

STREAM Academies change the flow at SJS Alden

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This past year has seen much change for St. John the Baptist Alden; a new principal, teachers and a pastoral administrator. All of these changes have positively affected their school, but the most fun transformation was the addition of STREAM Academies.

Academies are designed to be hands on learning kits or investigations that students work on weekly throughout the semester. Although segmented, many teachers still wove those kit lessons into other subjects, seamlessly crossing over the subject boundaries to teach their students that in life, every area of learning overlaps in many ways. STREAM has changed the way classes learn new things; as an alternative, hands-on approach to previously more “two-dimensional” subjects. STREAM Day, signalled by a catchy tune, quickly became the students’ favorite day of the week.

The School Garden was a favorite this year. Classes in fourth and fifth grade learned the basics of growing food, and set plans into place early in the year, learning about nutrients, proper planting procedures, sustainability and raised garden beds. With the help of volunteers and an after-school garden club of third through eighth grades, raised beds were installed on Earth Day, and a parish celebration was held. Seedlings were planted in May, and the garden continues to grow over the summer, maintained by SJS families and parish volunteers. What started as a STREAM project in class has developed into a combined parish and school family endeavor on the St. John’s campus. The garden has flourished after planting, quickly growing in Western New York’s hot and humid summer. Their first “fruits” were actually a lettuce harvest, with tomatoes quickly following. The parish is continuing to enjoy the harvest, and there are plans for students to learn how to can, preserve and freeze extra produce. This experience has taught much in planning, patience and hard work and after learning what has worked this season, they are eager to see how the



garden will transform over the next few years.

Kitchen Chem became another beloved academy of SJS Alden students. The first semester, sixth through eighth grade learned to prepare and cook certain foods. They made apple pie, homemade macaroni and cheese, and even a creative pink pasta salad for the diocesan X-STREAM Games. The second semester saw first and second grades learning to make pancakes, lemon bars and watermelon ice cream. These important life skills taught in a fun, safe and encouraging environment were a wonderful way to introduce students to a lifelong love of cooking. St. John the Baptist School plans to introduce more classes into this academy next year.

A STREAM Exhibition Night was held in early May to celebrate this approach to learning and allow students to show off their hard work to parents and the community. The garden was featured, as were first and second grade “chefs” offering patrons their delicious lemon bars. On display were kindergarten’s Lego



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Aeriella DeRoller (left) and Emma Casillo (center) water the plants at the school garden under the watchful eye of Pre-K 3 teacher Denise Beal (right).

U academy designs, where students were encouraged to use the free range of their imagination to create a concepts using legos. Eighth-graders demonstrated their robotics program and process. Third-graders exhibited Academy Arcade games created using recycled materials. Guest were able to

play these imaginative concepts for a donation to charity. Social justice art projects and pro-pife creations were proudly displayed. Fourth-graders performed their Living Wax Museum; an alternative to a written history report. In costume, students perform a monologue every time a visitor “activates” their historical character. It’s a fun way to see history come alive.

Preferring more integration with STREAM, SJS will be changing the flow of student experience, deciding to incorporate the academies into daily classes more, and offering certain kits as extra-curricular, after-school learning opportunities. As a hands-on approach to learning, the academies have helped the entire school along their path to a love of learning that much more.

St. John’s is still accepting registrations for the 2018-19 school year, with limited openings for most grades, pre-K 3 through eighth-grade. Call 716-937-9483 today for a personalized tour for your family and to discuss all of their alternative learning endeavors.



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Owen Beebe tries out one of the Academy Arcade games at the STREAM Exhibition Night.