



# ST. SIMON THE APOSTLE SCHOOL

## Expands STEM Learning with Purdue IN-MaC and STEM Education Works

### OVERVIEW

When St. Simon the Apostle School in Indianapolis wanted to expand its STEM offerings, school leaders knew they needed a program teachers could use with confidence, a space students would be eager to enter, and support that would help the program succeed from day one.

Through a partnership with Purdue IN-MaC and STEM Education Works, St. Simon launched a new Design and Innovation Studio in January. Within three months, students were coding, building, problem-solving, and exploring new technology with confidence.

What started as a new space quickly became one of the most active and engaging spaces in the school.

### THE CHALLENGE

St. Simon already had a strong science foundation. The school had discussed becoming a STEM-certified school in Indiana, but leaders wanted a more practical path.

“We always have been high STEM,” said Paula Pletcher, media specialist at St. Simon. “We have a lot of STEM teachers.” The school’s biggest gap was in computer science. Teachers wanted to give students more hands-



on experiences, but many felt limited by time, setup, and confidence with technology.

“I just want to teach the kids and bring cool things and have the kids like science,” Pletcher said. “I don’t want to spend my time recording all the stuff we’re doing, the fun things we’re doing for the kids.” Teachers also needed a curriculum that was easy to follow and flexible enough for different comfort levels.

### THE SOLUTION

The opportunity came through a parent connection. After learning about STEM Education Works and Purdue IN-MaC, the school quickly realized it had the pieces in place. “We have the people in place. We had space that we could use. We agreed to commit to the program,” Pletcher said. “And it’s just been amazing.”

The STEM Education Works curriculum gave teachers confidence from the start. “When we first started talking about it, they sent me the lesson plans,” Pletcher said. “Anyone can teach from these lesson plans. I could give this to any teacher and follow along.”

The school launched its STEM lab in January and quickly began using tools such as Sphero indi, drones, and coding activities across grade levels.



### THE IMPACT

Students responded right away.

“The Sphero indi cars are kind of my favorite because I think they’re very, very fun,” Pletcher said. She shared a story about first-grade students who had already learned to code, organize their projects, and think through multi-step problems. “They were doing double loops. They were just putting all this stuff together. It was incredible,” she said.

Pletcher also noticed that students were taking ownership of the materials and understood exactly what to do when it was time to put them away. “They’re like, okay, we have to color code all of the squares, color code them, put them in the right order,” she said.

For younger students, the excitement came from getting their hands on real tools and technology. For teachers, the impact came from seeing how quickly students built confidence. “The kids are coming to the library to do science, so they think that’s pretty cool, because they’re changing space and that kind of thing,” Pletcher said.

The excitement spread to teachers as well. During a professional development day, the school turned the library and hallways into hands-on STEM stations.

“It was the most active professional development we ever had,” Pletcher said. “We had the teachers flying drones down the hallway.”

After the session, teachers wanted to bring their own classes into the lab and team-teach lessons. The new studio quickly became a place where students could test ideas, make mistakes, solve problems, and build confidence.



### WHY IT WORKED

The partnership succeeded because the program was easy to implement, practical for teachers, and engaging for students. At St. Simon, teachers often wear many hats. A turnkey STEM solution helped remove barriers and made the transition easier.

“I just think it’s one of the best things I’ve ever encountered turnkey,” Pletcher said. “To be able to, start to finish, get it rolling in three months and teach ... we were teaching in January, and the kids are so excited about it.”

For schools that feel hesitant about STEM, Pletcher believes support and training make all the difference.

### LOOKING AHEAD

St. Simon’s new Design and Innovation Studio has already become a hub for curiosity, creativity, and collaboration. Students are building real skills. Teachers are more confident. The school is bringing computer science and hands-on STEM into more classrooms.

For St. Simon, the partnership with Purdue IN-MaC and STEM Education Works gave the school a practical way to make STEM part of everyday learning. For schools considering a similar investment, Pletcher believes the value is clear. “Anyone who wants to come and see our lab is welcome to come and see our lab,” she said.

St. Simon’s experience shows what is possible when schools have the right tools, the right support, and a shared commitment to hands-on learning. In a short amount of time, the school created a STEM space that students want to be in, teachers feel confident using, and families are proud to support.