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For further information:

Diane Mangiante

dianemangiante@gmail.com

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Welcome to PEP Talk, Public Education Partners' column that highlights the work of Aiken County's public school teachers and explores issues of importance to them, to their students, and to all of us who benefit from what is going on in our classrooms now and in the future.

Recently you may have read in the *Aiken Standard* that PEP will be encouraging the use of hands-on STEM kits in the elementary schools. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math. The expansion of our work in this area is possible through the support of major funding from the Community Foundation for the CSRA, other local donations, and, of course, by the educators who implement the kits in their classrooms.

In a world where all of us, and even our youngest children, are using their hands to scroll up, scroll down and click [HERE](#), we can forget the important role of our hands in the process of learning. Scrolling is not the same as building or measuring or planting. Multiple studies have shown that hands-on learning – actually manipulating things – leads to more activity in areas of the brain important for memory, creativity, and deep learning. This is why it is so important that our teachers want to include more hands-on learning through STEM kits in our district's classrooms – and why PEP is responding to that need.

Here's an example of a recent PEP Classroom Innovation Grant awarded to Monica Petersen, a 4-K teacher at Gloverville Elementary School. Ms. Petersen used her grant to purchase a greenhouse for her classroom, along with a grow light, seeds, soil and pots. There may be an app to teach small children about how plants grow, but how much better it was for her students to actually plant the seeds, take responsibility for watering and turning the light on and off, measure the plants, draw the plants, and compare the plants based on their growing conditions. At the end of the year, when the weather was right, the children took the plants outside and put them in the ground. Taking care of something and waiting for results to come from one's work are also important skills children need. This STEM project builds those as well.

PEP applauds our educators who go above and beyond to help students not just learn facts, but to imagine, and build, and wait, and analyze. As PEP provides more STEM kits to the elementary classrooms, we hope you will join us in this work, encouraging teachers by putting tools in their hands that make a difference.

To learn more or support PEP programs, visit PEPAiken.org or follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

Public Education Partners: Harnessing the power of our community to enhance student learning and support educators in the Aiken County Public School District.