# School experiments with science room

## Hands-on lessons will give students a chance at close-up learning

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Parents at one Farmington Hills elementary are experimenting with their own brand of science education, as educators look for ways to improve learning in that area.

Parent-Teacher Organization members at Wooddale Elementary earmarked several thousand dollars from PTO fundraisers this year to set up a science room at the school.

Work on the room began in January. It will offer hands-on lessons coordinated with various chapters in the district's new science text.

"Hearing something 100 times is not as good as seeing it once," says a slogan above the door of the room shared by science and music educators. With parent/teacher cooperation, the room is looking more like a science room.

It has posters, things for students to touch and explore and boxes full of hands-on lessons for teachers. Though far from being complete, teachers now sign up to use the room and materials.

"We tried to implement it two years ago, but there was not a room and we didn't have the money to fund it," said PTO president DiAnne Hagan.

A successful fundraiser last fall cleared the way for the PTO, spearheaded by parent Lesley Gore, to begin their dream.

*The Wooddale parent/teacher effort* follows goals set several years ago by the Farmington school board.

**TRUSTEES HAVE** said said they want to open science rooms in each elementary school. That has not happened because of scarcity of extra classroom space at most schools.

This year, there is an experimental science room set up at Highmeadow Common Campus, a 2-year pilot alternative elementary school. One is also planned for a new elementary school on the district's west side, slated to open in 1990.

School officials remain concerned about science because of test results, from the Michigan Education Assessment Program, which show deficiencies in the science area statewide, at all levels.

The Farmington district recently adopted new textbooks and a program focusing on intensive teacher training in the science area to enhance the curriculum program.

"The main goal is to get the scientific process started," said Gore, who head's the Wooddale PTO's science committee and has a degree in chemistry.

Educated in England where she studied science extensively, Gore said she and other parents saw it lacking in the school's curriculum and pushed to set up the science room. The room serves children in all grades, from kindergarten to grade five.

**SO FAR**, the parents have set up instructional hand-on lessons in magnetism, electricity, static electricity and paleontology, complementing the school science textbook. They want students to focus on the key steps of the scientific process, which includes: questioning, hypothesis, materials, procedure, observations and conclusions.

The next area of focus will be on Orienteering, as parents, teachers and kids carve out nature trail in the woods behind the school this spring and summer. Cub Scout Troop 318 will help mark the nature trail. Parents also hope to have an orienteering tape to guide students in the outdoor area.

PTO members say they will continue to add small amounts of money to keep the science room going in the future, but hope the district will officially take charge of the science room in the coming year.

Hagan has children in the fourth and sixth grades, and Gore children in kindergarten, first and third grades. "That's why this is so important," Hagan added. "We need to get this into the elementary early."

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

**Charmaine Ratcliffe teaches first-grade science in the science room at Wooddale Elementary in Farmington Hills.**

## Longacre plans its spring activities

Several activities are planned at Longacre Elementary School in Farmington Hills as the end of the school year approaches. They include:

- The rock opera "Stone Soup," based on an old French folk tale will be presented by first graders May 5. The students have been practicing and preparing for several weeks.
- The entire school will watch a performance of "Dorothy's Adventures in Oz" on May 9. It will involve six Longacre students as Munchkins and evil witch assistants. Presented courtesy of the Longacre PTA and Assembly Committee, the production is put on by Dance Focus from Ann Arbor.
- The Longacre gymnasium will be jumping all day on May 16, as physical education teacher Ann Sopha coordinates a "Jump Rope for Heart" day to fight heart disease. Each class will have a specified time to continuously jump rope, after students solicit pledges and donations for their favorite organization.

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