ROMEO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

GOOD NEWS ACROSS 'R' DISTRICT

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Grant brings learning to life

Scientists and engineers at L&L Products, a family owned company located in Romeo, have collaborated with customers around the world for nearly 70 years to make products lighter, stronger and quieter. The company makes a difference as a Romeo Community Schools business partner as well. Over the past four years, L&L has awarded $65,000 in STEM grants to elementary schools across the district to pave the way for future generations of innovators.

Thanks to the materials provided with these grant funds, STEM classes in each of the five elementary buildings are reaching new heights. For Amanda Rocha, STEM teacher at Indian Hills Elementary School, the funding has transformed her classroom from a makerspace where students were using rudimentary materials to an environment where all STEM components – science, technology, engineering and math – are on full display.

One of the most popular materials across grade levels are Keva planks. Mrs. Rocha said this year's grant money was used to purchase even more of these planks, unleashing the children's imaginations to build dream playgrounds in kindergarten STEM classes and bridges in the older grades.

"We talk about the different bridges engineers build and they replicate those with Keva planks," Mrs. Rocha said.

Also popular with the upper elementary students are Sphero Robots. Whether building BattleBots, in which the robots battle each other ("Think of the *Big Hero 6* Disney movie," Mrs. Rocha suggested), or creating their floats for the Sphero Robot Thanksgiving Parade,

the students are learning how to design and build mazes, write the code to move their robots, and tap into their creativity to bring their floats to life.

Other useful items purchased with the grant funds are Makedo tools, a series of cardboard construction tools purposely designed to be safe for kids. Using these tools, the students can cut or drill through cardboard, punch holes, and screw pieces of cardboard together. These tools “make it very engaging and hands-on, but also make it real life,” Mrs. Rocha explained. “They feel like the real tools, but they’re safe for kids.”

Sarah Savage, STEM teacher at Amanda Moore Elementary School, also sings the praises of the grant money and the difference it has made in her classroom, beginning with her Young 5 students. LEGO Tech Machines are particularly popular among these young learners. For example, each week the children build different machines.

“Their imaginations just go bonkers with this,” Mrs. Savage said. “Every year it’s such a success. They absolutely love it. They’re building diggers and cement mixers. They’re acting out what the vehicle does. It’s just so much fun for them.”

Students as young as kindergarten learn how to write code, beginning with hands off or no technology coding. This leads into coding Code & Go Robot Mice on their iPads. By second grade, students learn to code on their Chromebooks.

Popular among first and third graders is another LEGO education invention called Bricq Motion. This, too, comes with lesson plans that Mrs. Savage enhances

and adapts to fit her curriculum. In these lessons the children learn about data collection and the scientific method.

“It seems like play, but they’re learning things too,” Mrs. Savage said. “Like force and motion. They’re learning about physics, but in a playful way.”

Students also learn lifelong skills like working as part of a team and collaboration.

“L&L has given us the materials but it is so much more than the materials,” Mrs. Savage said. “It’s interactive – two kids working together or a table of kids, sharing their communication skills. Problem solving.”

Experimenting with snap circuits is another example of what Mrs. Savage refers to as “disguised learning.” To make circuits, second graders learn how to work with a partner, experiment and problem solve.

“Can we light up the lightbulb? Can we make the noise? These are literally lightbulb moments in learning.”