

IMMERSED IN INVESTIGATION

• *STUDENTS LEARN FORENSICS IN CLASSROOM*

Last February, Wolsey-Wessington students in grades K-12 spent a week immersed in Forensics in the Classroom a program designed to help students transition from the traditional classroom setting to transdisciplinary problem-based learning.

Nearly 300 students participated in the rigorous STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) focused program requiring participants to draw on all content areas to solve mock crime scenes set up at their school. The learning experiences was made possible by Wolsey-Wessington Staff and Students, the PAST Foundation, Mid-Central Educational Cooperative, Sanford Research and South Dakota Innovation Lab.

Students in grades 6-12 spent the first part of the week learning and applying their new skills in fingerprinting, trace evidence, anthropology and other forensic science skills required to solve crimes. Employees of South Dakota Innovation Lab helped deliver content and facilitate lab activities. Eddie Aamold, a forensic biologist from the SD Crime Lab, served as an industry partner who shared his expertise in the area of DNA collection and analysis.

Later that week, the students were put into groups and assigned to one of several mock crime scenes to apply all that they had learned.

As students worked with different content experts in all areas of the school, they methodically documented and mapped every detail. Everyone had a specific role to play from taking pictures to dusting for fingerprints, and analyzing handwriting. Student groups used all the information they had gathered to put together the story of the crime they were investigating.

Students took their cases to “court,” with each student offering testimony in his or her area of expertise at the end of the week. Local judicial officials assisted in evaluating the cases that students presented.

Elementary students played an important role in the crime solving adventure, as well.

Early in the week, they discovered \$1 million ransom notes for their kidnapped classroom stuffed animals. They learned about many of the same topics as the older students, and by the end of the week, they too, had determined the culprits.

Local law enforcement officers were contacted and given the evidence reports written by each classroom and the kidnapers were



apprehended.

Their activities culminated with a visit from South Dakota Highway Patrol Trooper Mark Chamberlain who assisted with their investigation and returned the missing stuffed animals to an elated Wolsey-Wessington student body.

“It’s finding real-world problems and issues that are of interest to the kids, that get them motivated to learn and to explore and take education in a different direction,” Wolsey-Wessington Superintendent James Cutshaw said. “It’s more exciting than just trying to read out of a textbook something that maybe doesn’t apply to you or you can’t relate to.”

