

# FLORIDACatholic

## VENICE DIOCESE

### Academy is first Diocesan school to be STREAM certified

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Special to the Florida Catholic

**SARASOTA** | After a thorough assessment and examination, St. Mary Academy in Sarasota was awarded the title of a certified STREAM (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) school.

The Academy is the first Catholic school in the Diocese of Venice, and the first ESE (Exceptional Student Education) school in Florida, to earn this prestigious certification through the Florida Catholic Conference (FCC) and the National Council for Private School Education. The academy joins just three other schools in the state with a STREAM title.



As a school serving students with special learning needs, St. Mary Academy realizes the value of a STREAM concept of learning, Principal Rebecca Reynolds said. "With nearly 20 years of excellence in education, St. Mary Academy continues to offer its students a progressive education, affording them a strong foundation to ensure future success," Reynolds said. "A STREAM curriculum model allows them to do just that."

Dr. Ben Moore, Diocese Superintendent of Catholic Education, said the Diocese is proud of the administration, faculty and staff of St. Mary Academy for achieving the STREAM certification from the FCC.

"Such a designation is the culmination of years of preparation and professional commitment to this initiative," Moore said. "The FCC has validated our schools' unique ability to provide a balanced educational experience designed to prepare our students for the future while remaining grounded in our Catholic identity."

A STREAM education is the collaborative blending of six concepts (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) through the platform of the Catholic faith in an exploratory and inquiry-based learning environment. STREAM schools integrate Catholic identity into every aspect of the curriculum and promote a culture of innovation. STREAM lessons educate students for their future, make learning relevant, and emphasize interdisciplinary connections.



Ayan observes a carbon dioxide bubble while studying states of matter during a STREAM-based lesson at St. Mary Academy in Sarasota. (COURTESY)

St. Mary Academy operates using a STREAM curriculum model. Teachers provide students with meaningful instruction and authentic assessments by using project-based learning, which provides their students with real-world situations and applications.

From kindergarten through grade eight, the teachers at St. Mary Academy design units of study that challenge and empower students.

A recent STREAM unit of study titled "Tham Luang Cave Rescue," encompassed all subject areas. From science to art class, middle school students studied the progression of the cave rescue. Each student was assigned to a rescue team and planned accordingly. Rescue teams developed plans to feed, deliver medical attention, devise an escape route and secure life safety for everyone involved.

Students didn't stop there. They continued their exploration in each class by: measuring distance in math class; calculating escape-route times in technology class; researching amount of oxygen necessary in science class; creating mock caves in art class; developing overall escape plans in engineering; and discussing the value of preserving human life in religion class.

"It's exciting to see the students so engaged in their learning," said Kathy Wilde, STREAM Coordinator. "They ask higher-level questions and seek the answers independently. After all, 21st-century learners are problem-solvers. It's rewarding to see students so empowered to find solutions, both in and out of the classroom."

The school offers a STREAM lab, vegetable garden, prayer garden, open fields, and the Zazarino Center/gymnasium as dynamic learning spaces, in addition to collaborative classrooms. Parents recognize the value and appreciate a STREAM curriculum model.

Jessica Alcalá, Home School Association President, said the STREAM foundation of the school is obvious. "The faculty and staff, led by Mrs. Reynolds, continue to impress me with the way they include so much relevant learning across all subject areas" Alcalá said. "It's a new way of learning, and my son loves it."

St. Mary Academy also takes careful consideration to differentiate instruction. The teachers accommodate the academic and developmental needs of their students in various ways. The school takes great pride in encouraging and fostering each child's academic success, while maintaining a rigorous, developmentally appropriate curriculum. The students continue to thrive in a progressive academic environment, where they are faithful to God, inspired to serve, responsible for their actions and engaged to learn. ■

*For more information about St. Mary Academy or to make a donation, contact Connie Taft, Development Director, at [ctaft@stmarysarasota.org](mailto:ctaft@stmarysarasota.org).*