

Mauston charter school pushing students past fear of failure

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Mauston's iLEAD charter school is working to move students past fear of failure so they can succeed in the economy of tomorrow.

So says Terry Whipple, executive director of the Juneau County Economic Development Corporation and co-founder of iLEAD. He said the school was started in 2012 to help kids prepare for what they're going to face in the future, by "sending them on a journey" to explore what they're most interested in and where they perform best.

It focuses on entrepreneurship and leadership, offering kids in grades 7 - 12 the opportunity for more self-directed learning.

He says the school's curriculum is mostly project-based, pushing students to pursue learning objectives that are most relevant to them. Projects let them research their interest areas under the supervision of instructors charged with making sure the classic curriculum components — math, science, writing skills, etc. — are being covered.

"It's funny; in the Midwest, when you step out to explore an idea, you're on dangerous ground," Whipple said.

Importantly, he says, they're teaching students to be unafraid to fail. Whipple worked previously in Silicon Valley, and he says that West Coast culture of failure being acceptable is a big part of iLEAD.

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