

New Laker science labs lead to enhanced hands-on lessons

PIGEON – Students didn't waste any time when inaugurating the new science laboratory at Elkton-Pigeon-Bay Port Laker High School.

In the fall, students in the college biology class measured amounts of protein, lipids and carbohydrates in various foods.

A few months later, chemistry students completed an experiment with copper and nitric acid. Right before Christmas, these students created Christmas ornaments using galvanized iron, hydrochloric acid and copper nitrate solution.

Closer to the end of the school year, biology students studied various plant cells underneath a microscope. Forensic science students developed tests to identify unknown powder substances and learned how to detect blood types.

The new science lab, constructed last summer as part of the district's sinking fund for facility improvements, has added plenty of spark to science lessons. The lab features eight stations that offer plenty of space for groups to work on experiments. There is more safety equipment available, as well, so a wider variety of materials can be used in experiments. It looks like a lab one would find at a college.

"This year, we were able to do a lot more labs than we've ever done," said Jordan Maust. "In our college biology class, we had 16 experiments. In physics class, every other week we start a new experiment. The new labs have opened (my knowledge) to the lab side of science."

"The new labs and equipment give us a wider variety of (projects) we can do," said Ashley Baranski. "It's super helpful."

The new lab also helped Science Olympiad team members better prepare for competition, and this year for the first time, they advanced to state-level competition.

Laker High School science teacher Deb Hasselschwert said the science lab turned out better than what she imagined. She's excited about being able to do experiments she's always wanted to do with students.

"The lab allows students to perform experiments that were not possible in the old classrooms and to be safer while experimenting," Hasselschwert said. "It allows students to experience working in a college-level facility while still in high school."

Hasselschwert said the new Laker science lab is even more advanced than some college labs.

"As past students come back to visit, they have been in awe of the new lab and ask if they can take college classes here during the summer," she said.

She said her favorite parts of the lab are the dual view fume hood and the extra-large sinks at each station.

"I have used both regularly this past year and am excited to use them next year," she said.

The lab is shared between multiple teachers, and their science classrooms also received renovations. The classrooms have more advanced technology, such as a projection system with surrounding television screens that can be moved around the classroom.

“I feel Lakers has taken a huge step forward on the technology front with these two new classrooms,” she said.

Hasselschwert said the renovations have helped her expand her technological skills when presenting information to students.

“The high-tech classroom has allowed students to interact with each other and present information in a new way,” she noted. “Students and I can present from anywhere in the room and everyone can see and hear what is happening. I have also used the TV screens for individual teams that are working together and viewing the same design or presentation. The students seem to also really like this feature.”

Hasselschwert said she’s looking forward to spending more time in the lab and “exploring science to the fullest.”

She said she’s very thankful for the school board, administration, technology department and custodial staff for the work they’ve done to make the science department remodel so successful.

“I feel so blessed to be teaching in such an amazing facility,” she said.