

More Space For STEM

Middle Schools Hold Open House For ‘Makerspaces’

By NOLAN STOUT Daily News-Record

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HARRISONBURG — Science, technology, engineering and math students at Harrisonburg’s two middle schools have new space to work in.

Thomas Harrison and Skyline middle schools held open houses for the “makerspaces” on Friday.

Harrisonburg City Public Schools’ STEM program allows seventh- and eighth-grade students at Thomas Harrison and Skyline to take a combination science and engineering class where they work on various hands-on, collaborative projects. It was created in 2012.

John DeVier-Scott, Thomas Harrison’s STEM coordinator, said Thomas Harrison has 43 seventh- and 54 eighth-graders in the program.

Each school converted old fifth-grade classrooms to create the work spaces. Fifth grade moved to elementary schools this year to alleviate overcrowding at the middle schools.

Thomas Harrison’s repurposed area is downstairs and will house the seventh-grade STEM class. Eighth-graders will remain in an existing STEM room, but occasionally come downstairs for projects.

“We kind of outgrew our space that we had at the other end of the building,” he said.

At Thomas Harrison, two classrooms were combined and a third was converted to a computer work area with 3D printers. The walls are painted teal and yellow.

“The bright colors make it feel like its a cool place to be,” said Stephanie Nelson, a seventh-grade STEM teacher.

Eighth-grader Micah Wickline, 13, was working with the printers, which DeVier-Scott said are new. Micah said he learned how to use the 3D printers over the summer and used the open house as an opportunity to test out the new equipment.

“They’re all basically the same,” he said.

Even though there’s more space, DeVier-Scott said the program likely won’t expand. Instead, the classrooms will be available to all teachers, allowing more students to use the area.

“Our goal is really to get the kids that aren’t in the STEM program into this space and get them more involved in technology,” DeVier-Scott said. “To get more students involved in integrated activities, we need to be able to leave this space open.”

At Friday’s open house, students demonstrated some of the technology available in the classrooms.

Eighth-grader Alex Verson, 13, used an iPad to navigate a Sphero robot through a maze he created last year.

“We found it interesting because it’s a gyroscopic robot that if I kick it over there, it’ll just roll back on its belly,” he said.

Contact Nolan Stout at 574-6278 or nstout@dnronline.com