

# Innovation Studios Helps C-M Students Expand Knowledge

Students at Canonsburg Middle School are prospering from an Innovation Studios concept initiated three years ago designed to highlight the unique learning experiences that all seventh and eighth graders receive in their related arts rotation block.

Innovation Studios was started in the 2015-16 school year to serve as an overarching designation (branding) of the programming already in place at the school. Class names were changed at that time to more clearly reflect the content being covered.

According to those who teach the classes, the content was not added to create Innovation Studios. The concept (as a brand) was created to house the content that existed.

"One of the key concepts of a true middle school philosophy (vs. a traditional junior high school) is the idea that all students should have access to explore a wide variety of subject areas," said Dr. Greg Taranto, principal of Canonsburg Middle School.

"All of the Innovation Studio classes are STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) based classes which are areas that have tremendous growth opportunities in our country. The idea is to expose them at this level with the hope they will take more classes at the high school and consider STEAM based careers."

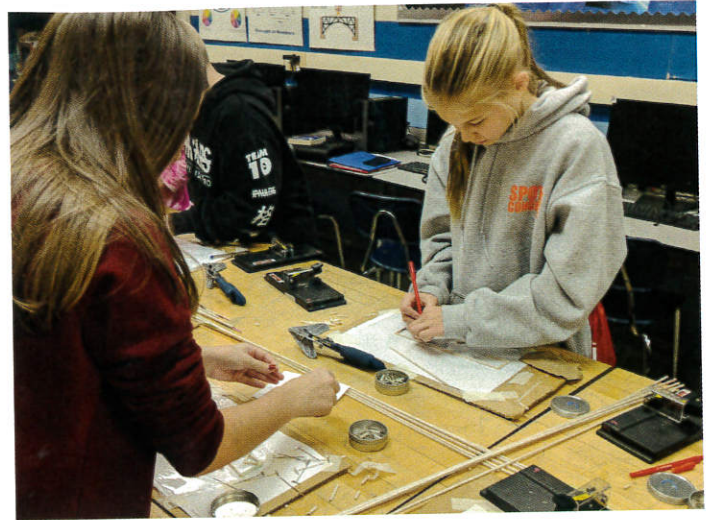


The teachers involved with Innovation Studios: Eric Mychalishyn (materials fabrication and automation & robotics), Brian Herring (creative design & interactive digital design), Michael Maffei (design and analysis and digital systems & electronics), and Lauren Bizich (Visual Arts) said all students at Canonsburg Middle School are involved with Innovation Studios. Eight (four in seventh grade and four in eighth grade) classes are part of the program.

Various concepts occur in multiple classes and teachers routinely collaborate with each other as well as other disciplines to ensure proper and consistent use of terminology and application of course concepts.

Each class is taught in six-week intervals, with each seventh grader spending 24 weeks in Innovation Studios. This 24-week program is repeated again in eighth grade, allowing 48 total weeks of Innovation Studios between both grades. All students are part of Innovation Studios, which are not elective courses. Each student sees all content.

"We have had a very strong technology education program for going on 15 years now so it was a natural progression to create



this Innovation Studio concept which really communicates to the students and community the expectations of these courses," Dr. Taranto said.

Taranto said the program continues to evolve and prosper.

"(It has) absolutely," Taranto added. "As our society's technology and needs change, we adjust the curriculum to meet those needs. The teachers are constantly adjusting lessons to create innovative learning experiences. These teachers are life-long learners which keeps them on top of the needs of the students."

Through this collaboration, students are presented with the many natural connections that exist between these areas and are shown the many possible career options that may develop out of them.

Innovation Studios represents cross-curricular coursework at its finest and the District "knows" it sets the standard for excellence in middle level education.

The school has been recognized on a state and national level for this concept through their Pennsylvania and National Schools to Watch designation.

"Collaboration between the areas of Art, Technology and Engineering create a learning environment for students that is unmatched at any surrounding middle school," according to those who track the program."

A total of eight distinct courses comprise Innovation Studios at Canonsburg Middle School. As students transition from one course to the next, they experience consistent terminology, common software and mutual respect for the varying content areas and the many connections that exist between them.

Course descriptions can be reviewed on the Innovation Studios web page – a link can be found on the school's website.

Those teaching the Innovation Studios model at Canonsburg Middle School said there had been a strong focus on the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math since long before "STEAM" became the buzzword of education.

"As progressive content has always been a hallmark of the school, and because cross-curricular connections are strongly supported by the middle school philosophy," the teachers said. "Canonsburg Middle School has also provided its students with strong experiences in the areas of Art, Electronics and Design. The seven separate areas intersect and combine numerous times throughout the diverse curriculum at (the school).

"The driving force at Canonsburg Middle School has consistently been and will continue to be educating the whole child. Providing opportunities for our students to learn and grow in hands-on, developmentally appropriate environments is critical for their development of academic excellence."