

k2i breaks down barriers to STEM education with \$400K donation from 407 ETR

Lassonde program at York U will put money towards programming that will create talent pipeline in STEM and offer opportunities to underrepresented groups

TORONTO, July 25, 2023 – York University’s Lassonde School of Engineering k2i (kindergarten to industry) program is receiving a \$400,000 injection of funds from 407 ETR that will help the program reach its goals of dismantling systemic barriers for underrepresented groups in STEM (science, technology engineering and math) and preparing the next generation for careers in these fields.

The donation was announced at an on-campus event today at the Bergeron Centre for Engineering Excellence where leadership from Lassonde and 407 ETR were on-hand to speak to the importance of the initiative and what this money would mean for the programming offered through k2i.

“We launched the k2i academy three years ago with the idea of bringing STEM learning to life,” says Jane Goodyer, Dean of the Lassonde School of Engineering. “The k2i academy is a sandbox for innovation in STEM education, building a network of collaborative partners, committed to creating systemic change in our education system. With this gift, Lassonde will continue our work to increase equity, diversity and inclusion, and create a talent pipeline in STEM through job-ready training and innovative learning models.”

The donation will be divided equally between two programs, administered by Lisa Cole, Director of the k2i academy.

The first program, the 407 ETR Path2STEM Fund, will support a micro-credentialed Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program. SHSMs allow students to gain experiences and develop skills toward their high school diploma in Ontario while focusing on a specific economic sector. The 407 ETR Path2STEM Fund will be used to create a series of innovative SHSM experiences in engineering and digital technologies. Geared towards diverse learners, the program will prepare students for innovative post-secondary programs and meaningful STEM careers.

407 ETR President & CEO Javier Tamargo says his organization is keen to invest in a highly skilled and diverse workforce that can meet the challenges of tomorrow.

“407 ETR is a company rooted in STEM. In fact, about half of our workforce is employed in a STEM-related position ranging from data analytics and IT to traffic and tolling. These professionals are integral to our business, and so is ensuring that our team is reflective of the

vibrant communities we serve,” says Tamargo. “That starts with doing our part to help foster a diverse talent pool which is why we’re so proud to support the Lassonde School and York University’s work to move more youth into the pipeline towards rewarding academic and professional careers in STEM.”

The second program, the 407 ETR Work Integrated Learning Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) fund, will specifically be geared to help k2i expand its offerings to students underrepresented in STEM, including women, Black and Indigenous youth and those from low-income communities. Since 2020, k2i has been offering paid summer work opportunities for students in grades 10, 11 and 12 while gaining school credit. The programming is done in partnership with the Toronto District School Board, York Region District School Board and Peel District School Board. Students receive 140 hours of paid work with an added opportunity to earn a high school prerequisite credit for STEM pathways while learning skills in coding, design, electronics and more. This year’s on-campus program offered a unique Grade 12 English credit, rooting language and communication in hands-on science and engineering experiences.

Students are empowered to explore, question, wonder and discover through interactive learning experiences to strengthen skills in computational thinking, coding, electronics, engineering design, 3D modeling and creativity. Combining work and learning provides an innovative way for students to explore possibilities in STEM careers, connect with networks and mentors to launch their interests in postsecondary studies, gain experience in developing STEM skills, and strengthen professional skills in communication, collaboration and problem-solving.

“With this generous donation from 407 ETR, we will continue our journey of offering paid educational experiences to underrepresented students in environments that are dynamic, innovative and collaborative,” says Cole. “We’ve already reached 6,000+ youth and offered more than 175,000 hours of learning and we’re thrilled to be able to expand this work and hit our next milestones.”

Since its launch, in June 2020, k2i academy has:

- Developed partnerships with publicly funded school boards with 522,000+ students and 74,000+ staff.
- Employed 400+ high school students and 130+ undergraduate STEM mentors through the Bringing STEM to Life: Work-Integrated Learning program.
- Has seen more than 99 per cent of students successfully complete their credits.

407 ETR has been a supporter of the Lassonde School of Engineering and York for over a decade. In 2013, a donation was made to support the 407 ETR Learning Laboratory, home to pre-laboratory training, theory, and application for a generation of Civil Engineering students.

-30-

About Lassonde School of Engineering

Located in the heart of the multicultural Greater Toronto Area, [Lassonde School of Engineering](#) at York University is home to engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs, representing a diverse community of students, faculty, staff, alumni and partners. With 11 undergraduate programs, seven graduate programs and a host of certificates and accessible study options, Lassonde is shaping the next generation of creators who will tackle the world's biggest challenges and devise creative solutions through interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Lassonde's creators think in big systems rather than small silos, design with people in mind and embrace ambiguity.

About York University

[York University](#) is a modern, multi-campus, urban university located in Toronto, Ontario. Backed by a diverse group of students, faculty, staff, alumni and partners, we bring a uniquely global perspective to help solve societal challenges, drive positive change, and prepare our students for success. York's fully bilingual Glendon Campus is home to Southern Ontario's Centre of Excellence for French Language and Bilingual Postsecondary Education. York's campuses in Costa Rica and India offer students exceptional transnational learning opportunities and innovative programs. Together, we can make things right for our communities, our planet, and our future.

About 407 ETR

Highway 407 ETR is an all-electronic open-access toll highway located in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. The highway spans 108 kilometres from Burlington in the west to Pickering in the east.

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Media Contacts: Emina Gamulin, York University Media Relations, 437-217-6362, egamulin@yorku.ca

407 ETR Contact: media@407etr.com, 416-706-1861

