

LEYDEN HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 212
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DISTRICT 212 BUSINESS INCUBATOR COURSE ADAPTS TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Leyden’s innovative business education incubator course gives students the opportunity to create and develop their products and services. Designed to guide students toward becoming an entrepreneur, successful business experts serve as coaches and mentors as they guide student teams through the process of ideation, market research, and business plan development.

Students gain in-market experience with minimum viable product research and presentations generated by grants given to the student teams. As well as learning about marketing, accounting, and human resource issues, participants study the legal aspects of running a business and ways to prepare for an investor panel presentation.

According to Shannon O’Connor, a business incubator teacher at the West campus, the presentation drives the entrepreneurial spirit by encouraging student teams to pitch their original idea to investors. The goal is to win funding for their business plans and turn their idea into a reality.

“In the past, each team was assigned one mentor,” O’Connor says. “That person would work with that team all year acting as a sounding board and leading students through the process. Business people would come in and teach a class with us in their area of expertise such as legal or marketing.”

But due to the constraints imposed by COVID-19, the process has changed. This semester business mentors record a video, talk about their area of business expertise, and offer students advice based on their work experiences. The videos are filmed on FlipGrid and dubbed the Leyden Incubator Wall of Experts. Students can access the site to view a diverse collection of mentor videos and also request guidance from coaches.

O’Connor says that “given the current environment, we’ve established a board of advisors, one board per school. Recently the mentors were introduced, and student groups benefited from multiple perspectives. Students also learned about each mentor’s area of expertise so they know who to contact should they have questions about a specific topic.”

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