

Grant Middle School unveils STEM Lab

MARION – Parents and community leaders got their first look at Grant Middle School’s state-of-the-art STEM Lab during a ceremony held recently at the school.

The lab, already in use by classes, focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills increasingly in demand by employers.

“It’s a space that provides opportunities,” said Kristin Tope, who along with Ricardo Lehman teaches robotics and other programs offered in the lab. Lehman said it engages students in learning and addresses the crucial need to get more students interested in STEM careers.

Students gave tours of the lab and demonstrations about what they are learning during an open house held on Nov. 4. The school also held a ribbon cutting to commemorate its opening.

The lab features a robotics area that lets students practice for ongoing VEX Robotics competitions. It includes computers and work stations that give students more room to work on projects. There are spaces set aside for them to collaborate and creatively solve problems and tools to help teach them technology and other skills.

Other programs planned for the lab include forensics, computer programming, Expedition Mars, coding, pre-engineering, engineering principles, and grossology. Students can learn how to code and program or study the scientific process in classes like grossology, which features projects like dissecting a sheep’s brain that may be gross in nature but engages students in learning.

Marion City Schools Superintendent Gary Barber said the lab fits into the district’s four pillars of reform including Next Generational Learning Environments, which embrace technology and personalized learning. It also aligns with Diploma Plus, an effort to ensure students leave high school with either acceptance into a two-or four-year college, an apprenticeship program, the military, or employment in a high-demand job.

The primary objective is to interest students in STEM fields that are in high demand throughout the area. That includes automobile manufacturing and engineering.

“Our students are getting the skills and life skills necessary to fit into one of our highest paying jobs,” Barber said. “Automobile engineering and manufacturing is a career path we are trying to emphasize because of the high-demand jobs. We wanted to make sure we have a facility that reflected our goals of making our students college and career ready.

“It’s all built for students to communicate collaboratively, think critically to solve problems, be able to be creative,” he said.

These skills, Barber said, are 21st century skills that allow students to be competitive in a global marketplace.

Tope referred to the challenge faced nationwide that there are not enough high school graduates choosing technology related disciplines in college. This, rather than reflecting upon a lack of capacity for

new students on the part of technical schools and universities, points to a lack of qualified and interested applicants.

“We will not have the people we require in the next generation to solve the problems of tomorrow unless this shortage is directly addressed today,” she said. “Who will solve the world’s next crisis?”

“The world needs the students of today to become the scientists, engineers and problem solvers of tomorrow,” Lehman said. “The constant breakthroughs in chemistry, medicine, materials and physics reveal a new set of challenges and create an even greater opportunity for problem solving through technology.”

Captions

4852 (primary photo)

Parents and community members tour Grant Middle School’s new STEM Lab during an open house held on Nov. 4. The STEM Lab focuses on robotics and other science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills in demand by employers.

4766 (secondary photo)

Students demonstrate robotics to a group of government and community leaders following the ribbon cutting for Grant Middle School’s new STEM Lab on Nov. 4.

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