



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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New STEM Series Launches at John Muir Elementary

District Partners with Innovative Learning Studio to Implement STEM Program

Santa Monica, Calif. – Whether they're conducting interviews of school employees to address a school system issue, analyzing turtles and owls to figure out how to keep bicyclists safe or developing a video game to encourage peers to live a healthy lifestyle, students at John Muir Elementary have embarked on a unique, hands-on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) program developed by a local District partner, The Exploratory.

“In exposing our young students to STEM-related programs early on, we are establishing the foundation for each student to be knowledgeable and competitive for the systems, problems and solutions of tomorrow’s jobs,” Sandra Lyon, superintendent, said. “We are extremely grateful for the partnership with The Exploratory and for the hands-on experience it is bringing to our classrooms.”

The eight-week program, the second part of a two-part STEM series, is organized in part by The Exploratory – a Culver City-based design lab that prepares children for the challenges of tomorrow through its Tinker.Make.Innovate philosophy. The program consists of grade-level specific assignments developed for John Muir students.

“The Exploratory seeks to teach children to use their natural curiosity to take risks, learn from mistakes and dive into exploration to produce imaginative solutions for tomorrow's challenges,” Jean Kaneko, founder and head tinkerer at The Exploratory, said. “By using innovative teaching methods in a STEM framework, children are prepared for a future that requires effective problem-solving skills, outside-the-box and flexible thinking.”

At John Muir, kindergarteners will be tasked with understanding how the cafeteria, library, classrooms, among other facets of their campus, operate within their school system. They will interview employees in order to design a solution to an issue they encounter while learning the basics of how to design a prototype of the school’s entrance with Popsicle sticks, paper and other simple materials.

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First-graders will study turtles and owls, incorporating their natural defense mechanisms into ways to enhance safety for bicyclists. Second-graders will explore simple machines and gear systems to create an automata, or self-operating machine, that will share a story about a person who had made a difference in history.

Fourth- and fifth-graders will invent a solution to natural disaster. Fifth-graders will also design a video game using scratch programming language and self-created input devices called makey-makeys that encourage peers to live healthy lives.

“This series really teaches our students the basics of engineering and design as they are challenged to not only learn, but also to put into practice concepts of balance, strength and innovation,” Tristan Komlos, John Muir Principal, said. “We are so grateful for the inspirational and practical program that The Exploratory has developed for our students here.”

The STEM in-class series at John Muir is the first offered by The Exploratory, which works with other SMMUSD schools as an after-school program. The organization meets in all 11 classrooms, once a week for about an hour.

The first part of the STEM series consisted of hands-on activities in which kindergarteners examined natural materials through different lenses; first-graders made games using wind power and second-graders made insects out of recycled materials. Third-graders learned about circuitry, lights and reflection, while fourth-graders explored habitats by inventing an imaginary creature and its make-believe habitat.

The Exploratory is an educational organization, camp and service that focuses on developing creative learning programs that promote hands-on, inquiry-based learning that uses both sides of the brain. The design studio, where students, teachers and others can attend workshops and programs, is located in Culver City.

Photo Captions

Muir STEM1: Students, including third-graders pictured here, at John Muir Elementary have embarked on a unique, hands-on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) program developed in partnership with Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and The Exploratory.

Muir STEM2: Students, including third-graders pictured here, at John Muir Elementary have embarked on a unique, hands-on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) program developed in partnership with Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and The Exploratory.

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As a community of learners, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District works together in a nurturing environment to help students be visionary, versatile thinkers; resourceful, life-long learners; effective, multilingual communicators and global citizens.