



Jerry Zucker Middle School

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Media Release

Zucker Middle School kicks off new STEM approach to learning

North Charleston, SC – Eleven years ago, Laing Middle School implemented STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) into all aspects of scholar learning. In partnership with staff members from Laing, this model is now being replicated on the other side of the district at Jerry Zucker Middle School.

Laing’s approach included employing a STEM Coach, Dr. Mel Goodwin, who with school staff and teachers, grew this whole-school initiative by creating and providing educators with STEM tools to teach content. He said the results of this initiative were scholars being consistently attentive and engaged, and 80 percent of scholars retained the content better.

Even better, Laing teachers and administrators found that under-achieving students were more successful in the classroom using STEM tools than in a traditional classroom setting.

This trans-disciplinary approach is a proven success at Laing and Dr. Joe Williams, Charleston County School District’s (CCSD) Associate Superintendent of Middle Schools, wanted students at Zucker to have the same opportunity.

[A partnership was born.](#) Zucker recently kicked off their STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) with the help of Goodwin, a handful of willing teachers, and Zucker’s STEAM Coach, Anne-Merle Bryant.

“We are so excited about this partnership, and look forward to the great benefits from both schools,” said Williams.

Bryant is a firm believer in using STEAM tools at the middle school level so that students go into high school and beyond, confident and with knowledge of the working world.

“STEAM tools incorporate collaborative activities that encourage diverse opinions. STEAM offers opportunities for experimentation, taking risks and teaches workplace readiness skills,” said Bryant.

Goodwin said Williams was spot-on when he saw that the STEM model used at Laing would be useful to every school in the district.

"The impact we saw on our under-achieving students was a story we told a lot and when Dr. Williams suggested we pilot this, I was honored," said Goodwin. "We recognize that every school is different so we do not consider this a turn-key solution. Our approaches and tools are useful and coupled with enthusiastic educators with a willingness to try, it is a win-win."

At Zucker, students are working on building a water pump. This relates to a book they are reading called *A Long Walk to Water*, where the main characters endure hardships related to securing safe drinking water.

"We are ground-zero with this program but we aspire to replicate the model Laing uses," said Bryant. "I intend for this lab to be used as an extension of activities taking place in the classroom. Integrated learning connects the dots with all of the core classes here at Zucker."

Seventh grader Mateo Castrejon is enjoying the hands-on activity.

"I want to be an aerospace engineer when I grow up and these projects will help me achieve that," said Castrejon.

Marian Gathers, a seventh grade English teacher at Zucker said the STEAM component of this literacy lesson provides hands-on activities.

"It is important for students to see what others are going through in this world and connect it with a possible scientific solution," said Gathers. "STEAM tools are important because they allow our students with diverse learning styles, to experiment, brainstorm, and learn at their own pace."

Goodwin said the enthusiasm that Zucker cohort teachers showed in learning these tools will be why the model succeeds.

"There is nothing like the experience of having tried something and seen the results," said Goodwin. "As they adapt these tools school-wide, they will begin to see intentional engagement from students because of peeked interests. These students will begin to show capabilities they didn't know they had."

Analyn Haynes is a pre-engineering teacher at Laing and will serve as a mentor and support teacher to educators at Zucker.

"I am excited for Zucker," said Haynes. "This is their opportunity to really use creative materials in their curriculum. I love to collaborate and am looking forward to being a support for the teachers at Zucker. I have been in their shoes and worked through the process. I know it will be a challenge but I will be there with them working to make their curriculum better, year after year."

Gathers said the feedback from her students has been exciting.

"The students are learning to work outside of a textbook and are being motivated to engage each other and work together," said Gathers. "These STEAM tools have opened their minds, expanded their vocabulary, and motivated collaborative work."

Carlee Binnarr is a seventh grader at Zucker and enjoys the group work these STEAM projects afford her.

"We think faster as a team and can better problem-solve," said Binnarr. "The hands-on work will help me prepare for a future career."

Cassidy Harris is also a seventh grade English teacher at Zucker.

"STEAM is an opportunity for students to take real-world problems and find complex solutions by working together," said Harris. "Students with different interests are working together, using problem-solving techniques to engage in meaningful ways."

Haynes said it is important to remember that STEAM is much more than science and math.

"It is outside-of-the-box thinking," said Haynes. "It is in-depth thinking, using tangible items. STEAM involves problem-solving and creative thinking and enforces perseverance. It is thinking beyond the textbook."

Goodwin added that exposure to STEAM tools improves the ability of students to pursue careers of interest.

"The tools we give students will allow them to solve problems with an engineer's outlook, especially core academics," said Goodwin. "We also teach them a systematic approach so they feel better about the time they are spending in academic pursuits."

Bryant credits Goodwin and Haynes for their wealth of knowledge.

"We appreciate them training our teachers on best practices," said Bryant. "Their expertise has set our school up for success. It's refreshing to be able to 'shake hands across the bridge' and consider Laing our sister school."

Bryant added that rigor and engagement are at the core of everything done at Zucker.

"This new STEAM initiative increases and fulfills both of those goals," added Bryant.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.