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HIGH SCHOOL PROJECTS AIM TO CHANGE INDUSTRY LANDSCAPE

*More Than 1,400 High School Students Developed Concepts for New Products
Through Annual Illinois Science & Technology Institute Program*

April 26, 2018 – (CHICAGO, IL) – Solar-powered irrigation in Bangladesh, a chatbot to aid communication between deaf and hearing people, and a backpack that wirelessly charges a cell phone — all products developed by Illinois high school students for the Illinois Science and Technology Institute STEM Challenge on Apr. 26 at Motorola Mobility in the Merchandise Mart.

This year, the program paired 16 of the state's most innovative companies — Caterpillar, AbbVie and State Farm, to name a few — with 27 high schools, where more than 1,400 students tackled an authentic, real-world business problem facing the company.

Over the course of a semester, students innovated alongside mentors from each of these companies and came up with new ideas, products, prototypes and designs.

For instance, Lisle-based electronics maker Molex challenged students at Oak Park and River Forest High School to imagine a world without cords and chargers. Students developed ideas ranging from wireless charging tables to a backpack with designated wireless charging pockets.

Meanwhile, at Downers Grove North High School, nine ComEd mentors guided nearly 75 students as they developed renewable energy ideas. Their ideas included harnessing energy from a bicycle to charge a portable battery, a solar-powered school bus, and purifying water with solar energy.

And for State Farm, students from Normal Community High School, Normal Community West High School and Bloomington High School are developing ideas for products like anti-lock picking alarms, home-security smart speaker applications and mechanisms to block carbon monoxide build-up.

“These are transformative experiences for a young person,” said Mark Harris, president and CEO of the Illinois Science and Technology Institute. “In many cases, this is a student’s first exposure to the workplace, much less the concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation. Our



goal is to help build Illinois' STEM talent pipeline by opening up the walls of the classroom and making these industry connections to cultivate the next wave of problem solvers and innovators."

Thanks to AbbVie, one of these ideas has become reality.

In 2016, a team at North Chicago High School proposed building a school-based health clinic to address low vaccination rates. The prior year, about 200 students had been prohibited from coming to school because they hadn't gotten their state-mandated vaccines by the mid-October deadline. Last summer, 110 AbbVie volunteers worked alongside the students to turn that idea into a reality, and the clinic opened in October 2017.

"AbbVie's philanthropic efforts have always included a focus on improving access to education, including in our own backyard," said Melissa Walsh, vice president of AbbVie Foundation. "For our employees, working with students to fuel their passion for science and innovative thinking is an incredibly rewarding way to give back to our community. The students of North Chicago inspire us on so many levels, and it's a privilege to help them shine through our STEM challenge mentorship program."

What: The 5th annual STEM Challenge Student Showcase

When: Thurs., April 26, 8:15 a.m.-1 p.m.

Where: Motorola Mobility in the Merchandise Mart

What to Expect: One team from each of the 27 high schools will present their proposed solutions to a pressing company problem. Students, mentors and ISTI staff will be available for broadcast and print interviews.

About the Illinois Science and Technology Institute:

The Illinois Science & Technology Institute (ISTI) is a STEM-focused nonprofit that provides programs and partnerships to connect companies with classrooms. ISTI supports schools and companies who want to impact the next generation of innovators. We are a bridge between the classroom and real world that facilitates collaboration between students and industry mentors. For more information, visit www.istcoalition.org/education-programs/ and follow us on twitter @istcoalition.

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