

KENOSHA NEWS

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These students are all business

KTEC-West pupils form company while in summer school

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Company curriculum



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY KEVIN POIRIER

From left, Skylar Farr, Sophia Steinke, Catherine Casadont and Emma Anderson brainstorm ideas as they get ready for departmental presentations Wednesday for MEME Corp, the company students created at KTEC-West.

With time fast approaching for MEME Corp to bring its customizable backpack to market, company departments scrambled Wednesday afternoon to finalize a business plan, create an accountability report and prepare a pitch to potential investors.

Members of some departments appeared more in tune with each other this day than their counterparts in other areas.

That becomes apparent as team leaders took turns in front of their company peers, CEO and advisers to present departmental reports.

This was the fifth of what will be 13 scheduled meetings, including two each that took place last Wednesday and Thursday. Other than that, each meeting runs two hours weekly.

Mentoring opportunity

None of what he observes appears unusual to Michael Polzin, CEO of Leeward Business Advisers, 5455 Sheridan Road. He has more than 20 years experience mentoring, helping to launch products or services, leveraging technology solutions and building business plans for clients.

"I would say it mirrors it very, very closely what we see especially in startup businesses or businesses going through some type of change, where there is a lot of internal turmoil and difficult decision-making to do to maintain success," Polzin said.

Then again, maybe it's just a tad bit out of the ordinary.

After all, "here" is Kenosha School of Technology Enhanced Curriculum-West, 5710 32nd Ave., where 27 summer school students comprise the whole of MEME Corp. They formed their company with the help of Polzin's mentorship and a number of parents and other adult volunteers during four meetings last week.

The students range from those entering sixth grade to others who just graduated eighth grade and will begin high school this fall. The dollars-and-cents side of the equation may not add up to the kinds of risk and exposure grownup entrepreneurs face, but, on a comparative scale, these student-entrepreneurs are no less under the gun to get the job done.

By now, the students have self-determined which department to join: management/administration, supply chain/manufacturing/quality control, marketing, finance or sales/customer service. Last week, they whittled down product choices to a pair of possibilities, with a drawstring backpack buyers can customize selected by majority vote.

They also voted on the company name, which stands for "Major Enterprise Monitoring Entrepreneurs."

"They have a business plan," Polzin said. "They're going to raise funding to support their marketing campaign to develop and generate consumer interest in their product, while simultaneously beginning to purchase raw materials to begin the product manufacturing."

Junior Achievement model

The model is supplied by Junior Achievement of Wisconsin. With the start of the program at KTEC-West, Polzin joined the board of the Racine and Kenosha counties JA chapter.

He moved around the school library asking pointed questions as he stopped at desks grouped together by department: What's your plan for using social media? What about customer satisfaction? How are you going to measure that? Who is your target audience for marketing? Who do you think is your main audience to buy these? What are your revenue targets? What are the variables involved in getting there?

Several students asked questions of their own.

Polzin pointed out how departments often step on each other's turf. He talked about "silo-to-silo communication," company flow, figuring out the end goal, making the sales needed to earn a profit, crafting their 10-second "elevator pitch" to sell investors on financing it.

"Actually they've gelled well together," Polzin, 39, a father of two teens, said after the students filed out of class. "The biggest thing for us is to provide students a real, context-based opportunity to learn. So much time is spent learning from the book and teaching to the test, which is not transferable to those 21st century skills they need.

"Out of the Junior Achievement program," he added, "we expect these students to gain real life experience working effectively as a cohort, learn what it means to work with a larger team, and that they walk away inspired and self-confident — which you can't get from a book."

Said Polzin: "It's been said many times that you learn more from failure. Projects like this provide that safe environment to explore, fail, learn, do it all over again."