is leading a regional initiative designed to improve the interest and performance in math, engineering, technology and science (METS) classes by students in Missouri schools.

Toward that end, Lindenwood is working with a variety of area businesses and organizations to enhance teacher education curriculum in METS areas and create a pilot METS instructional program for Missouri schools.

Terry Stewart, a teacher education professor at Lindenwood and former superintendent of the Jennings School District, sat on the governor's planning committee for METS; he said Dr. James D. Evans, president of Lindenwood made a presentation on the initiative in front of an audience of business and school officials on May 5 at the St. Louis Science Center.

Additionally, Evans appointed a Lindenwood METS task force that consists of Stewart, Vice Presidents Richard Boyle and Jann Weitzel, School of Education Dean Cynthia Bice, School of Sciences Dean Marilyn Abbott, and teacher education professor Cindy Vitale.

More recently, Lindenwood hosted a meeting on July 31 for area school administrators intended to build interest in a pilot program to test METS teaching strategies in some area classrooms.

"METS has the potential to work and to make a real difference in science education preparation in our state and nation—and we will need more of this category of learning to keep pace in the global community, which is quickly becoming more globally competitive," Evans said.

Stewart said current partners in the St. Louis region include Lindenwood, IBM, BJC Healthcare, the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis (OSED) of the University of Missouri Extension, and MOREnet, which provides Internet connectivity, technical support and training to school districts, colleges and hospitals throughout Missouri.

"Our immediate goal is to bring in more partners to provide funding and input," Stewart said. "The business community has an interest in this because they are not getting kids interested in pursuing METS careers."

Stewart said the task force has devised a program to change the way teachers teach METS subjects in schools and train teachers in participating schools next summer. These teachers would take techniques back to the classroom and apply them using high-tech applications that would allow students to take more of a hands-on approach to learning.

The pilot program would be implemented in 15 classrooms and evaluated over two years, after which long-term funding would be sought to implement the program on a broader scope.

The new approach would utilize various high-tech applications, such as high-speed Internet connections, to bring lessons to life for students, allow them to work on projects in a concrete way and see immediate results, as opposed to study-and-drill.

"To learn most effectively, the student must be motivated enough to focus on the learning opportunity—to be engaged by it," said Evans, whose background as a psychologist is in learning, cognition and quantitative analysis. "Having to actively do something commands attention. The student must see the learning situation as an interesting opportunity to solve a problem, make something happen or create something—that is just human nature."