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Animalearn Launches Humane Science Education Program in Philadelphia

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Jenkintown, PA - Animalearn is pleased to announce the successful launch of its new Animalearn Philly Schools Partnership (APSP) program, which brings technology resources for humane science education to city kids.

Two public schools in Philadelphia, Chester A. Arthur School and Robert Morris School, were selected to participate in the initial phase of the program for the 2020-2021 school year, and have been outfitted with Apple technology to run the Merge EDU augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) teaching tools in their science classes.

Middle school science teacher Jeffrey Gerstemeier, at Chester A. Arthur School, commented, "My students and I are looking forward to virtual dissections, galactic exploration, and exciting virtual field trips with great anticipation. The capabilities of Merge offer a wonderful opportunity to shrink the distances between our students and will allow them to interact on a more robust level."

Robert Morris science teacher Katelin McAndrew added, "The generous gift of the Merge virtual reality technology, platform, and iPods will transform the learning of our middle years science students... [They] will learn not only the power of technology for education, but also the power of science and technology working in tandem to ensure safe, responsible science practices that protect and preserve life and our environment."

Dynamic principals at both schools were instrumental in helping shape the program, which focuses on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects. Chester Arthur School Principal Dr. Mary Libby is pleased with the opportunities that this program offers. "With the Merge cubes and headsets, 7th and 8th grade students can learn about anatomy and physiology through humane dissections, take virtual field trips, and create virtual objects that they can share with each other and their teacher, despite not being in-person together."

Robert Morris Principal Tameron Dancy is also optimistic that the program will bring benefits. "The humane alternative to animal use program combined with the AR/VR technology will provide our future scientists an opportunity to view and virtually interact with a component of the Life Science curriculum they may never have gotten the opportunity to experience without it. With the Animalearn program and Merge technology, our students are poised to be leaders in science—not just merely participants."

Nicole Green, Director of Animalearn, said that the inspiration for the program came in the spring of 2020 when schools were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and educators were reaching out to Animalearn because of its expertise in alternatives to traditional dissection labs. At the same time, there was new urgency in calls to address social injustice and the tremendous imbalance in access to resources for education. "We spoke with a supporter about the need to work more closely with schools, so we could help in a meaningful way. Her generous funding got us started and we filled in with money we saved on travel this year." The value of the products delivered to the schools totals over \$17,000. In addition, tech education company Merge made a generous contribution of AR cubes and VR headsets for each student and the company is also providing support to teachers on using the technology. In all, the set-up includes two classroom sets of iPods, Merge AR Cubes, Merge VR Headsets, and access to the Merge EDU platform.



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“It’s been a challenging year for schools, and we’re grateful to partner with Animalearn to help bring science and STEM to life for students in Philadelphia,” said Stephanie Lyons, Community Manager at Merge. “With over 100 engaging, interactive simulations and over 1,000 hands-on digital teaching aids that cover complex science and STEM concepts, we hope that Merge EDU will inspire students and get them excited about learning.”

About Animalearn

Established in 1990 as the education initiative of The American Anti-Vivisection Society, Animalearn works to foster an awareness of, and a respect for animals used in education. Animalearn strives to eliminate the use of animals for this purpose and is committed to assisting educators and students to find the most effective non-animal methods to teach and study science. Animalearn also maintains a lending library, The Science Bank, which provides to schools the latest in high-tech, animal-friendly educational technology for the classroom, and has grown to be the largest free loan program of humane science education alternatives in the United States.

