

Next-Generation Libraries- Newsday 11/27/22

The students at Silas Wood Sixth Grade Center in the South Huntington school district are learning to write computer code, use 3D printers, experience virtual reality and have access to a green screen in what was once a library room that mostly housed books.

Like other public school libraries across Long Island, the space has transformed into a place where students work together and technical advances have led to new ways to learn.

In many districts, school libraries have an open-air concept and offer students opportunities to podcast, code or video conference. The furniture is movable and there are private study rooms. There are still books, but the tall stacks of bookcases have been removed.

Districts from both Nassau and Suffolk — including Amityville, Bethpage, Baldwin, Herricks, South Huntington and Valley Stream 13 — have upgraded their libraries in recent years. Some have used funding from bonds and others budgeted from the general fund. And there are other plans in the works. For example, the Wantagh school district has scheduled a bond vote next month that includes funding for a complete renovation of the library media center at the high school.

“They [libraries] are such the hub of the entire school,” said Eastern Suffolk BOCES School Library System director Carl Vitevitch.

In South Huntington, the Silas Wood library is now a “Makerspace” — a collaborative work space where students use both high-tech and no-tech tools. There’s a green screen where students can create background visual effects, 3D printers and a virtual reality system. Students follow lessons on their Chromebooks.

There are still stacks of books, but they are no longer the focal point.

“We’ve learned that traditional libraries are no longer needed. What we need is a combination of both,” said John Murphy, South Huntington’s assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. “So library science is still getting students not only books, but also giving them the 21st century skills necessary to be successful once they get into high school and past high school.”

A recent lesson combined the old with the new. Students were given Rick Riordan’s book “The Lightning Thief” and then followed the teacher in a lesson on how to craft a digital lightning bolt on their Chromebooks that will be printed on a 3D printer.

Cristian Diaz, 12, liked the lesson and used the virtual reality system to “ride” a roller coaster in class.