

VISITATION ACADEMY

Relevant in the Real World

BY JULIA CHRISTENSEN



Senior students Claire Stolwyk and Sarah Noonan

PHOTO BY SARAH CROWDER

AN AFTERNOON SPENT working with iPads, robots and 3-D printers may sound like the workday of a highly-trained professional. But at Visitation Academy, it could just be fourth period.

Visitation Academy offers an all-girls education for grades one through 12, all under a STEM—science, technology, engineering and math—curriculum. A co-ed Montessori program, with hints of the full STEM program intertwined, is also available for children ages 2 through 5. This means iPads hit the classroom during the toddler years and robotics training starts in first grade. In the upper school program, students begin with an introduction to computers and work up to courses like advanced physics.

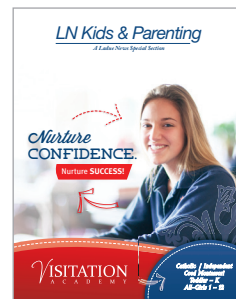
Sarah Spaunhorst, computer and engineering teacher at Visitation, says this education focus is important “because of the way our society as a whole is going. Most jobs that are going to be created in the future are going to be these science- and technology-related careers. The whole purpose of

going to high school is to prepare people for life beyond school.”

The curriculum also is designed to show the inter-relation among the sciences, making lessons ‘click,’ according to physics teacher Dawn Johnson. “Something you might learn in physics would be applicable in chemistry, which would then be applicable in biology... I think [the students are] getting a really well-rounded education, and they seem to be enjoying it.”

The program has been part of the school’s curriculum for the past few years, according to Spaunhorst, with a 10th- through 12th-grade engineering program as the most recent upper-school addition. “It helps make science and math relevant,” she says. “This STEM-gearred curriculum will help them learn, Oh, I learned this in math class, I get to use it in science and build it in engineering.” Spaunhorst explains this can help students who may have otherwise found the theories to be abstract.

Whether or not students decide to pursue careers in STEM-related professions, the lessons learned in the program can have lasting benefits. “A lot of things they learn in STEM can apply to everyday life,” Johnson says. “It might be a bit of information they pull out later in life in a business meeting. Science is everywhere—it’s just how much you’re willing to see it.”



ON THE COVER: Find out more about Visitation Academy at the upcoming all-school open house on Nov. 3 from noon to 4 p.m. Pictured on the cover: Freshman Sean Vogel. For more information, call 625-9100 or visit visitationacademy.org.