For Immediate Release

Mill Valley is STEAMing Ahead with New Initiatives

On March 16th, the California Department of Education announced that the 10th annual California Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) Symposium will take place this October. The event is co-hosted by the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation and the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.

A STEAM education is an important priority and gives students technical knowledge that will be the foundation for future educational success and job skills. In addition to our strong and vibrant arts program for students, this year in the Mill Valley School District, Instructional Technology Coach, Katie Fisher, has been targeting new ways to bring technology and engineering education to the forefront of our curriculum. She began by using the Common Sense Schools curriculum, to teach a series of Digital Citizenship lessons to over 750 of the elementary, 3rd through 5th-grade students. The mission is to give students, and families, information to empower them in responsible use of technology, and in turn to learn, create, participate, and be good digital citizens. "By becoming a Common Sense District, we show our community that we are committed to providing safe and innovative spaces for students to thrive as they harness the potential of technology for learning and life," said Fisher.
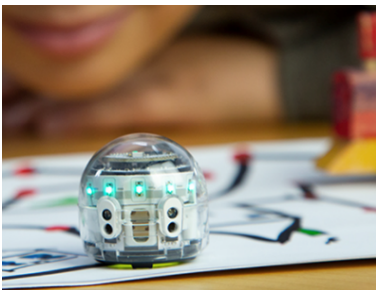
Continuing with the technology portion of STEAM, the District purchased codable robots, called Ozobots, which are a valuable and versatile educational tool for grades K – 8. The robots can be coded using colored markers by the younger students, and using computerized codes by the middle school students. Ms. Fisher states, "When students learn to code, they are learning how to organize, express, and share ideas in new ways, in a new medium. Coding embraces perseverance, and critical thinking, in a fun and engaging way. It also teaches students to collaborate, problem-solve their work, and ultimately create sharable projects."

Mill Valley school board member and parent, Elli Abdoli added "A STEAM education provides valuable technology, engineering, and critical thinking skills. My kids couldn't wait to continue experimenting with coding after their first lesson, and it's exciting to watch their interests bloom in these areas."

An engineering angle on STEAM has been implemented at Strawberry Point School, where they have built a "makerspace". Students are challenged to explore, build, and create self-directed projects from a variety of materials and tools, ranging from paper and cardboard, circuit boards and Lego™, building tools to green screens, and more. The plan is to expand this blueprint at other sites, although each space will have its own unique set-up and feel based on the needs, interests, resources, and goals of the students and school.

"Our district learner profile states our aim to foster, among other qualities, critical-thinking, collaboration, communication, inquiry, knowledge, and perseverance in our students; we feel that including the STEAM concepts deeply enhances the educational experience that we offer" said superintendent, Dr. Kimberly Berman.