



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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City of Columbia & Columbia Urban League Kick off Annual Summer Youth Work Program

More than 30 students began their summer break on Monday at various sites in the City of Columbia as part of the Columbia Urban League's Science Technology Enrichment Program (STEP).

STEP, formerly known as the Summer Work Experience Leadership Program (SWELP), is a transition from the Summer Work Experience Leadership Program, which was an evidence-based, best-practice career development program for primarily disadvantaged and underserved youth between the ages of 14 and 19.

This summer, the Columbia Urban League will provide work experiences that include exposure to global technology and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) skills necessary to obtain and maintain gainful employment in the emerging global workforce.

The City of Columbia, which has been a sponsor of the program since 2010, has provided 23 sites for students to gain valuable work experience. Students will work two weeks per session from June 11 through August 3. More than 100 students have signed up to work during the summer.

"I'm thankful for valued organizations like the Columbia Urban League that give our youth the opportunities they need to thrive," said Mayor Benjamin. "A laser-like focus on the urgent need for STEM skills will prepare these young leaders to compete and succeed in life."

J.T. McLawhorn, President and CEO of the Columbia Urban League, said the program, which was started in 1984 is a way to deter youth from violence and expose them to careers that will help them compete in today's workforce.

"It's imperative that we prepare young people for these jobs (in science, math, engineering and technology)," McLawhorn said. "It gives a kid the opportunity to not be

caught up in gangs and violence. If there was ever a need for the enrichment program it's now."

"Our law enforcement is doing an excellent job but they can't solve the problem by themselves," he said. "It's going to take a lot of moving parts and we think this particular program is going to be real important in getting young people connected (to global career opportunities)."

JaQuan Austin-Inabinett, a 17-year-old Dreher High School senior, participated in the summer youth program for three years gaining skills he said has prepared him for life after high school.

"Programs like STEP are important to have because technology is advancing and we should advance our knowledge of STEM so that we can work with these advanced technologies," Austin-Inabinett said. "(The program) also helps keep our generation out of trouble and (focused on) getting a higher education."

Austin-Inabinett said he recommends the program to anyone who has an interest in gaining some job experience.

"Being in the SWELP program (now STEP) has taught me so much about the real world at young age," he said.

For more information about the STEP program, contact the Columbia Urban League at 803-799-8150.

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