

For Immediate Release

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**Ripon Receives National Recognition for Commitment to Empowering Students
*Named a distinguished district for STEM and career learning program***

Ripon, WI - The Ripon Area School District (RASD) announced today that it has been recognized as a Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Distinguished District for providing broad access to transformative learning opportunities for students through its PLTW programs. It is one of just over 30 districts across the U.S. to receive this honor and one of only five districts in Wisconsin. [PLTW](#) is a nonprofit organization that serves millions of K-12 students and teachers in over 10,500 schools across the U.S.

“This honor is something to celebrate. These programs inspire and engage students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and prepare them with the knowledge and skills they’ll need to succeed in any career path they choose,” said Superintendent Dr. Mary Whitrock. “Since PLTW has been introduced in the district, students are expressing an increased interest in careers in engineering and robotics. They are also improving their critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills.”

The PLTW Distinguished District recognition honors districts committed to increasing student access, engagement, and achievement in their PLTW programs. To be eligible for the designation, RASD had to have had 20 percent or more of its students in each grade, K-12, participate in a PLTW program during the 2016-17 school year. Ripon is unique in that PLTW is offered to students in all our schools, charter and non charter, in all grades K-12. All students in grade K-8 participate every year in the Launch and Gateway programs. At the high school level, all sophomores are required to take the Principles of Engineering course and have the option to take a PLTW Engineering Pathway and/or Computer Science Pathway which offer additional PLTW courses to them over their HS career.

"Throughout the Ripon Area School District, students in grades K-12 find themselves more actively engaged in science, technology and engineering through Project Lead the Way (PLTW). This program empowers students to adopt a design-thinking mindset through compelling activities, projects, and problems that build upon each other and relate to the world around them. Our teachers have

enthusiastically embraced teaching PLTW, especially after witnessing student excitement and knowledge acquisition," noted Chrissy Damm, Curriculum Director.

Through PLTW programs, students develop STEM knowledge as well as in-demand, transportable skills that they will use both in school and for the rest of their lives, on any career path they take. As PLTW students progress through grades K-12, they are empowered to engage in problem solving and process thinking, develop technical knowledge and skills, build communication skills, and explore career opportunities.

The program is possible through the support of the School Board, Curriculum Director Chrissy Damm, our principals, Technology Department and our staff. The teachers that make this program a success include all of our elementary teachers; Project Launch Master Teachers Liz Wargula and Janet Ernst; Lead Teachers Keycia Dahlvig and Cindi Pokorny; PLTW Gateway Program Lead Teachers Melissa Schultz, Renee Scoff, and Chris Lalor; all Catalyst teachers; and PLTW Lead Teachers Nick Goeldi, Jesse Schwingle, and Jon Potratz.

Ripon has been fortunate to have significant community partners such as Alliance Laundry and Ripon Printers helping to build the program through donations and programming support. "The partnership is paying off. We are very excited about our collaboration with area businesses and know their help has been a great asset in getting us to this point in our journey to build the workforce in our area," said Superintendent Dr. Mary Whitrock.

RASD offers PLTW Launch (K-5), PLTW Gateway (6-8), and PLTW Engineering and Computer Science at Ripon High School and Lumen Charter High School. "It is a great honor to recognize Ripon for its commitment to students," said Vince Bertram, President and CEO of PLTW. "These educators are leaders in what school should look like, and they should be very proud of ensuring students have the knowledge and skills to be career ready and successful on any career path they choose."

The Ripon Area School District is part of a community of K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and corporate and philanthropic partners across the country united around a passion for providing students with inspiring, engaging, and empowering learning opportunities. The Milwaukee School of Engineering is our state partner for program training and support. For more information about PLTW's recognition program, visit pltw.org/our-programs/program-recognition.

For more information on the Ripon Area School District's PLTW programs or to set up a school visit, contact Chrissy Damm, Curriculum Director at (920)-748-4600.

Photo Opportunity of crane with three students

This past month, the 8th grade engineering class worked in teams to design wood frame cranes and then tested the cranes' capacity to lift weight. Groups learned about strong structures and the use of compound pulley system to assist in the lifting process. The goal of the project was to hoist 100 lbs. from the floor to the table top they were working on. The contest was called the "Race to Hundred". One group's crane has lifted close to twice the weight lifted by any crane in the past. At 300 lbs, the technology education (tech ed) instructor, Chris Lalor, wisely had to tell the students it was not safe to test the crane at any heavier weights with the current setup.

Mr. Lalor noted, "That crane might be on display for quite a few years. I don't think I have ever had to tell a group to stop testing because of a potential safety issue with the amount of weight before. I couldn't believe that they had 300 lbs off the floor. From my memory, I don't believe I have had more than four-five groups since I started the project many years ago get past 150 lbs. The goal was always a hundred so safety was never an issue. This group of students, Adam Banerjee, Jules Messitte, and Isaac Whitrock definitely exceeded whatever I thought was possible on this activity."

Please contact Dr. Mary Whitrock at (920) 748-4600 with any comments or concerns.

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