Pitsco Education and SmartGurlz™ Launch Smart Buddies™ Coding Solution to Encourage Diversity in STEM

Design helps more children see themselves in STEM and increases workforce diversity

PITTSBURG, KS (June 24, 2019) – Pitsco Education, in collaboration with SmartGurlz™, today announced the launch of Smart Buddies™ – the newest addition to its K-12 coding and robotics continuum. Core to both companies’ missions to bring quality, approachable, hands-on STEM learning tools to every student, Smart Buddies is a unique new coding solution accompanied by a curriculum that focuses on increasing diversity awareness for third- to fifth-grade students throughout the US and Canada.

The introduction of Smart Buddies coincides with data showing a lack of diversity within the STEM workforce and education:

- Women and minorities make up only 20 percent of the STEM workforce.
- While over a third of black, Latino, and Native American students enter college with an interest in studying STEM, only 16 percent go on to obtain bachelor’s degrees in these fields.
- A gender gap in STEM interest is reported to begin as early as the fourth grade and continues at various milestones throughout a girl’s school trajectory. By high school, only 9 percent of girls are interested in STEM.

Smart Buddies has been created with a diverse set of relatable characters, or “buddies,” on self-balancing, programmable scooters called Siggys™ to enable learners to better envision themselves working in STEM and coding. With a focus on storytelling, the new coding solution leverages the Smart Buddies app, where students are first introduced to their buddies – different role models who have interests in science, engineering, and the arts. These characters address systemic and personal issues such as diversity, race, gender differences, and conflict resolution. Students are then exposed to the basics of block-based coding by controlling the movements of their characters on their Siggys. Exercises include problem-solving techniques that cover fundamental coding concepts such as sequences, loops, events, conditionals, functions, and variables.

“Everything we do at Pitsco Education is rooted in providing future-relevant skills for all learners, regardless of their race, gender, or socioeconomic background,” said Pitsco Education Executive Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer Stephan Turnipseed. “With Smart Buddies, we are on a mission to help more children identify with STEM, be much more inspired to continue their coding and STEM education journey, and ultimately contribute to bringing much-needed diversity to the STEM workforce.”

Designed to use right after download, the Smart Buddies app is a redesigned version of the block-based programming tool Google Blockly that offers never-ending in-app challenges to keep children engaged for hours.

“Partnering with Pitsco Education supports our focus on creating more opportunities for minorities and underrepresented students,” said Sharmi Albrechtsen, CEO of SmartGurlz. “Pitsco’s long history for contributing engaging STEM education solutions that actually help students connect with their real world enhances our mission for celebrating inclusion and diversity and getting more young minds excited about coding and STEM.”
Smart Buddies Features:

- **HIGHLY ENGAGING:** A recent pilot with 250 students showed high levels of engagement with both girls and boys, with teachers reporting that children opted to miss recess to continue coding.
- **INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING:** Combines imaginative yet real-life storytelling with coding and math-related subjects.
- **MAXIMIZES LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Introduces the basics of computer science by covering sequences, functions, subroutines, and loops.
- **CORE CURRICULUM:** Lesson plans are designed to meet ISTE-S and Common Core State Standards.
- **STEM TO OTHER CLASSES:** Can cover multiple subjects, such as English, science, and mathematics.
- **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING:** Lessons include opportunities for discussion, debate, and reflection on important topics such as diversity, gender differences, and conflict resolution.
- **CODE OF CONDUCT:** A code of conduct serves as communication guidelines for teachers and classmates to support behaviors that encourage inclusivity.

Availability and Upcoming Initiatives

Beginning September 2019, Smart Buddies will be available for purchase in customizable four-packs throughout the US and Canada, exclusively through Pitsco Education at Pitsco.com/SmartBuddies. Additional buddies can be individually purchased to best fit the demographic of every classroom, every year. To see Smart Buddies in action prior to release, visit Pitsco Education at ISTE 2019 in booth 2215.

Highlights/Multimedia:

- **Click to Tweet:** Pitsco Education and SmartGurlz™ announce the launch of Smart Buddies™, a hands-on coding and robotics solution using characters to address systemic and personal issues such as diversity, race, gender, and conflict resolution. Pitsco.com/SmartBuddies
- **Learn more about Pitsco:** Pitsco.com
- **Learn more about SmartGurlz:** Smartgurlz.com

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Pitsco Education is the leading provider of hands-on K-12 STEM solutions. STEM education prepares learners for the future through the integration of science, technology, engineering, and math concepts using relevant hands-on applications to connect school, community, and work. Our various products, activities, curriculum, and solutions promote positive learning experiences and continued classroom success.

SmartGurlz is a STEM education and entertainment company whose flagship product is a line of friendly, self-balancing robots and action figures that engage and encourage girls to learn code. Connected via smartphone or tablet, SmartGurlz allows girls 6 and up to immerse themselves in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). SmartGurlz inspires the female leaders of tomorrow, today.

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