Washington students need strong science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills to pursue Washington’s highest demand career pathways that lead to family-wage jobs – from controls programming, to construction, to 21st-century manufacturing. Over the past few years, students in the West Sound STEM Network have received cradle-to-career STEM education opportunities thanks to our partnership with the Washington State Legislature.

**STEM CAFES**
West Sound STEM Network implemented a comprehensive, collaborative, and broad dive into STEM teacher professional development by partnering with higher education, industry members, Tribes, military, and non-profits to deliver 58 STEM training workshops for teachers, with 39 of them as virtual in response to COVID guidelines. As a result, teachers expanded their STEM knowledge and leadership skills which directly increased access and opportunities for new skills for students.

**COMPUTER SCIENCE**
West Sound STEM Network received a third year of computer science grant funding from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The opportunities provided by the OSPI Computer Science grant will continue to have high impact in our region. The grants support districts, schools, and nonprofits to train teachers and integrate computational skills into classrooms. West Sound STEM will continue to connect teachers directly with industry leaders who use computational thinking on a daily basis. In addition, the grants expand computer science access to groups of students who have historically been underrepresented in computer science programs and careers.

**CAREER CONNECT WASHINGTON: BUILDING PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS**
West Sound STEM Network is one of the nine regional Career Connect Washington Networks and received $125,000 in funding from Career Connect Washington. Regional Networks are the key to scaling career connected learning statewide and as a Regional Network, West Sound STEM Network convenes and manages regional, cross-industry partnerships that will lead to expansion of opportunities for Washington youth.

During the time of the coronavirus pandemic, we continue to innovate using the cutting edge tools to create meaningful, memorable experiences for our communities. For example, with support from Career Connect Washington, West Sound STEM Network, in partnership with Tacoma STEAM Network and OSPI, co-developed and launched virtual Controls Technology Educator externships. The unique opportunity immersed over 100 teachers from across the region in the basic concepts of Control Systems Technology by using
models such as games, industry tools, and simulations as analogs for how sensors trigger complex decisions and actions.

**CREATING A POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT CULTURE: CATALYZING FINANCIAL AID COMPLETION**

The immediate need for equitable access to earning a postsecondary credential, especially for populations furthest from opportunity, is highly dependent upon FAFSA/WASFA completion. Yet, students from poverty, students of color, and students from remote and rural areas have significantly lower FAFSA completion rates. This is a glaring example of inequity and multiple West Sound STEM Network partners are engaged in closing this gap. West Sound STEM Network, in partnership with Washington STEM, regional partners and state agencies, deployed a comprehensive and systemic analysis of FAFSA completion barriers and comprehensive supports—by partnering with leaders of historically marginalized populations and with the other nine STEM Networks. Together, they will convened a wide range of education, community, government, and other leaders to co-develop a model for change. The time is now—students cannot wait any longer.

**THANK YOU**

We thank the Washington State Legislature for their engagement with STEM education issues and the West Sound STEM Network. Our collective and ongoing impact on Washington students means that every student, from our earliest learners to those on their way to a STEM career, will be prepared to thrive in Washington’s innovation economy. Our collaboration with the Legislature is essential as we work to strengthen our education systems so that students in our region can thrive and contribute to the vitality of their communities.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Kareen Borders at borders@skschools.org