



A Bridge Between the Energy Sector and Education

For more than 15 years, IPAA's Energy Education Center has facilitated programs such as camps, field trips, competitions, career conferences, teacher training and an extern program.

By **Barry Russell**, Independent Petroleum Association of America

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—Barry Russell, IPAA



Back in 2006, the team at the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) started out small with an initial idea on how it could make a difference in education. The IPAA Educational Foundation began with one high school in east Houston, and 15 years later, it has reached more than 20,000 students in 163 schools and 87 school districts around the U.S. We're proud of the diverse students, both economically and geographically, that we're empowering with our programs. Our pre-pandemic stats are as follows: 61% Hispanic, 26% Black, 8% White and 3% Asian, with 41% of those being female. While COVID-19 has shaken the industry in many ways, it has allowed us to reach an even wider and more diverse group from the standpoint of our programs, as we were forced to virtually connect with educators and students. For me, that's really been the silver lining through all of this. The longstanding relationship we built with educators allowed us to provide them with what they needed when it mattered most.

What is the 'why' behind our outreach to students? It really comes down to ensuring the energy industry attracts the brightest minds over the next decade as the number of jobs in STEM industries, including oil and natural gas and renewables, is expected to grow 50% faster than in non-STEM industries. Our outreach to students empowers them to take control of their future by reassuring them that they belong in our industry while simultaneously introducing them to available careers and encouraging them to reach high to achieve their dreams.

With the support of the IPAA Energy Workforce Education Advisory Board and critical corporate and individual sponsorships, we are achieving an unprecedented level of success. It really is exciting to be a part of, and we're forever grateful for the support of the Energy Workforce & Technology Council (formerly PESA) and Leslie Beyer, the council's CEO as well as Halliburton, specifically Galen Cobb, who have believed in our mission and have been with us for more than a decade.

For more than 15 years, the Education Center has facilitated many programs, including camps, field trips, guest speakers, competitions, career conferences, teacher training and an extern program (to name a few). But like everyone else, in 2020 we were forced to quickly adapt, and for now our key programs are all virtual.

At the high school level, the Education Center grew our annual Exploring Energy conference into a dynamic, ongoing virtual program that launched in January 2021. The Virtual Exploring Energy Program empowers educators and students by encouraging them to delve into the energy industry and its many career fields through a variety of video showcases, virtual tours and virtual visits to the classroom by respected professionals. Students can enter essay and video contests and apply for a completion certificate they can use on college applications and résumés. There are also incentives for educator participation.

Launched in November 2021, a student-led national energy academy is a part of the Virtual Exploring Energy Program. The academy meets once per month and is free to those interested in STEM career fields. Each month students explore different topics related to the energy industry and listen to industry professionals with expertise in that topic. This is another great addition to students' college applications and résumés.

Today there are more than 100 videos available in the repository with more than 6,500 students participating, representing 47 school districts and territories across the country, including as far as Guam (home of Kali, the program's first student prize winner).

At the middle school level, we expanded our digital Permian STEM career exploration program,



Pictured Left:

IPAA's Exploring Energy Program, currently offered virtually, empowers educators and students by encouraging them to delve into the energy industry and its many career fields. The 2019 in-person conference welcomed more than 1,300 high school students from Houston. (Source: IPAA)

Pictured Below:

Students from the Young Women's College Preparatory Academy attended the 2019 Women's Global Leadership Conference in Energy in Houston. This annual women's event in the energy industry focuses on discussing the industry's key environmental, economic, professional development and human capital issues in one setting. The 2020 event attracted more than 10,000 attendees. (Source: IPAA)

called Power Your Future, to 57 counties in Texas and New Mexico. Many of these counties have only one middle school and they often don't have access to this type of innovative educational initiative. In the program, learners engage with interactive content to show them STEM in their world. Virtual career cards are integrated within the digital learning experience that expose students to STEM roles relevant to their interests.

Our Education Center staff's skills and background in working with both industry and educators made this virtual transition happen with ease. Our women-led team of Anne Ford, Sarah Hewitt and Nikki Thomas are seasoned pros. Often when the industry goes straight to education, with the best of intentions, it is like two worlds colliding as they each approach things from very different perspectives. Our team is the bridge that speaks both languages. They have learned what works and know how to be successful.

Nobody wants to relive the hardships of 2020, but we are forging on because what we're doing is important now and for generations to come.

We encourage companies to consider making this program part of their ESG initiatives. Learn more about our programs and how to get involved at IPAA.org/education. ■



About the author: Barry Russell is president and CEO of the IPAA and co-chairman of the IPAA Energy Workforce Education Advisory Board.

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Westside High School hosted a summer camp for incoming petroleum academy freshmen in August 2018. Approximately 40 freshmen and 12 upperclassmen spent their day taking part in team building activities led by InnerWorks Co. Students were tasked to work together to solve fun and fast-paced physical and mental challenges. Throughout the camp, older students worked side by side with the incoming freshmen. The goal of this summer camp was to introduce new students to each other and to older Westside Petroleum Academy alumni so each student would have connections on the first day of school. Students also practiced working in a team and persevering through challenges—skills that are essential for success in high school and beyond. (Source: IPAA)