

# Campos Foundation Grants \$178,000 to Fund New SmartLab at Urban Promise Academy in Oakland

*Investment Expands STEM Access and Project-Based Learning Opportunities for Middle School Students in the Oakland Unified School District*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) marked a major moment for student innovation as Urban Promise Academy (UPA) officially opened its new SmartLab—now fully operational and already buzzing with activity. During the ribbon-cutting celebration, students demonstrated robotics tools, explored digital design software, and showcased the new learning environment funded by a \$178,000 grant from the Campos Foundation. The completed SmartLab now transforms what began as a vision into a daily, hands-on learning experience.



Urban Promise Academy Principal Tierre Mesa joins a student in cutting the ribbon to officially open the new Campos SmartLab.

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*Tierre Mesa, Principal of  
Urban Promise Academy*

The Campos Foundation’s continued investment in STEM education is now taking shape inside UPA’s classrooms. Following their support of SmartLab projects at St. Joseph’s School in Anaheim and Baker Elementary in San Diego, the foundation’s newest contribution is already giving Oakland students expanded access to career-aligned technology tools. During the event, visitors saw firsthand how the foundation’s grant is actively reshaping instruction—moving STEM from abstract concepts to immersive, real-world application.

Throughout the morning, students guided guests through different stations, including engineering challenges, digital storytelling activities, and introductory coding tasks. Teachers highlighted how the lab has already changed classroom dynamics, noting increased engagement, peer collaboration, and a noticeable boost in students' confidence as they experiment with new tools.

The celebration also featured a high-energy performance by "Stardust," a rap group known for blending STEM concepts with music. Their original STEM-focused raps turned engineering terms, coding logic, and scientific principles into catchy lyrics—instantly connecting with students. The performance quickly became a highlight of the event, demonstrating that STEM learning can be joyful, culturally relevant, and creatively expressed. Teachers noted that Stardust's approach energized students and reinforced that innovation thrives at the intersection of the arts and STEM.

"This lab is just a lab until you put your heart and mind into what you want to do and what you want to get out of it," said Deanna Miller-Campos, President of the Campos Foundation. "There are brilliant minds among you, and that's why we invest in what we do."

Marco Campos, CEO of Campos EPC, encouraged students to see this as more than a physical space—an opportunity to define their future. "Your journey will be defined by the opportunities you seize," he said. "You are capable of anything you set your mind to—but you have to move, you have to act, and you have to believe in yourselves."

For Principal Tierre Mesa, the SmartLab represents more than an addition to the school—it's a



Marco Campos, CEO and President of Campos EPC, delivers remarks during the SmartLab ribbon-cutting ceremony at Urban Promise Academy.



SmartLab CEO Dr. Jennifer Berry and Dawud Hasan of the STEM-focused rap group Stardust celebrate the opening of the new Campos SmartLab at Urban Promise Academy.

transformation in how students experience learning. “This is such a special day for our school and our community,” Mesa said. “The SmartLab gives our students access to hands-on learning that helps them see themselves as creators, innovators, and problem-solvers. It’s about preparing them not just for the future, but for the confidence to lead it.”

Eighth grader presenters shared that the SmartLab has quickly become one of the most anticipated parts of their school week. Several spoke about discovering new interests—ranging from 3D modeling to robotics programming—and how the space allows them to “try, fail, and try again” in a way traditional classrooms don’t always allow.

The completed SmartLab at UPA includes dedicated workstations for engineering design, digital content creation, robotics exploration, and coding fundamentals. Instead of learning concepts solely through textbooks, students now build prototypes, animate original stories, test real code, and document their progress using industry-standard processes. Teachers shared that these early weeks have demonstrated the power of hands-on learning to spark curiosity—especially among students who previously felt disconnected from STEM subjects.

Dr. Jennifer Berry, CEO of SmartLab, emphasized the importance of helping students connect with their own potential through purposeful, hands-on learning experiences. “We are passionate about ensuring that students feel they belong, that their ideas have impact, and that they can master challenges in this world,” Berry said. “That’s what it means to develop a STEM identity—to know, ‘I belong here. My ideas add value. I am future ready.’”

The Campos Foundation’s investment is already influencing instruction at UPA, expanding what teachers can offer and what students believe is possible for themselves. Early classroom observations show students eagerly taking on leadership roles within group projects, experimenting with new software, and connecting lab activities to real-world careers in engineering, digital media, and computer science.

The opening of the SmartLab demonstrates how strategic partnerships can accelerate educational innovation. What began as a philanthropic investment has become a fully realized learning environment that is already reshaping the student experience—providing pathways that prepare young people for the opportunities emerging in Oakland’s growing STEM economy.

A video recap of the event captures students leading demonstrations, showcasing early projects, and celebrating the opening of their new space. [Watch the highlights on YouTube.](#)

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SmartLab delivers turnkey, career-centered K–12 STEM programs that equip today’s students for tomorrow’s challenges. Every hands-on PBL learning environment integrates grade-appropriate STEM applications across industry pathways to create real career connections. SmartLab programs include dedicated or flexible learning environments along with standards-aligned curriculum, professional development, and ongoing support.

Campos Foundation

The Campos Foundation is committed to empowering underserved communities through education, leadership, and opportunity. With a special focus on providing equitable access to STEM learning, the foundation partners with schools and organizations to create transformational educational experiences that prepare students for college, careers, and life. Learn more at [www.camposfoundation.org](http://www.camposfoundation.org).

Urban Promise Academy

Urban Promise Academy (UPA) is a public middle school in the Oakland Unified School District dedicated to providing a safe, supportive, and academically rigorous environment where all students can thrive. Located in the heart of Oakland, UPA emphasizes equity, community engagement, and real-world learning experiences to prepare students for success in high school, college, and beyond. [Learn more at urbanpromise.ousd.org](http://urbanpromise.ousd.org).

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