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KID Museum’s Invent The Future Challenge Empowers Students to Become the Inventors, Innovators, and Creators of Tomorrow

KID Museum’s fourth annual middle school maker challenge, the *Invent the Future Challenge*, launches this winter, at a time when the need for innovative thinking and creative problem-solving has never been more urgent. Pandemic-related learning loss has had a devastating effect, deepening the need for hands-on curriculum that activates youth as creative thinkers and engaged learners.

“Students need to use their creativity and get excited about learning again,” says Cara Lesser, KID Museum Founder and Executive Director. “The Invent the Future Challenge engages kids in creating solutions to real-world problems, while developing skills they will rely on for the rest of their lives.”

At a time when so much in their lives has been turned upside-down, students and educators will find the challenge more relevant than ever. Designed to cultivate innovative thinking, technical and social emotional skills, and an interest in STEM, the Invent the Future Challenge is on track to reach over 1,000 students this year, with many already signed on to participate. The Challenge is open to students from across the region, and draws teams from both public and private schools. The museum partners with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to provide a series of six skill-building workshops led by KID Museum educators, along with professional development and other supports for teachers, to students from high-needs schools, ensuring that those from under resourced communities have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way.

“We’re so grateful for the partnership we have with KID Museum,” says Dr. Jack Smith, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools. “Through the Invent the Future Challenge and other KID Museum programs we’ve been able to provide engaging, innovative learning during this difficult time — and beyond.”

This year, KID Museum has adapted the Challenge to fit all-virtual or hybrid settings. Despite this necessary shift, the program is more comprehensive than ever, providing 10 hours of hands-on, maker-based classroom curriculum in addition to the six skill-building workshops, integrated professional development, and a facilitated professional learning community.

The Invent the Future Challenge encourages sixth, seventh, and eighth graders to address a community or global problem by developing, designing, and prototyping an innovative solution to the question: *What will you make to protect life on this planet?* — a question that takes on new meaning as students are encouraged to think about global health as part of our environment. In past years, students have collaborated with their peers to invent saltwater purification mechanisms, underwater trash collectors, and forest fire detection systems.

The program is based on KID Museum’s “Mind of a Maker” framework, which focuses students on building technical skills like design thinking, engineering, fabrication, and coding, as well as social emotional skills such as collaboration, exploration, perseverance, and empathy, by tackling real problems that face our world. These are the skills and learning approaches — essential to combatting learning loss — that often get lost in virtual learning, and that KID Museum is actively addressing.

The museum’s unique approach to real-time virtual learning, which combines off-screen, hands-on building with on-screen collaboration and support, was successfully piloted this past summer when they partnered with MCPS to deliver a multi-week summer school curriculum to over 4,000 elementary school students.

Says Dr. Smith, “Career success increasingly depends upon creative problem-solving and innovative thinking. Our partnership with KID Museum allows us to work together to strengthen these abilities in our students so they are prepared to thrive in the workforce of the future.”

With the threat of a “lost generation” of students (and the ripple effect that creates on schools, the future workforce, and the community), innovative, engaging programs like the Invent the Future Challenge take on a new urgency in preparing our children to invent the future.

About KID Museum

KID Museum is the region’s pioneering experiential museum and educational makerspace. We foster the “Mind of a Maker” and empower the next generation with the skills to invent the future. Through hands-on programs, we challenge young people to be active makers, building agency, confidence, and creative problem-solving skills. We design and deliver programs across the full continuum of learning for kids in pre-k through middle school in partnership with educators and schools. Our weekend onsite programs, community events, and live, virtual sessions

encourage families to learn and explore together. We are part of a growing movement to remake education for every young person, putting them in the driver's seat of their learning and trusting them to be agents of change. Find out more about the [Invent the Future Challenge](#).

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