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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



### **Big Lake High School Named National Leader in Work-based Learning**

BIG LAKE, Minn. - April 26, 2019 - Big Lake High School strives to create college and career readiness opportunities for all students through work-based learning, including successfully placing students in apprenticeships to learn practical and theoretical aspects of highly-skilled occupations. The program called REAL (Relevant Experience Apprenticeship Learning) provides all students opportunities to gain exposure and experience through exploration in the field of their choosing through registered apprenticeships. REAL is made possible through Big Lake School District's partnership with Project Lead The Way (PLTW). Big Lake High School is an early adopter of youth apprenticeships powered by PLTW, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Labor.

The REAL program has received numerous awards in 2018 including the Star of Innovation Award, Bridge Award for Resources Training & Solutions, the Arconic Foundation Grant for Robotics and is a leader in the implementation of youth apprenticeships powered by PLTW. In a partnership with Hanna Klimmek, EDFP Community Development Director for the City of Big Lake, the REAL Program has received the Local Government Innovation Award for apprentice learning.

The registered apprenticeship program provides a comprehensive apprenticeship skills and knowledge framework that schools and industry can customize to meet local apprenticeship needs. The PLTW National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards were developed in conjunction with the information technology, engineering, and biomedical sectors; facilitates an easier and faster implementation of a registered apprenticeship program; and can be adopted and used by PLTW schools and business partners to engage PLTW high school students in apprenticeship opportunities.

PLTW is a nonprofit organization that provides a transformative learning experience for PreK-12 students and teachers across the U.S. PLTW empowers students to develop in-demand, transportable knowledge and skills through pathways in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science.

“Students need opportunities where they can experience professional environments that drive their enthusiasm, excitement and learning,” says Principal Bob Dockendorf. “The apprenticeship model provides exposure to industries we might not otherwise recognize in our surrounding communities.”

Currently more than 7 million open jobs are available in the United States, exceeding the number of job seekers. Many vacancies remain unfilled because job creators cannot find job seekers with the necessary skills. Apprenticeships provide paid, relevant workplace experiences and opportunities to develop skills that job creators demand.

“Administration is committed to expanding apprenticeships and workforce investment across all industries,” said U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta. “Apprenticeship is a proven way to help Americans learn the skills they need for good, safe, family-sustaining jobs.”

The Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system have identified six career clusters that include Business Management and Administration; Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Arts, Communications and Information Systems; Human Services; Health Science Technology; and Engineering, Manufacturing and Technology. Big Lake High School’s Work-based Learning Coordinators Matt Vogel and Wade Olson have identified businesses and organizations in the Big Lake area to connect students with experiences in their chosen field. Participants in the program have shadowed in career fields such as airplane mechanics, human resources, nursing, and even mortuary science.

Students who participate in this program will sign with the organization they are mentoring with. Signing opportunities bring businesses, students, staff, parents, and the community together to give the newly-signed apprentice the same amount of enthusiasm that athletes enjoy when signing with a college or professional team. “By participating in signings, we see instant pride for what is taking place and what is about to take place for students and parents in the future,” says Dockendorf. This fall signing day is October 3, 2019 and businesses are encouraged to participate.

Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, Big Lake High School students will have the opportunity to participate in PLTW Engineering courses and earn college credit. Unique partnerships with local companies give students additional opportunities to gain real-world experience through registered apprenticeships. In partnership with Lisi Medical and ARCONIC Engineering, select PLTW students will be accepted into a paid apprenticeship as an Engineering Assistant. Both Lisi Medical and ARCONIC have contributed greatly to the development of this program and dedicated their expertise to create learning plans for students that align with PLTW and the U.S. Department of Labor National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards.

Businesses interested in partnering with Big Lake High School can contact Principal Bob Dockendorf at 763-262-2547 or by email [b.dockendorf@biglakeschools.org](mailto:b.dockendorf@biglakeschools.org).

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**About Big Lake School District:**

Big Lake School District is comprised of two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school, with an approximate population of 3,100 students. For more information about Big Lake School District, visit <http://www.biglakeschools.org>

**About PLTW**

Project Lead The Way (PLTW) is a nonprofit organization that provides a transformative learning experience for PreK-12 students and teachers across the U.S. PLTW empowers students to develop in-demand, transportable knowledge and skills through pathways in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science. PLTW's teacher training and resources support teachers as they engage their students in real-world learning. Approximately 11,500 elementary, middle, and high schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia offer PLTW programs. For more information on Project Lead The Way, visit [pltw.org](http://pltw.org).