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PRESS RELEASE – **New Robotics Program for all Holyoke Public Schools eighth-grade students**

Holyoke, Massachusetts – Holyoke Codes has expanded their computer science and technology workshops for students in the Holyoke Public Schools. This year all eighth-grade students are included in the experience, engaging in robotics projects.   Last year, the program consisted of a seven-week hands-on coding experience that was available to the nearly 400, seventh-grade students in the district. "The seventh-grade students showed such engagement and ownership of their learning last year that we had to find a way to continue and expand this program," stated Holyoke Public Schools STEM Director Tonya Claiborne.

The goals and outcomes of these project-based workshops are to expose students to coding and robotics in a way that they can be successful and envision this field as something that is interesting and engaging. This creates confidence and competence in middle-school students that will translate to many subjects as they move through high school. "The exposure alone has changed the way students see their future," stated Claiborne. "I am basing this on the many thank you notes received from students expressing their desire to continue learning in the computer science field and how they now see this as a viable career path. I am blessed to work in a district that works tirelessly at providing pathways for every student."

All seventh-grade students will explore code through the following projects: WeDo Robotics, Coding with Scratch, Mobile App Development, and Minecraft for Education. All eighth-grade students will have the opportunity to explore robotics through a variety of engaging experiences that combine technology, computational thinking, problem solving, and the arts, including Mars Exploration Mission, SumoBot Challenge, Build a DanceBot!, Code a DanceBot!

The Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center (MGHPCC), a sponsor and member of Holyoke Codes, will host the program at the Center and provide laptops, tablets, and robotics kits through a grant from the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center. "I am so pleased we are able to collaborate with Holyoke Codes and the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center to offer every seventh and eighth grade student in our district the opportunity to participate in these rich coding and robotics experiences," stated Claiborne. The curriculum will be taught by computer science teachers and information technology professionals from the region and will integrate coding with *Scratch*, a visual programming environment with rich multimedia capabilities developed by MIT and robotics projects. Students will focus on such areas as design cycle, mathematical concepts, and communication while learning about the MGHPCC and the types of research it supports.

About Holyoke Codes:
Holyoke Codes, launched in December 2014 as part of Computer Science Education Week, is a collaborative partnership of the MGHPCC; Girls Inc. of Holyoke; Commonwealth Alliance for Information Technology Education; New England Regional Developers; Sweet and Fizzy. Educators, computer science and IT professionals develop and teach our workshops, which provide hands-on experiences for kids and families in coding, robotics, and technology. Most workshops are offered in downtown Holyoke at little or no cost to participants. The program encourages creativity, abstract thinking, systematic reasoning, collaborative working skills, and confidence, so kids and families can thrive in any environment. For more information, visit http://holyokecodes.org/.

About the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center:
The MGHPCC is a ground-breaking collaboration of five of the state's most research-intensive universities, state government and private industry — the most significant collaboration among government, industry and public and private universities in the history of the Commonwealth, and the first facility in the nation of its kind. The 90,000-square-foot computing facility in Holyoke, Massachusetts, opened in November 2012. Funding was provided by the five member universities -- Boston University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University and the University of Massachusetts -- the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Cisco, EMC, and the Federal New Markets Tax Credit program. The member universities fund the ongoing operation of the MGHPCC. For more information on the Massachusetts High Performance Computing Center, visit http://www.mghpcc.org.

Contact:
If you have any questions or are interested in visiting the Holyoke Public Schools, please contact Director of Communications Judy Taylor, at (413) 493-1605 **jtaylor@hps.holyoke.ma.us**.

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