

The Sagemont School Introduces Innovation Lab

BY STACEY BOMSER

It is full STEAM ahead for students in The Sagemont School's new Innovation Lab. Housed in the Media Center on the Lower School Campus, the Innovation Lab allows students in pre-school through fifth grade to practice critical science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) skills with hands-on activities.

"Students today must be proficient communicators, creators, critical thinkers and collaborators," explains Monica Vigna, The Sagemont School Lower School Campus Principal. "The activities students complete in the Innovation Lab allow for robust learning that features real-world context and speaks to the student's interests."

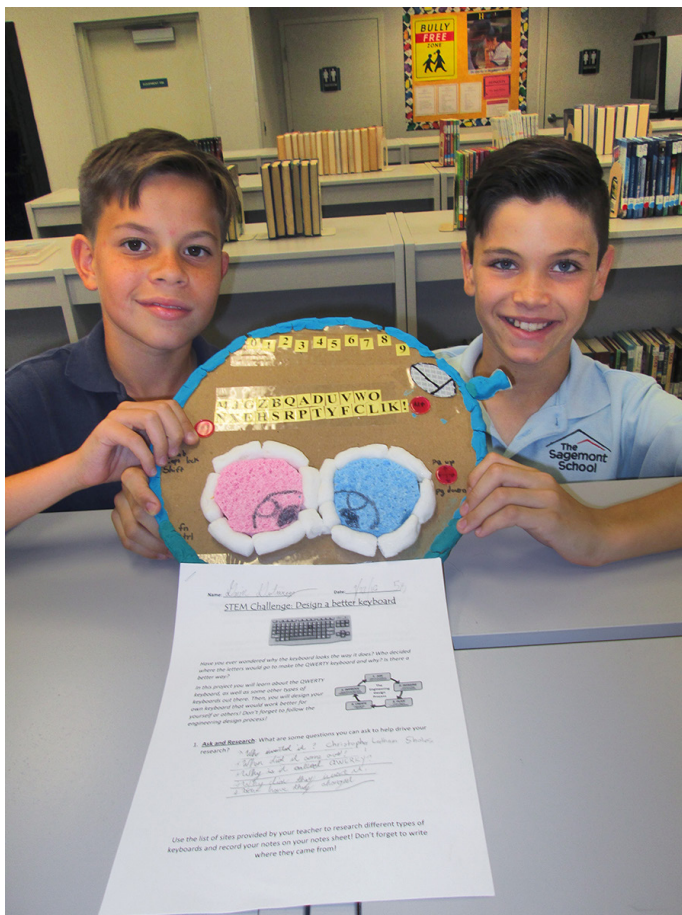
The Innovation Lab is stocked with equipment chosen specifically to develop students' problem-solving and critical thinking skills, while also emphasizing design and creativity. "We have a variety of electrical circuit boards, Dash and Dot the robot, Legos in all shapes and sizes, Goldiblox and all the extra materials students would need for creative play," notes Assistant Principal Pilar Valdes.

While the Innovation Lab is utilized by all grade levels, the activities students engage in are all age appropriate and relate to the curriculum. For example, for the youngest students, lessons are based on a book.

"Early childhood students, preschool 3 and pre-K 4, recently read the story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*," shares Ms. Vigna. "Upon finishing the book, they had to problem solve and build the broken chair they learned about during the story using one of our STEM kits."

Older students participate in the Innovation Lab as part of their weekly technology special. Students work in centers to design and create projects related to a research topic.

"Students used their laptops to research a simple machine, created a digital poster using Microsoft Publisher with the facts they learned, and then wrapped it up with their own design and creation of a clothes pin racer," explains Media/Technology Specialist Janet Padron.



During Hour of Code, a national campaign to have all students engage in one hour of computer coding, a group of Sagemont fifth graders took the lesson one step further. They used Legos to create an off-line coding game that students in first through third grade could play.

Some activities are more hands-on than others. For one assignment, fourth graders were given a web challenge. They were asked to design and create a sturdy web that would hold a stapler that was dropped from five feet.

"Students were amazed at which design worked best and were eager to make improvements and test their model again," shares Ms. Padron.

Although only open a short while, the Sagemont students are already realizing how fortunate they are to have the Innovation Lab at their school.

Fifth grader Gavin Gutierrez says it has helped him improve his coding skills. "I really like it because it gives me ideas on how to do things and how we can program our own games. I also learned how to program the Dash and Dot robot and want to learn more about how it actually works, its mechanics."

Third grader Ryland McCarthy also enjoys using the robots in the Innovation Lab. "I really liked playing with the little robot because it is cool. You can program it to record your voice and repeat. You can control the speed too."

The Innovation Lab may have inspired a future career for Ryland. "I play a lot of games and I want to learn how to code when I get older so that I can make my own games."

Sagemont's Innovation Lab was made possible with support from the school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). "The PTO embraced the project with open arms," notes Ms. Valdes. "They have fundraised to cover the cost of new wood flooring and many of the items we currently have in the Innovation Lab."

In addition, the PTO has a wish list of items to add to the Innovation Lab including Ozobots, Makey-Makey kits and a 3D printer.

The Innovation Lab, which opened in December, is dedicated to Gary Quan. The media and technology professional was an integral member of the Sagemont faculty for 15 years, but sadly lost his battle with cancer over a year ago.

"Mr. Quan loved seeing the people around him happy," notes Ms. Vigna. "It made sense to have an uplifting, creative space named after him to keep his memory alive."

