

AUSD gathers STEAM

By: Tricia Caspers of the Auburn Journal



You've probably heard about STEM by now (science, technology, engineering and math) but you might be wondering what's up with STEAM. As part of a national trend, Auburn Union School District is embracing the 'A' as art or agriculture as part of its curriculum, and the second and third grade multi-age class at Auburn Elementary School recently had a chance to show parents what kind of STEAM projects they've been building.

"One of the biggest factors in a multi-age classroom is peer scaffolding," said Aurora Thompson, principal at Auburn Elementary. "The students teach each other, and sometimes reinforce the lesson even better than a teacher can It's a pretty natural fit for STEAM."

Each Friday the students work for an hour and a half in teams of two on a self-directed technology project. Their teacher, Chelsea Atkinson, sets them at a task, with the assistance of Kristen Beck, AUSD's curriculum coordinator. They might be programming robotic bees one week and building robotic birds out of Legos the next.

"(Students) have parameters and a goal for the end of the task," Thompson said. "One of the beauties of the program is that the process of getting there ... is open-ended."

The tasks build each week and become more complex, she said.

Auburn Elementary is only one of the five AUSD schools where Beck is working with teachers or principals to integrate STEAM curriculum, Thompson said.

Next year, Beck said, STEAM is going to look different because she's building on what the students have already learned.

Beck also hosts an "appy hour" where teachers are invited to an after-school gathering to learn about the newest teaching apps. She hopes that as teachers see STEAM in action, they'll be inspired to integrate it into their classrooms. They're learning to trust the process of "failing forward" – or letting students learn from their mistakes.

"It's uncomfortable," Beck said, "but that's what this time is for. It might be ugly and messy and frustrating, but that's OK."

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