



UNC CHARLOTTE
The Urban Education Collaborative

Evaluation of the International Telementor Program
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International Telementor Program
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Preston Middle School
www.prestonmiddleschool.org
REFLECTIONS FROM STAFF
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Scott Nielsen, Principal
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I have been excited to see the support that ITP has been able to provide Preston Middle School. During my many years in education, I have never been able to find a scalable model for providing a large number of mentors for a large population of students. ITP has shown the capacity to provide quality support for many of our students and created a capacity to challenge the thinking beyond the classroom walls. The program has helped us to create an environment that allows students to see both how they can make their world better and collaborate with professionals, who are themselves, contributing to making the world better. The work with ITP has also provided an avenue to participate in authentic work and produces real results.

I would love to see a time where ALL students have access to this type of support. I believe it provides richness to learning that may often be missed without this environment. We talk in education often about preparing students to be post-secondary ready, what better way than to collaborate with those professionals that we are preparing

students to work alongside!

At Preston Middle School, we also believe in providing an opportunity for students to build their entrepreneurial spirit. One of the effective ways that Preston students experience entrepreneurial skills is through our *Grand Challenges* project. Each student at Preston will select an engineering challenge based on real world problems that need to be solved. The students have been building background knowledge through the first semester, and then will begin to create solutions to these real world challenges. Small groups will present information on their solution and the data they have collected about its effectiveness. We continue to be amazed at this process and the solutions that middle school students are able to create. The ITP program can be a fantastic resource for this project and others like it!!

John Howe, Assistant Principal, STEM Institute Director, Flight Simulator Instructor
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The connection of professionals to Preston students is of such high importance that Preston has built it into its STEM School Model a 'Professional Networking/Mentoring' component. The importance of real world problem based learning for this generation cannot be overemphasized. This generation is highly altruistic and motivated to make a positive difference and working with mentors on solutions to big problems is the best way to keep them engaged in learning and being socially responsible. When Preston set out to become a world-class STEM Middle School, we recognized early that our internal efforts to obtain and manage mentors for our students was not scalable. ITP became the only realistic option and fortunately for us, a high-quality option.

Amy Schmer, Sixth Grade Science Teacher
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Latest Project Video: www.vimeo.com/channels/amyschmer
[Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project](#)
[Project Summary from 2011-2012](#)

ITP allows for students to dig deep into an area that is a passion of theirs. ITP allows for students to have one on one attention and get immediate feedback from someone who is 100% invested in the student. Students are very excited to see what their mentor has said or shared. Students are excited to share with other students what they have learned from their mentor. Students are truly bummed when they do not have a message or when there is a back-up mentor writing to them. All of this supports the work of a STEM school and what a STEM school wants for their students. Students are working on their projects during their free time, during their 9th hour, and during their Saturdays and Sundays, even their summer breaks!!

Finding 33 mentors to work with my students would be impossible for me to do on my own. ITP has taken all of that work off of my shoulders and I truly have 33 mentors that

are invested in my students and their project. The mentors message my students all the time and their messages are full of different teaching points. The mentors email me asking about their students. If they have not received a message, the mentor will contact me and ask if the student is okay, can I share any info about their student that will help the mentor send more effective messages. When I read the messages that are sent by mentors and students I feel like I have struck gold being partnered with ITP.

There are MANY benefits of the ITP program. Several of them are student engagement, level of understanding and ownership of the knowledge, sense of confidence. Student engagement in my ITP class is out of this world. Every single day 100% of my students are actively engaged in their pieces of the project. Every day I hear at the end of class, "This period is over? Oh man, I was just getting started." "Boy, this class goes so fast." I have also noticed that the attendance rate in that class is higher than any other class I teach. The students level of understanding and ownership of the knowledge in my ITP class is very evident. Students from last year can re-call information and facts from different classes, guest speakers and field trips. Those students are using the knowledge from their ITP class to improve and create answers to real problems this year. Those students understand that interviewing professionals and having an authentic audience will make their work better and more important. The students are not happy to just do work for their teacher. They have done work that is meaningful and understand that this type of work is very self satisfying.

Throughout the last two years, the confidence in the students that are in the ITP class have grown so much more that other 6th graders. The students in the ITP class are not afraid to make a phone call to professionals, write a letter/email to an expert, ask tough questions of other students and adults, share their thoughts and ideas to different groups of people. The students love it when there are visitors in our classroom. It is a whole new audience to share their work with.

I would love for every Preston student to get the chance to experience the type of education that my ITP classes have experienced. When students that do not have a mentor ask students that do have a mentor what it is all about, the non-mentor student says, "I wish I had one of those."

Cameron Shinn, Sixth Grade English Teacher

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[Writing with Impact Project](#)
[Project Summary from 2011-2012](#)

The International Telementoring has been an amazing support for our STEM school and how we are trying to STEM mission, which is to "Make the world a better place." Students here at Preston are able to find something that interests them, and devote their energy toward that interest. I thought that many students would pursue an interest that was self-serving, yet over the last two school years I have students who are pursuing the following topics: eliminating Malaria in Africa, Water Conservation, Athletic Camps for Students with Disabilities, Preventing Coral Bleaching, Saving

Grizzly Bears, and Understanding the Criminal Brain. Through these projects, students are trying to become the change they would like to see in the world.

If I were to try and find all of these mentors for one class of students, let alone all of my classes, it would be a full-time job. There is no way a teacher could do this and teach. It would be impossible. Through ITP, my students are able to collaborate, problem solve, and get the kind of one-on-one necessary for them to be pushed as individuals and make great strides.

I think one of the biggest tell-tale signs is when I have to be absent and I have a substitute teacher in my room. They leave notes talking about how “on-task” and “engaged” students are in class. When allowed to choose a topic they are interested in, students invest not just more energy, but more of themselves in this process. Because it is something they care about, they are willing to work harder, work longer, because it means something to them, personally. Also, by having students engage in constant communication, writing with a purpose and an audience, as well as collaborating constantly with their mentor, students are always improving in their writing. With the amount of reflective thought that is required, the amount of self-evaluation, students are learning how to consider more than one perspective, more than one idea, and more than one way of doing things. All of these things lead to better learners. Allowing students the space to collaborate with professionals, not teachers or students, but professionals, there is a different investment on part of the students: the work they produce feels real, relevant, and that it will not just receive a grade and be tucked away in the box of forget. It has purpose for these students.

I would love it if each teacher in this school had one Telementoring class. I think for every child to have the opportunity to pick a topic they were interested in, really learn about it, invest not in an assignment, but in themselves, would be a great experience. It is not just a great experience for kids, but one for teachers as professionals. I have learned so much from the last two school years, and I have been able to self-evaluate and self-reflect on what I am doing as a teacher and what I am asking students to do. It has been so valuable in order to figure out what is most important, and what I really want kids to learn, as well as why certain assignments and skills are so valuable.

Rachael Browning, Gifted and Talented Coordinator/Teacher
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[Continue The Vision Project](#)

I am Preston Middle School's Gifted and Talented Coordinator and Teacher. I teach a class called, “Continue the Vision,” which is a new Gifted & Talented exploratory semester elective for 7th and 8th grade students. This elective aims to support students as they delve deep into a personal area of interest. My students are asked to consider and explore one of their great passions to develop a culminating “Passion Project.” Interpretation of this project has taken on the diverse topics of video game programming and design, to engineering designs for flood mitigation in North Dakota, to

philanthropic pursuits that raise funds for important causes, to motivational speaking at elementary schools, to the production and curation of a grand public art exhibition, and much more. At the end of this class, students present their findings to an authentic audience of expert professionals, adult, family and faculty at an organized reception. The Telementor Program has served as a valuable and meaningful resource for students at Preston Middle School . This collaborative program assumes the role of added assistance for teachers and students, by offering up extra support. I have observed many of my students' mentors encourage greater depth, complexity and sophistication of bigger, more purposeful ideas. With mentors acting as a rudder, students are inspired to extensively conceptualize and reflect with intent. I have personally witnessed in these mentor relationships and consideration of authentic, worldly issues and applied problem-solving. The dialogue that is exchanged between many mentors and students has been consistently targeted to content curriculum, method and outcome. The affective support evident in fostering a positive mentor relationship has been proven to be unquestionably beneficial to youth. Furthermore, many of my students are motivated to do "real" work based on the relational connection cultivated with their mentor. My students are energized to go the extra mile and have become intrinsically driven to become a creative producer, rather than simply chasing the dangling "A." I expect quality work and reflection, and the mentors help reinforce this expectation.

Tracey Winey, Media Specialist
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[Reducing Philippine Deforestation](#)

My experience with ITP has been amazing. I was very fortunate to work on a project that involved Amy Schmer and David Neils called the Global Reforestation Project. We had students located in two places: Fort Collins, Colorado and Dumaguete, Philippines. From the beginning, the ITP program was incredible. Within 24 hours all of our students had mentors who spoke their native language! This was huge because our students in the Philippines had to translate every word doc and conversation when working with the Fort Collins students and it was time consuming and difficult for them. To have mentors communicate in their native language allowed them to focus on researching and proposing solutions. For all of our students, the mentor piece was critical. Our students researched causes of deforestation and shared the causes with their mentors. The mentors then pushed on the students to think more critically and evaluate other causes. The students also repeated this process when proposing solutions. The students quickly learned that their correspondence with their mentors required effective communication skills and well thought out ideas. The students were engaged by an authentic audience and encouraged by having personal and knowledgeable feedback. The students were excited and motivated by their mentors. The mentors also provided experts in the forestation field that surpassed my knowledge. I am grateful for the mentors. This process fostered authentic learning and global problem solving. The students were empowered and took charge of their own learning. Every student who participated in the Global Reforestation Project increased their STEM confidence and competence. Thank you ITP for advancing education!

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