F7 Summer Internship
Pilot Summary

What we accomplished, what we learned, and where we go from here — a six-week pilot of the F7 platform with 11 St. Louis high school students.

CIVIC CITY · SLPS LEARN & EARN · THE POST BUILDING · SUMMER 2026

Prepared by Civic City · F7 Missions

In partnership with St. Louis Public Schools · Learn & Earn

Host site The Post Building, downtown St. Louis

CHAPTER 01 THE PREMISE

What is F7?

This summer, Civic City partnered with the St. Louis Public Schools Learn & Earn Program to design and pilot F7, a digital learning platform designed to help schools deliver project-based learning while enabling students to manage projects, develop career-ready skills, and build a portfolio of projects.

The six-week internship served as the platform's first implementation, giving students the opportunity to test its tools and workflows while moving from identifying community challenges to researching, designing, building, testing, and presenting digital products.

Throughout the pilot, students identified challenges they cared about, interviewed people affected by those challenges, researched existing solutions, and built working digital products using artificial intelligence as a creative, research, and development tool. They also learned from educators, entrepreneurs, founders, and technology professionals while strengthening their ability to research, design, build, test, communicate, and improve their ideas through feedback.

The goal was not simply to teach students how to use technology. It was to help them think critically, solve meaningful problems, collaborate with others, and gain the confidence to turn an idea into something real. Just as Friendship 7 challenged a generation to imagine what was possible, F7 encouraged students to see themselves not only as future workers, but as builders capable of shaping the future.

MISSION ORIGIN · FRIENDSHIP 7, 1962

F7 is named after Friendship 7, the NASA mission that carried John Glenn on the first American orbital flight around Earth in 1962. While history often remembers the astronaut, the mission depended on thousands of engineers, mathematicians, technicians, designers, and problem-solvers working together to accomplish something that had never been done before.

F7 was built on that same belief: extraordinary achievements begin when people are given the opportunity to ask questions, solve difficult problems, collaborate, and continuously improve through iteration.

“I feel so much better about the future because of you.”

OMAR PERKINS · EDUCATOR IN RESIDENCE · F7 MISSIONS

CHAPTER 02 HOW IT WORKED

The Experience

The 6-week paid internship combined structured instruction, independent project-based learning, mentorship, and peer collaboration to give students a hands-on experience in design, innovation, and professional development.

PILOT SNAPSHOT

6 WEEKS
Duration
Paid summer internship

11 STUDENTS
Participants
St. Louis high school interns

2 HOURS
Virtual onboarding
Week 1 orientation

8 HOURS
Virtual instructor-led labs
4 additional sessions

25 HOURS
In-person instructor-led labs
5 Wednesdays (Weeks 2–6)

100 HOURS
Peer coworking & open support
Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri (Weeks 2–6)

135 hours
Total intern-support hours provided per student

The Post Building, St. Louis — and online

WHAT THE EXPERIENCE LOOKED LIKE

WEEK 1

Onboarding & the human-centered design mindset

Students completed virtual onboarding to prepare for the internship, meet the team, understand expectations, and become familiar with the human-centered design process. They were introduced to the tools, frameworks, and mindset needed to approach complex challenges and develop solutions centered on people's needs.

WEEKS 2–6

Independent builds, mentorship, and the St. Louis ecosystem

Students worked independently on their projects while receiving ongoing support through instructor-led, project-based learning labs, open coworking hours, and mentorship focused on college and career readiness. They were introduced to entrepreneurship pathways and opportunities within the St. Louis startup ecosystem, connecting their project work to real-world innovation, career exploration, and community impact.

Every Wednesday, students gathered in person at The Post Building in downtown St. Louis for collaborative learning sessions. Surrounded by local entrepreneurs, employers, and innovators, interns learned from mentors, exchanged ideas with peers, received feedback, and advanced their projects. These sessions served as the anchor of the internship, creating a community of learning and innovation.

Rather than completing identical assignments on the same schedule, students progressed through the human-centered design process at their own pace. Each project began by understanding people and their needs, then moved through research, ideation, prototyping, testing, and refinement.

COWORKING SESSIONS

During each coworking session, students engaged in hands-on learning, mentorship, collaboration, and professional development — a supportive environment to apply human-centered design principles, strengthen technical skills, and receive guidance from experienced educators, mentors, and industry professionals.

01 Work alongside educator and mentor Omar Perkins to develop skills, navigate challenges, and receive project guidance.

02 Interview classmates and community members to practice human-centered design research and better understand user needs.

03 Participate in feedback sessions and fireside chats with local entrepreneurs, innovators, and industry leaders.

04 Collaborate with peers, exchange ideas, and provide constructive feedback throughout the design process.

05 Build, troubleshoot, test, and improve their digital products through an iterative development process.

06 Receive coaching and mentorship focused on college and career readiness.

07 Explore entrepreneurship pathways and opportunities inside the St. Louis startup ecosystem.

08 Practice presenting their work and defending their design decisions in front of a room.

INDUSTRY EXPOSURE

GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGY

Frank Romo

Founder & CEO, ROMO GIS

Frank shared how geospatial technology, data, and mapping tools are being used by cities, nonprofits, and organizations to solve complex challenges — walking the cohort through real GIS workflows and the story of building his own company.

EXTENDED REALITY

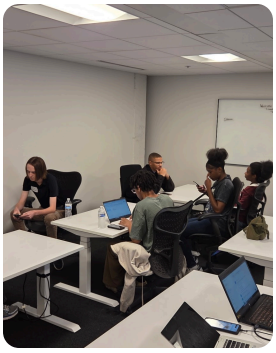
Tavon Wilson

Founder, Tono Technologies

Tavon brought a working XR prototype to the cohort — a hands-on first look at how immersive technology is designed and built today, plus a candid conversation about the path from idea to product.

INSIDE THE PILOT




Evidence & Outcomes

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

11 students

Registered and onboarded

Eleven St. Louis high school students enrolled in the pilot, completed onboarding, and were given access to the F7 platform and the full support structure.

82%

Engaged in the full innovation process

9 of 11 students moved through critical early-stage innovation activities essential to entrepreneurship and design thinking — identifying a challenge, interviewing users, researching, and building.

5 students

Presented on Pitch Day

Five interns stood in front of a live audience of partners, mentors, and family to present the problem they chose, the users they talked to, and the product they built.

100%

College & career exposure

Every participating student received mentorship and exposure to college pathways, career opportunities, and entrepreneurial ventures inside the St. Louis ecosystem.

COMPLETION RATE · 82%

82% of enrolled students engaged in the innovation process from challenge identification through building and testing a digital product.

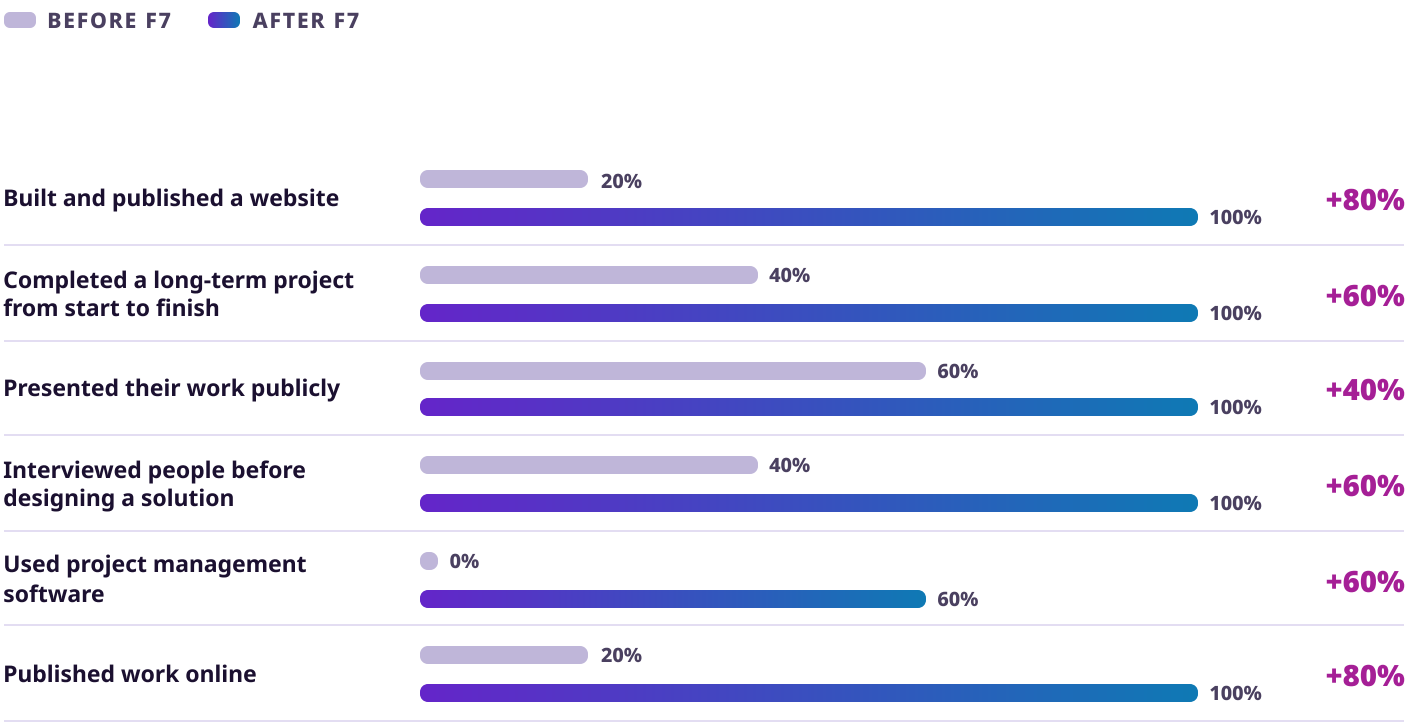
Through this process, all 9 students developed 21st-century skills that support college and career readiness — critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, problem-solving, and the ability to respond to feedback. By presenting their ideas, receiving peer and manager input, and refining their solutions, students practiced the iterative process used by entrepreneurs, designers, researchers, and professionals across industries.

BEFORE & AFTER · SELF-REPORTED SKILLS

By the end of the F7 pilot, students who completed the optional pre- and post-program survey reported measurable growth across technical, professional, and innovation skills.

Five of 11 interns completed both surveys, providing insight into changes in student confidence and skill development throughout the experience.

GROWTH ON EACH SKILL · CONTINUED



Used artificial intelligence to research, build, and solve problems

Before **4.6/5** → After **4.8/5**

40% OF STUDENTS INCREASED THEIR AI PROFICIENCY

IN THEIR WORDS

The feedback from my peers gave me fresh eyes

"Eyes that weren't blinded by developer insight. My peers gave me feedback on how to attempt to solve some of my hardest problems and how to significantly change my website's design to not look so robotic."

ALEKSANDROS KOTONI

My confidence has definitely increased.

"I know a lot more about what it takes to solve a problem now."

JALEN THOMPSON

F7 showed me what I could do

"I was confident before but F7 showed me what I could do when given the right resources to do so and focus on my project. It also showed me how useful AI is as a tool to help produce what you need it too."

DERRICK TERRY

Student Spotlight

The most meaningful outcome of the pilot wasn't simply that students learned new technical skills — it was that they applied those skills to solve problems they genuinely cared about.

Tiana Harris

Rethinking How Students Learn

LIVE PROJECT

learningdifferent.lovable.app

CHALLENGE

“The challenge I chose was changing how we're taught, not what we're taught. A lot of times the curriculum isn't the problem, it's how we're given it.”

After interviewing other students, Tiana realized that many learners struggle not because they lack ability, but because traditional instruction doesn't match how they learn best.

SOLUTION

Tiana designed Learning Different, a digital platform that helps educators transform classroom lessons into project-based learning experiences that better support students with different learning styles.

REFLECTION

“I definitely gained more patience because I'm the type of person where I don't like to plan or anything. I just want to jump into it, go with the flow, just move through stuff as it's coming. But definitely with F7 and creating my website, it couldn't just be jump in because what am I jumping into? I don't know what I'm doing.”

“I definitely had to sit there, plan things out, go through stuff. A lot of times when I do stuff, I don't like to change it because I feel like what I'm doing is good enough. But with creating my app, I had to go change stuff. I had to make things better. I definitely had to work on myself as well as my website and just make it better for not only me, but for the people that will be using it.”

CHAPTER 05 LESSONS & NEXT STEPS

What We Learned

The F7 Summer Internship Pilot showed that high school students are capable of tackling complex challenges when they're given the right process, tools, mentorship, and time to build.

01

Real challenges create deeper learning.

Students became more engaged when they worked on challenges they genuinely cared about. Rather than completing hypothetical assignments, they interviewed people, uncovered community needs, and designed solutions with a clear purpose.

02

AI accelerated learning, but didn't replace critical thinking.

Students used AI to research, brainstorm, troubleshoot, and build more efficiently. Success still depended on asking thoughtful questions, evaluating information, making decisions, and improving their work through feedback and iteration.

03

Mentorship and collaboration accelerated learning.

Weekly coaching from Omar Perkins, guest speakers, and collaboration with peers gave students the confidence to ask questions, test ideas, solve problems together, and continuously improve their work.

04

Expanding opportunities for educators.

The pilot showed that educators can contribute far beyond traditional classroom instruction. Omar Perkins served as a coach and mentor, guiding students as they developed their ideas. F7 also demonstrated a new opportunity for teachers to lead project-based learning during the summer and throughout the year while encouraging creativity, experimentation, and student-driven learning.

LOOKING AHEAD

The pilot successfully tested both the F7 learning experience and the first implementation of the F7 platform. Student participation provided valuable feedback that will strengthen the platform's project management, documentation, and educator support tools.

Future cohorts will build on these lessons by refining the platform, expanding student participation, and growing a network of educators, industry professionals, and community partners.

CHAPTER 05 OUTCOMES BEYOND THE SUMMER

Where Students Are Going Next

The clearest signal that the pilot worked is where these students are headed next — into engineering programs, college classrooms, and coursework they're starting before high school even ends.

Derrick Terry

Preparing to study Electrical Engineering at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Jalen Thompson

Preparing to study Computer Engineering at Washington University in St. Louis.

Aleksandros Kotoni

Taking classes at St. Louis Community College at Forest Park.

Tiana Harris

Plans to take college courses at Harris-Stowe State University during her senior year of high school.

When students are trusted to tackle meaningful challenges, and educators are empowered to guide the process, innovation becomes something they practice — not just something they learn about.

THANK YOU TO OUR COLLABORATORS

St. Louis Public Schools · Learn & Earn
PROGRAM & WORKFORCE PARTNER

Civic City
DESIGNER & OPERATOR OF THE F7 PILOT

The Post Building
HOST SITE — DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS