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Lt. Governor learns about Innovation

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CLINTON -- Add Kim Reynolds to the list of people taught at the Clinton High Innovation Labs.

After delivering her speech at the RAIL.ONE grand opening Tuesday, Iowa's Lieutenant Governor stopped at school grounds where she became the spectator. Students showed off their new classroom's capabilities, demonstrating how small group learning alongside access to modern technology benefits them. Then, teacher Wes Golden delivered his presentation of how and why.

Reynolds said she was so impressed she plans to point to CHS as a model for the education movement.

"I haven't seen this at the high school level," she said. "For this school to take the initiative and implement this on their own is phenomenal."

Joined by superintendent Deb Olson, board president Jim McGraw and other educators, Reynolds listened to Golden shed light on the labs' early results. In an effort to align with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, Golden said the school has also found a way to teach important workplace skills to students.

The labs are so effective, he said, that the district is implementing them in construction of the new Clinton Middle School to open this fall.

"As an educator, you're always trying to do what's right by the kids," Golden said. "The pats on the back are always good, but really it's all about doing right by students. It helps validate what we're doing when you're state leadership comes and says this is where you need to go. We're on the right track."

Employers are trending away from the disciplinary knowledge like English and history. Instead they seek what Golden called "soft skills," primarily the ability to problem solve.

While this doesn't do away with core subjects, it has caused CHS to re-think teaching. Golden said he has only heard of two high schools in the nation who are implementing the same practices.

"We should never keep what we do well a secret," he said. "The ultimate goal for me is whatever we can do to help people be better educators we should help them."

Reynolds asked if this strategy will work with lower levels. Golden said innovation classrooms can impact all students, K through 12.

The practices were so advanced that Reynolds said she's going to point more educators in Clinton's direction.

"Clinton was way ahead of us," she said. "When I can visit places like Clinton, I take it back to the STEM council, talk about what they're doing, highlight it, and encourage other school districts to encourage their students to do this across the state."