

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Antilles School's Future Technology Conference, Students Bring Innovation To Classroom

Technology / **Published On February 07, 2016 10:51 AM /**

Staff **February 07, 2016**



ST. THOMAS -- For Antilles' tech-savvy Social Studies teacher Kim Murtha, walking into this year's Future of Education Technology Conference (#FETC) was like walking into a favorite candy store.

"There were literally hundreds of workshops and the presenters ranged from teachers to people working at the nation's top education technology firms," Ms. Murtha said after returning from the conference late last month. Ms. Murtha was part of an Antilles contingent of eight that attended the conference, held this year in Orlando, with the purpose of bringing back to campus new strategies and methods for incorporating technology into the classroom.

"The conference made it easy for us to be able to facilitate meaningful experiences in our various fields," Ms. Murtha said. Social studies related workshops, along with a few MakerSpace sessions were high on the list for Ms. Murtha, who has been working on expanding Antilles' own MakerSpace and her students' access to different kinds of technology.

Joining Ms. Murtha at the conference were Lower School teachers Caitlin Goodwin, Kate Eanes, Margo Lynch and Michelle Riggle, along with Middle and Upper School colleagues Michelle Braley and Geoff Bergeron. Antilles informational technology whiz Elizabeth Anderson also joined the pack, attending administrative based workshops on providing the kind of support teachers need to make their strategies a reality within the classroom.

"We thought that if we could send a good sized group there that represented the different divisions of the school, we could maximize what was being offered at the conference and have those teachers turnkey their learning to others so that they could really make a big impact on campus," Antilles' Director of Professional Development Shannon Harris-Oriol explained this week.

Over the last few weeks, the teachers have been quick to incorporate what they learned into the classrooms. This week's big challenge, however, came from fourth grade teacher Michelle Riggle, who set her students to work on a building challenge using only a handful of spaghetti, some masking tape strips, and a marshmallow.

The students teamed up in groups to put together an indestructible tower using their best engineering strategies. Riggle and Lynch, Antilles' reading teacher, were on hand to supervise the effort, which they recently tried themselves at the Florida conference.

Riggle's only hint to the class was to concentrate on building a strong base – a lesson she and Lynch learned first-hand as they took on colleagues from across the nation during last month's conference. The true test of the creation was its ability to hold in place a marshmallow, placed on top of the tower, for as long as possible and students were given only 20 minutes to put it all together. In the end, the winning team used tape to stick together bunches of spaghetti in Eiffel Tower-like form, which allowed the marshmallow to stay in place – and the tower to stay up – for more than a minute.

Using augmented reality applications with students in the ELC, reading teacher Margo Lynch also explored this week different strategies for learning letters and sounds. On Friday, Lynch quickly printed out a table of animal picture cards that, combined with an iPad app, gave students a chance to see a 3D picture of each animal, hear how its name sounds, and take photos of two favorites that they were able to write about.

Digital literacy for three to six year olds is Lynch's focus, and she said this week that each students' work will also be set up within a digital portfolio that parents can also review.

"Technology really makes learning accessible to students at every level, allowing them to grasp certain concepts in a different way," Harris said. "This conference really enabled us to learn more about the technology that's out there, and bring back those elements that we can work into the learning environment over the next year."

