

St. Joan of Arc School installs science lab

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ABERDEEN - Elisa Paolucci had eight beakers - a microscopic number - until St. Joan of Arc School purchased a hands-on science program.

Now Paolucci, a math and the middle school science teacher, has five shelves of them.

The Harford County school purchased the science education system LabLearner and is the first Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to acquire it, said Virginia Bahr, the school's principal.

St. Joan of Arc, which offers science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) courses, did not have a lab before equipment was installed and materials added during summer 2012, Bahr said.

LabLearner materials include seven large locker cabinets, five tables and 25 chairs. In addition, an eye wash was added and chemicals, including acetone and sulfur, are properly stored.

To view a slideshow, navigate the arrows below.

The cabinets are full of grade-level appropriate items, ranging from marbles and Jacks to small plush animals and crayons. Materials are organized and in clear, plastic containers.

Supplies include teaching resources; student workbooks; safety goggles; two sizes of

lab coats; a skeleton; hot plates; microscopes; and triple beam balances.

Teaching in the lab is “stress free,” fun and safe, said Paolucci, who added students “see the equipment and they’re excited to use it.”

All students – from kindergarten through eighth grade – use the lab weekly.

“They know a flask from a beaker and a graduated cylinder,” Paolucci said.

Eighth-graders Erin Baier and Erin Andrews are more excited about science because of the lab.

“The biggest part is how hands-on it is,” said Baier, who added that previously, she and her classmates “were lucky if we were able to do them (labs) once a month.”

It is “definitely a big change,” Andrews said. “We get to do a lot more hands-on experiments.”

Experiments include testing the pH levels of acids and bases.

“It’s pretty cool,” Andrews said. “It’s gotten us more engaged.”

The school paid about \$80,000 for the lab, Paolucci said. Fundraisers, grants and an anonymous donor helped reach the goal.

“What a huge value it is beyond ‘I got a couple of beakers,’ ” said Paolucci, who added that she previously purchased needed classroom items with her own money.

“It’s a lot for the money,” she said. “It would have taken us years to get all the materials.”

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