



For Immediate Release March 18, 2026

Contact: Beth Anne Piehl

Char-Em ISD Director of Communications
231.330.5701 piehlb@charemisd.org

On board!

Char-Em ISD receives \$50,000 award for innovative STEM initiative that will have students building recreational boards in career tech

Many teenagers surely would get on board with being able to design and build ready-to-ride skateboards, longboards, snowboards and paddle boards during the school day. With the help of a new \$50,000 grant, students in Char-Em ISD Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs will be able to start doing just that.

“‘Gone Boarding’ is a national program with curricular resources to provide students with a real-world project and get them active in outdoor sports,” said Linnea Gibson, K-12 Science Consultant for Char-Em ISD and the Northern Michigan Learning Consortium.

The grant funding was announced as part of a larger Michigan investment in STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math - that is bringing \$800,000 to education agencies. Char-Em ISD will coordinate a regional professional learning committee for the new Gone Boarding initiative, including educators from districts in Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle ESD and Northwest Education Services in Traverse City. This committee will help provide learning opportunities for educators and students to dive into Gone Board activities and projects.

The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity’s (LEO) MiSTEM Network announced the funding as the first step in its expanded \$1.75 million competitive Playbook Mini Grant program.

In Northwest Michigan, Gibson said the receipt of this grant launches the Gone Boarding program within existing Career and Technical Education courses - such as woodworking, CAD, graphic design, and marketing - allowing students to design and fabricate boards while collaborating with local partners.

“We have several local partners who are interested and willing to support this program including Little Bay Boards, Woody’s Adventure Sports, Shaggy’s Copper Country Skis, local skateparks, and more,” Gibson said.

Char-Em ISD will coordinate a regional network of trained educators integrating hands-on, project-based STEM learning that deepens student engagement. By the end of the grant period, Gibson said the program will be self-sustained, as students/schools are able to sell their boards or even design boards for local clients or organizations. At the same time, they’ll be providing cohorts of students opportunities for authentic design, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship experiences.

“The program structure allows for it to be self-sustained through the sale of the boards and aims to grow toward designing for local clients who would like to have a custom board or to serve as fundraisers for the programs themselves,” Gibson said.

An added bonus: This initiative will reinforce ecotourism and healthy outdoor activities for teens in northern Michigan. Additional impacts through existing Char-Em ISD programming include a learning experience for K-8 students through Char-Em Street STEM, a camp program within Career Academy for Kids summer camp, and more.

“Another goal of this program in the 4+ year implementation is to host larger events with partners for students encouraging them to engage in more outdoor physical activities, Get Out and Ride, and also support ecotourism in the area,” Gibson said. “This initiative has multiple national partnership opportunities between schools and larger industry partners such as Vans, Burton, Go Pro, and more through competitions, tours, visits, and a Summer Bash.”

The expansion of the state-level grant funds is made possible through a \$1 million contribution from General Motors, which builds on MiSTEM’s existing \$750,000 program and reflects a public-private commitment to preparing Michigan students for STEM careers.

“Every student deserves the chance to build strong STEAM foundations early, because these skills open doors to the high growth careers that can shape their future,” said David Massaron, GM Vice President, Corporate Citizenship. “GM’s partnership with the MiSTEM Network expands hands-on, real-world learning experiences that help young people across Michigan see themselves as future engineers, problem solvers and innovators. When we invest in STEAM pathways, we strengthen the future for the communities we call home.”

The shared commitment to advancing STEM opportunities across Michigan is helping to build a stronger, more equitable future for students, educators, and communities statewide.

“By investing in STEM education, Michigan is investing in our future workforce,” said Megan Schrauben, MiSTEM Executive Director. “MiSTEM will continue to provide updates and outcomes of this partnership, as we work together to strengthen STEM education across the state and close talent gaps.”

The 17 grantees in this round of funding are:

- Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District
- Gull Lake Community Schools
- Buchanan Community Schools-Buchanan High School
- Ypsilanti Community Schools and Lincoln Consolidated Schools
- Wayne-Westland Community Schools
- Utica Community Schools
- Oakland Schools
- Kearsley Community Schools

- Eaton Regional Educational Service Agency
- Kent Intermediate School District
- Cadillac Area Public Schools
- Bay City Public Schools
- Brown City Community Schools
- Alcona Community Schools
- Engadine Consolidated Schools
- North Dickinson County School
- Chassell Township Schools



