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Local schools weigh in on STEM bill

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CTE Design and Technology students Sarth Patel, Ashley Jordan and Jacob Grager work with advanced CO2 laser technology as part of their senior capstone project. They are in the fourth year research and development course at Dakota High School taught by Mr. Scott E. Mitchell. (Submitted Photo)

On Feb. 25 the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM, Education Act, which was then referred to a Senate committee.

The bill amends the definition of STEM education with regard to the activities of several agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, or NSF, the Department of Energy, NASA, NOAA, National Institute of Standards and Technology and EPA to include computer science. The bill also continues competitive grants currently in place within the NSF that support informal, out-of-school STEM learning activities and environments such as home schools and community-based learning centers. The bill further expands the availability of certain other NSF scholarship, grants and fellowships for teachers who are working towards additional education in the STEM subject areas that they teach.

“In order for the U.S. to remain competitive in the global economy, we need to ensure our students, this country’s future, have the STEM skills critical to their success. Today, the House overwhelmingly passed bipartisan legislation that expands federal STEM programs to incorporate computer science – a rapidly growing STEM field – and improve educational opportunities for STEM teachers,” said U.S. Rep. Candice Miller.

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Including computer science in the definition of STEM education with regard to the activities at the six agencies makes sense due to its closely related nature to other STEM learning, said Claire Brisson, director of Career and Technology Education for Chippewa Valley Schools.

“Computer programs and information technology are intimately connected with engineering and technology and math and science. It makes sense to me. It opens up opportunities for teachers and people and initiatives in the IT area when it comes to funding,” Brisson said.

Brisson said that in the past, a lot of the emphasis on STEM was upon the math and science sections, but computer science is an integral part of many areas.

“They forget about the E and T in stem. The integration of the four makes STEM, STEM. What students learn and do in mechatronics and robotics involves physics and math and engineering and critical thinking principals and technology,” Brisson said.

Brisson said Chippewa Valley offers IT with a focus on web design, but she would like to see this expand. Finding qualified teachers is a concern, she noted.

“Maybe with grant opportunities like this, it sounds like they are offering opportunities for teachers to get more experience in this area,” Brisson said.

Finding secondary level teaching staff with the credentials to teach in more than one area, the necessary industry experience and teaching credentials can be difficult, particularly as industry experience must be recent and relevant within the last five years, she said. L’Anse Creuse Public Schools Director for Public and Community Relations Kelly Allen said it was currently too early to tell how the bill could impact the school district.

“Because the act has only passed in the House, it is too soon to detail how it could impact our district,” Allen said.

The district is interested in pursuing potential grant opportunities that may arise, however, she noted.

“Funding opportunities to enhance the learning experience at L’Anse Creuse, including grants and scholarships, are actively pursued throughout the year at the district level and by individual teachers. We will continue to do so as more opportunities become available,” Allen said.

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Dakota High School seniors Ashley Jordan, Sarth Patel and Jacob Grager participate in a senior capstone project to apply knowledge and skills they have developed in relevant learning. The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill to expand STEM opportunities for students. (Submitted Photo)



Dakota High School seniors Ashley Jordan, Sarth Patel and Jacob Grager are involved in CTE/STEM programs at Dakota High School. (Submitted Photo)