In 2018, Voya Financial partnered with the National Network of State Teachers of the Year to form a working group of 15 of some of the most recognized educators in the country. Together with 15 additional early career and high-potential educators, those teachers studied the future of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. Their findings:

Effective STEM learning begins with amazing STEM educators. Characteristics of an amazing STEM educator include:

- Promoter of curiosity, inquiry, risk-taking and openness to potential failure.
- Engagement with real-world research, problem solving, and global connections with practitioners.
- Collaborator with the private sector.
- Promoter of empathy and vulnerability.
- Ability to foster positive relationships among students.
- Reliance on hands-on learning, and the ability to generate excitement as a part of classroom culture.

Encouraging students to take risks and embrace failure is difficult, but the following can help:

- Building a supportive classroom community.
- Training teachers to foster those communities.
- Empowering students to learn from mistakes.
- Correcting mistakes without fear or embarrassment.

Empowering educators to develop themselves in order to better serve their students is crucial. Educators believe the ideal environments for this are:

- Experiential and several days in length.
- Site-based such as national parks, universities, museums or lab connections with practitioners.
- Educator- or industry-led sessions.
- Idea-generating events that provide participants with ideas and materials that they can immediately use in the classroom.
- Sessions that enable educators to generate tools that provide teachers with choices on how to achieve their goals in unique circumstances.
- Deepened by opportunities for reflection.

Voya Foundation will seek out education partners that employ these methods for innovative opportunities to develop America's educators, and hopes that our education audience will use this information in their own practice.

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