

A SCHOOL FULL OF OPPORTUNITY

Students at De Smet's Laura Ingalls Wilder Elementary are benefitting from their district's commitment to providing enriched learning opportunities.

Elementary students have taken part in computer coding, fishing, a Young Reader's Festival and snowshoeing among other educationally enriched activities, as part of the school's inaugural adventure into its "Wild About Learning" theme.

"We wanted to really tap into the students' specific interests," Elementary Principal Abi Van Regenmorter said. "Each student was asked what they were most interested in learning about and then we used those ideas to organize the activities."

"By the end of the year, all students in grades K-5 will have to option to participate."

Van Regenmorter said teachers also organized independent activities for the classes, including the fourth grade class's reading of the book *Dolphin Tale 2*, which culminated in the students attending the movie *Dolphin Tale*.

A goal of the project was to introduce a skill that will be useful later in the students' education and life and a large number of students indicated they wanted to learn more about technology so, utilizing Code.org, the school had the students learn to solve mazes, design games and program a robot.

"We know that computer science jobs are growing rapidly and there are not enough graduates to fill those positions," Van Regenmorter said. "It was my goal to give students not only knowledge about coding, but also confidence to try new and different things."

Students learned perseverance throughout the coding lessons and during the sessions it became evident students were more comfortable taking risks and thinking critically instead of automatically asking an adult for help when they didn't know the answer, said Van Regenmorter.



The learning didn't stop when the lesson ended.

"Several students have continued to work on the coding out of school time and at home," Van Regenmorter said. "The awesome thing about coding is that the students don't even realize how complex of a skill they are learning."

In cooperation with the Outdoor Campus, Laura Ingalls



Wilder students learned about science and the outdoors during the fishing trip to Lake Thompson. Students that attended the Young Reader's Festival were able to listen to author Kate DiCamillo speak about her experiences and inspirations for writing books and watched a performance by Native American hoop dancer, Kevin Locke, who also spoke about the Native American culture, played a flute and introduced children to the Lakota language.

Van Regenmorter said the enrichment activities brought a new level of energy and excitement to school and expanded the comfort zones of students are expanding.

"They are excited to try new activities," Van Regenmorter said, adding that parents have been very supportive of the activities, which the district will continue to pursue.

"We hope to expand these opportunities," Van Regenmorter said, "to give students exposure to different cultures, interests, and academic skills to prepare them to truly be life-long learners."