

New nonprofit solves thorny issue for STEM teachers

August 31, 2018 4:00 PM Mark Miester
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Todd Wackerman, center, a 2018 A. B. Freeman School of Business graduate, directs the STEM Library Lab, a new nonprofit that gives New Orleans public and charter school teachers the tools they need to teach hands-on, inquiry-based science. Pictured with him are recent Tulane graduates and new STEM Library Lab employees Michaela Slosar and Alexandra Cooper. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

In the six years he spent teaching in New Orleans public schools, Todd Wackerman had a lot of great ideas about how to make science education more exciting — and a lot of trouble getting the tools he needed to make those ideas a reality.

To teach a lab on acceleration, the 2018 [A. B. Freeman School of Business](#) graduate once tried rolling bocce balls down an aluminum gutter while his students tracked

their motion with tape measures and stopwatches.

“It was engaging for the students, but we couldn’t get reliable results,” Wackerman recalled. “The right tool for that exercise is a Vernier Dynamics System with a motion sensor and accelerometer, but a set for the class would have cost \$3,000. It just wasn’t feasible.”

When Wackerman enrolled in the Tulane MBA program, he thought about ways to solve that problem. He also participated in the [Taylor Center’s](#) social venture accelerator, the [Changemaker Institute](#), to develop the idea. The result of his efforts is [STEM Library Lab](#), a new nonprofit that gives New Orleans public and charter school teachers the tools they need to teach hands-on, inquiry-based science.

Library Lab works like a lending library for math and science teachers. When schools purchase an annual membership, their teachers get access to the library’s full inventory of STEM equipment, everything from microscopes and Bunsen burners to Paleozoic fossils and math manipulatives. If Library Lab doesn’t have a piece of equipment in stock, teachers can special order it and usually receive it within a week.

“The sharing model makes sense because there’s such a variety of STEM equipment, but it only gets used by a given teacher for a couple of days a year,” Wackerman said.

Library Lab also offers a lesson plan database and personalized coaching to help teachers use the resources effectively.

Library Lab launched in August in an 800-square-foot space within [Bricolage Academy](#) at 2426 Esplanade Ave. The equipment library is open for browsing Monday–Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. in Room 2050. Wackerman said he currently has 10 schools signed up and he’s hoping to enroll more during the school year.

“It’s a great time to be trying new things in education,” Wackerman said, “and we’re excited to be a part of that change.”