



FEMA Region 7 Provides Internship with Olathe Schools Public Safety Academy Seniors to Prepare Local Communities for Disasters

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In the Spring of 2021, the FEMA Region 7 Preparedness Division and the Olathe Public Schools 21st Century Public Safety Academy at Olathe West High School collaborated on the development of curriculum that would enhance preparedness for middle school students and their families. Eight 21st Century Public Safety Academy seniors were mentored and provided an internship opportunity with Preparedness Officer Linda Davis and Community Liaison Ryan Lowry-Lee. The goal of this internship was to develop lessons focused on preparedness utilizing the STEP program and curriculum available on the Ready.gov website. The goal was two-fold, to not only teach the participating seniors about preparedness but also to extend that learning by teaching the material to other teen students within the Olathe School District. There has been brain-based research related to the effectiveness of teaching as a catalyst for the actual transfer of new learning. Therefore, instructors from the academy, Davis and Lowry-Lee felt that this endeavor would best be served by having the senior students develop new lessons to deliver to the middle schoolers using the materials provided online in the STEP program.



The seniors who participated in this internship had four years of extensive training in the first responder industry. In fact, the Public Safety Academy has two strands of study that students can participate in beginning their freshmen year at Olathe West High School. Strands of study include Law Enforcement and Fire Rescue. Students selected for the academy their freshmen year

spend a total of four years participating in Kansas State Career Technical Education (CTE) curriculum and hands on experiences that prepare them to be a first responder. These courses are taught by current industry professionals from the City of Olathe Fire Department and Police Department as well as many other advisory partners within the local community. Students can graduate from the academy with up to twenty-one



hours of college credit. In fact, several professional certifications are offered to the Fire Rescue students. Upon graduation from high school these students are ready to test for many of their firefighting certifications and are ready for employment by fire departments across the state.

The eight students participating in the Internship with FEMA Region 7 were a mix of Law Enforcement students and Fire Rescue students from the academy. Due to covid restrictions, academy instructors, preparedness officer Davis and community liaison Lowry-Lee met online with senior students throughout the development and delivery of the four lessons over a two-month period. The lessons that were developed by the seniors focused on preparedness. Lesson topics targeted the common disasters that might affect the local population in Olathe, Kansas. The topics included preparedness for disasters caused by tornadoes, flooding, and fires. A culminating lesson was also developed that provided an overview and assessment of effectiveness of the three lessons that were taught to the middle school students. During the development and delivery of the lessons senior students included many of their favorite in-class learning technologies. These technologies helped create an interactive experience for the middle school students during the lessons. Web-based virtual tours of real disaster sites, Kahoot games, interactive tools in ZOOM and tools located in the STEP curriculum were used to create an online atmosphere of fun and meaning for the students. One of the favorite tools implemented in the lessons was the flood plain locator which allowed middle school students to locate their own residence and determine their risk factor for flooding.

As stated, the focus of the internship with FEMA Region 7 was not only to provide a solid foundation for public safety academy seniors in preparedness but also to share this foundation

with middle school students in the school district. It appears that this partnership and experience was definitely a success as lesson data revealed a mean score of 86% retention for those that directly participated in the culminating lesson assessments. Academy instructors and senior students would agree that this partnership with FEMA Region 7 really made a difference in the community. Our hope is that we can continue this partnership as we move forward in the



development of the internship experience. Both the Olathe School District 21st Century Public Safety Academy and FEMA Region 7 realize that they have a common goal to include the youth of local communities as a catalyst to prepare for the future.

