

Elm Street gets STEM certification

- The school is the first in Floyd County to receive recognition, 21st in the state.

 By Kristina Wilder

Staff Writer

KWilder@RN-T.com

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Three years of hard work at Elm Street Elementary has paid off as the school was just named the 21st STEM-certified elementary school in Georgia and is the first school in Floyd County to be certified.

During a ceremony at the school Monday, representatives from the Georgia Department of Education presented a banner to the students and faculty.

STEM — which stands for science, technology, engineering and math — is defined as an education that fully integrates the curriculum as opposed to subjects being taught just in isolation.

STEM encourages students to be problem-solvers and to develop ideas, make discoveries and explore project-based learning.

More than 600 students gathered to watch and cheer as the banner was presented to the school. After the ceremony, the banner was carried through the school hallways so every student could reach out and touch it.

"Every student here participated and contributed to us becoming a STEM school," explained JoAnn Moss, principal. "This is the way kids should be taught and this is just the beginning for our school."

Michael Buck, superintendent of Rome City Schools, said he was thrilled for the students.

"The opportunity to learn in this type of environment is incredible," he said. "I'm excited for our teachers and the whole Elm Street family."

Elm Street is the first school in Northwest Georgia to be STEM-certified as well as the first in Rome, Moss said.

Gilda Lyon, the STEM coordinator for the Georgia Department of Education, was part of the group that visited the school to make the decision on certification.

"It usually takes about three years for a school to become STEM-certified," Lyon said. "A school has to totally transform. The STEM culture is one of collaboration, and an integrated curriculum

and it is hard work for everyone."

Schools must collaborate with local business partners, who must be directly involved with the education process.

"They can't just be donating money or speaking on STEM day," Lyon explained. "When we talk to the students, the kids have to articulate to us how they work with the business partners and how each aspect of what they are working on relates to what they are learning in class."

Lyon said Elm Street impressed the evaluation team, which was made up of DOE officials, business and industry leaders and a professor from Georgia Institute of Technology.

"I had one tell me they'd been to schools all over the state, all over the country, and that Elm Street was one of the best they'd seen," she said.

The purpose behind STEM programs is to encourage schools to expose students to STEM careers, she added.

"This all started because businesses in Georgia were telling the Department of Education that they needed to have more science-and math-focused workers," she said. "The program teaches our students that what they are learning is applicable. For instance, in math you learn fractions, but what are those good for? It is harder to explain if you just teach them from a book, but if you let them apply that knowledge, it makes it easier to learn and they understand the use."

As a STEM-certified school, Elm Street will qualify for more grants and be able to expand their business partners to a wider range in the state, Moss said.

"It is a recognition of our program and it validates what we are doing," she added.

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Read this story online for links to the Elm Street school and STEM Georgia websites.

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Students at Elm Street Elementary School line the hallways to cheer as the Certified STEM School banner is carried through the school Monday after the presentation ceremony.