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REGION

From STEM to STREAM

School adds religion, art to science, technology, engineering and math

By Isaac Groves

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Weather notwithstanding, the middle school students of Blessed Sacrament Catholic School tromped around Cedarock Park Thursday on an all-day STREAM field trip.

Blessed Sacrament has been working on its STEM certification, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

STEM is a growing trend in education since 21st century jobs are expected to require those skills.

At Blessed Sacrament they decided to add Art and Religion to make it a STREAM school to recognize the importance of art education and the school's religious foundation.

Unlike many curricular reforms these days, this was an in-house creation.

"Because the way we learned is different from how these kids are learning in the 21st century," said Principal Maria Gomez.

While the curriculum is ongoing, the field trip to Cedarock Park was an all-day, hands-on STREAM lesson.

Students had Spanish, literature, art, math, science, religion and technology lessons with no more cover than a picnic shelter.

Math teacher Tiffany Stalek said hands-on learning seems to work for kids with all kinds of learning styles.

The 49 students also seemed to enjoy being out of the classroom, even if their matching navy blue Blessed Sacrament hooded sweatshirts were kind of wet.

Like STEM, the new curriculum also teaches lessons across subjects.

For example, Gomez said teachers were combining art and religion lessons with the parable of the mustard seed.

Students read the scripture and did art projects on it giving students, who get mus-



Sam Roberts / Times-News

Blessed Sacrament students hike at Cedarock Park on Thursday during a field trip. Blessed Sacrament is evolving the STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – program into STREAM, adding religion and art to the mix.

tard from a bottle now, a better idea of how small mustard seeds are, and what Jesus was getting at.

On the field trip, students combined technology and science by surveying small plots in the park to look at the trees and the other life in them.

They also used global positioning data to find latitude and longitude of locations, thermometers to measure ground temperature and the Beaufort Scale, observing the movements of leaves and branches, to measure wind speed.

A hike in the park fed into science and art lessons.

"We looked up about the trees we saw and we put some leaves in little bags and looked up the scientific names and learned what the value is to wildlife and humans," said fifth-grader Daniella Urgiles, 10.

Urgiles said she would also have an art project about the wildlife she saw at the park. She saw two deer, and what one of her classmates called a poison caterpillar.

Some things about middle school never change.

"That's the job of a scientist – to find out 'is this a cause or is this a correlation?'"

VICTORIA SEBASTIAN

SCIENCE TEACHER

Another religion lesson Thursday had students identify trees to see if they were native species and if they would do well on Blessed Sacrament's campus.

If they would, students will see about planting some on campus, said religion teacher Carol Kearney.

Gomez said the lesson shows students "the wondrous things of God in nature."

It is also follows Pope Francis' call to be protectors of creation, Gomez said.

Science teacher Victoria Sebastian had students look at the connection between increases in ice cream sales and shark attacks in the summer.

"That's the job of a scientist," Sebastian said, "to find out 'is this a cause or is this a correlation?'"