



## WHAT iGNITES US

**Illuminating Innovation at the Middle Level**  
Garnet Valley Middle School: Glen Mills, PA  
By: Joy Rosser  
jrosser@kcsd.org

*Joy Rosser is currently serving as secretary on the DVR-PASCD board, teaching sixth grade science at Kennett Middle School, serving on the Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch State Evaluation Team and is president of the southeast regional PAMLE board. Joy is expanding her research and writing; discovering ways people are being ignited within educational institutions, among student interactions, and within families affiliated with education.*

Evident upon entering Garnet Valley Middle School (GVMS) are the words of Steve Jobs, “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” Staff and students are in the business of building leaders through the marriage of innovation and learning; this endeavor contributed to the recent honorable designation of Garnet Valley Middle School as a 2017 PA Don Eichhorn School: “School to Watch” (PA STW) as part of a recognition program developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform.

With the passion to motivate students to act on dreams and ideas, GVMS has embraced the concept of a *makerspace* by transitioning their traditional quiet, literacy focused library into a boisterous, active design-driven setting. While still maintaining a separate literacy space, the collaborative *makerspace* provides ongoing opportunities for students to explore their creativity, express their inventiveness, and share ideas with peers. Student participation in the creative space continues to gain momentum and popularity; students are emerging as leaders of their own ingenious thoughts. Peering into the window of opportunities in the GVMS *makerspace* reveals robot programming, kinetic and electronic circuit sets, the design of Revolutionary War catapults, expansive dry erase surface areas for artistic expression and design, and a silhouette maker for crafting projects involving precise and intricate cuts. The think, play, and design space affords endless opportunities for student collaboration and expression.

GVMS is well on its way to embracing 21<sup>st</sup> century education with a mission and vision focusing on creativity, compassion and community in a supportive culture. *The Innovator’s Mindset* written by George Couros, has encouraged and ignited change both in the district and in the school. The foundation of this text, *the belief that abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed leading to the creation of new and better ideas* is adopted at GVMS. Staff embrace an ongoing attitude of refusing to believe the impossibility of any venture when it comes to GVMS students.

An even broader scope of the technology and innovation infused throughout the school are the accomplishments of STEAM night, Global Design Day, and the eSchool of Garnet Valley - a new initiative created to provide the resources and flexibility for students who learn best in either a full or part-time digital environment. The diverse digital curriculum offers students the choice of completing their courses in the Garnet Valley eSchool Studio, computer labs, at home, or other locations with Internet Access (GVCD website, 2017). As a hybrid model, the eSchool embodies

technological innovation, creativity and inclusion of all students in the Garnet Valley Middle School.

Students, staff and the community of Garnet Valley Middle School are creating leaders in the realms of innovation, technology, inspiration and commitment. The journey is illuminated through their hallways, their courtyards, their classrooms, and most importantly, through the attitudes and enthusiasm of those who walk through their doors every day.