At the White House Science Fair earlier this year, US2020, an organization aimed at creating the high-tech workforce of tomorrow, designated seven communities, including the Research Triangle Park (RTP), as the winners of a national competition to encourage mentoring in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Sponsored by Cisco and launched at the Clinton Global Initiative, the US2020 City Competition challenged cities to develop innovative models for dramatically increasing the number of STEM professionals mentoring and teaching students through hands-on projects. US2020 is specifically focused on increasing STEM opportunities and excitement for girls, underrepresented minorities, and children from low-income families.

US2020 RTP, a coalition of 41 corporate sponsors and educational organizations providing the mentors and leadership to make this project successful, has been named the grand prize winner. The other winners are Chicago, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Wichita, and Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Winning teams will share $1 million in financial, consulting, and staff support over the next year to launch their plans. The plans developed by these seven cities and regions represent some of the country’s
most innovative thinking in engaging underrepresented and underserved youth in STEM.

US2020 RTP will facilitate hands-on, high-impact mentorships for K-16 students in Durham and Wake counties. Nonprofits, schools, and universities willing to partner can create opportunities through an online mentor-matching platform.

Non-profits and other agencies with a mission of bolstering STEM education are helping to guide and refine the mentor relationships between the schools and corporate sponsors. Partners that will host direct-to-school mentor opportunities starting this fall include the Wake Young Women’s Leadership Academy (WYWLA) and Wake Young Men’s Leadership Academy (WYMLA).

Diane Cadavid, WYWLA’s STEM and Career Development Coordinator, is excited to participate. “STEM mentoring with US2020 is an extraordinary opportunity for students to see that there are adults who want to help them. Mentors are not only exposing our students to the many different career pathways, but they are helping students see their own potential and challenging them to go further.”

Last week’s project launch event at RTP’s headquarters showcased the hands-on and interactive STEM learning on which the US2020 model is based. Guests engaged in activities such as building stomp rockets and were also introduced to mentorship opportunities from a selection of nonprofit partners through a “speed dating” activity where prospective mentors were able to browse potential mentor opportunities.

US2020 RTP, which emerged from a White House call to generate big, innovative solutions to our STEM education challenge, is just one example of the new opportunities for our state’s companies and communities to collaborate.

Save the date! Join leaders and learners from across North Carolina this February 9-10 at the 30th Annual Emerging Issues Forum. Our theme this year is “Innovation Reconstructed: How will our companies and communities innovate to compete in a future of accelerating everything?” Registration opens November 3, 2014.
Kendall Hageman  
Education Policy Manager  
kendall_hageman@ncsu.edu  
Twitter Handle: @Education_IEI

Do you know a teacher who is working hard to help students succeed? Let us know, and s/he could be featured in the next education issue!