

Burnett Creek incorporates Wonder Lab Jr. in curriculum

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LAFAYETTE - A green screen and a Lego wall decorate the walls of a new technology design lab at a Tippecanoe County school.

Students at Burnett Creek Elementary School will have the chance to use innovative technology at a new design lab called Wonder Lab Jr., which opened this week.

Another Wonder Lab Jr. opened at Sunnyside School of International Studies in Indianapolis as well. But unlike Sunnyside, where students will use the Wonder Lab Jr. as an extracurricular activity, Burnett Creek will include it in its curriculum.

Tiffani Pettit, a fifth grade teacher at Burnett Creek Elementary, said Wonder Lab Jr. allows kids to focus on problem-solving skills.

The 3-D printer, which get a lot of attention from the students, isn't as simple as pushing a button to print. She said they've had to work through how to operate it several times.

Pettit plans to take her students to the Wonder Lab Jr. for art once a week. "We are absolutely lucky," she said.

The Indiana Next Generation Manufacturing Competitiveness Center (IN-MaC) funded the two Wonder Labs.

Robert Nida, education and workforce development director for IN-MaC, said he thinks manufacturing is such an important tool that it's important to get younger generations interested early on.

With Wonder Labs, it brings the two — manufacturing and education — together.

"If I had a wand, there would be a Wonder Lab in every school," he said.

Purdue's Associate Professor of Industrial Design TJ Kim developed Won-



Matthew Fisher, 7, guides a sphero through an app in the Wonder Lab Jr. at Burnett Creek Elementary. PHOTOS BY SHANNON HALL/JOURNAL & COURIER



A 3-D printer at Burnett Creek prints a phone holder. The elementary school has 10 3-D printers in its new Wonderland Jr. lab.

der Lab, which enables people in the community to develop and design technology-based tools.

He said at the elementary level, students should learn how to make products.

Kim hopes to see more design labs such as Wonder Lab Jr. at all levels of education.

The lab features several different stations — 3-D printing, a Sphero robotic ball and STEM education kits.

Kim said people tend to not learn about design until college, so by introducing it to younger kids, it allows them to explore the field and think about art differently.

According to a Purdue news release, the Wonder Lab hopes to expand and put a Wonder Lab Jr. in every state.

"The whole idea is to make a space with a school where kids can discover new technology through design," Kim said.