FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   **CONTACT:**   **Alicia J. Sells**
                                                        Director of Innovation
                                                        502-475-1245
                                                        asells@ovec.org

US Department of Education looks to OVEC
for innovative solutions to the nation's tech workforce shortage

Shelbyville, KY (December 17, 2020) - America has a critical shortage of qualified employees for its rapidly growing tech workforce, and the United States Department of Education (USED) is looking to the Ohio Valley Education Cooperative (OVEC) and iLEAD Academy in Kentucky for innovative solutions to the problem.

This week, iLEAD Academy was chosen as one of five schools in the nation to develop model computer science education career pathways in USED's Rural Tech Challenge. OVEC, which operates iLEAD Academy, also received a $4 million Education Innovation Research (EIR) grant for a groundbreaking effort to train teachers to teach computer science in elementary and middle school.

According to code.org, perhaps the single biggest impediment to expanding Computer Science education is the lack of teachers prepared to teach Computer Science courses. In 2016, only 75 Computer Science teachers graduated from pre-service preparation programs. In comparison, nearly 10,000 Math teachers graduated that year—and another 12,000 Science teachers.

OVEC and public school districts that are members of the organization will design a model approach to prepare American students for the nation's fastest-growing, highest-wage occupations in a career pathway spanning from third grade through college.

According to the digital magazine CIO, "the United States only graduates 65,000 college students each year with tech-related degrees, and most don't graduate with the "last mile" training they need to be employable." With the $100,000 prize from the Rural Tech Challenge, iLEAD will take that problem on with guidance from employers in the INTERalliance of Greater Cincinnati and postsecondary partners at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) and Northern Kentucky University (NKU).

iLEAD will create Kentucky's first ***virtual Computer Science Career Academy***. Students in the program will earn 12 hours of college credit targeted to completion of one of six Associate Degrees in Computer Science at JCTC or one of two Associate-to-Bachelor's degrees from JCTC to NKU College of Informatics Students who attend iLEAD Academy in-person will complete one of the degrees while in high school. Students will earn high-demand industry certifications in Digital Literacy, Computational Thinking, and the programming languages JAVA and Python.

iLEAD also will offer a virtual program introducing students to the core concepts of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address rapidly increasing demand for AI Specialists. The INTERalliance of Greater Cincinnati, which includes employers like Procter & Gamble, Cintas, 5/3 Bank, and Kroger, will offer input into design. A recent LinkedIn report on the most in-demand job skills showed AI Specialist is the fastest growing occupation in the United States and in countries around the globe.

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OVEC will use the $4 million EIR grant to train 140 teachers from nine Kentucky public school districts to teach code.org computer science courses at elementary and middle school levels. The training will take place through a micro credential program offered by [BloomBoard](#) in partnership with code.org. Teachers participating in the self-paced professional learning program will receive a $4,000 stipend when earning the micro credentials qualifying them to teach code.org courses.

The OVEC-member schools districts participating in the teacher training program are Bullitt County, Eminence Independent, Frankfort Independent, Franklin County, Gallatin County, Henry County, Jefferson County, Owen County, Shelby County, and Trimble County. The districts include more than 170 schools serving students from rural and suburban communities and Kentucky's most urban neighborhoods.

In the nine districts, 62% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. In Jefferson County, more than 57% of the student identify as racial or ethnic minorities. The [Louisville Urban League](#) will offer guidance on incorporating cultural competence in computer science education, and this input will be incorporated into the micro credential training for teachers.

The [American Institutes for Research](#) will measure success and impact of the EIR grant initiatives. EIR grants require a research partner to evaluate the program and contribute to a base of evidence for education innovations that improve student achievement.

OVEC is an educational support agency in North-central Kentucky, providing professional learning, advocacy, and services to educators and students.

iLEAD is Kentucky's first regional career academy and educates students from Carroll, Gallatin, Henry, Owen, and Trimble Counties for the STEM careers in advanced manufacturing, computer science engineering, and health care. iLEAD students graduate from high school with an Associate Degree from Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) in Carrollton, KY, and work credentials important to STEM employers. OVEC operates iLEAD for its five sponsor school districts.

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