

# Charter school's reputation rockets skyward

BY TERRY FLORES

tflores@kenoshanews.com

A Kenosha Unified charter school with a curriculum built for the 21st century has become a recognized resource for schools in the region.

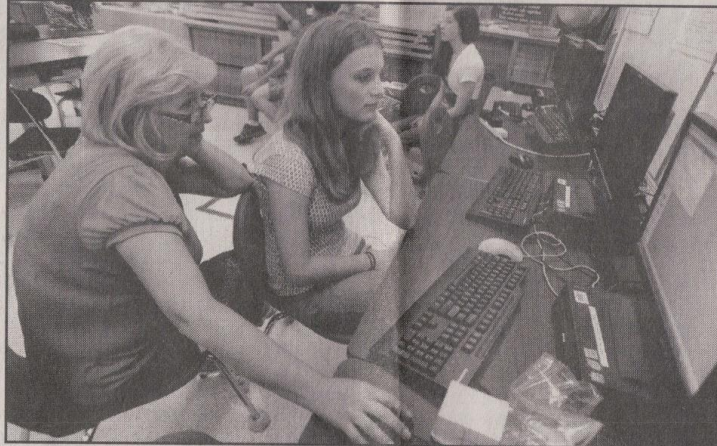
Kenosha Technology Enhanced Curriculum charter school, a Kenosha Unified charter school at 6811 18th Ave., earned its recognition this spring from Project Lead the Way, a national initiative that emphasizes hands-on learning while incorporating science, technology, engineering and math.

Principal Angela Andersson along with Sarah McMillian, who teaches sixth-grade science and math, established the charter school six years ago. McMillian and Bonnie

Skurski, who teaches seventh- and eighth-grade science, have been trained and are using the project's rigorous science and technology curriculum. Andersson said the charter's emphasis on science and technology is taught in conjunction with core subjects and is aligned with Unified's requirements.

## Hands-on learning system

It's also the only middle school



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY KEVIN POIRIER

**Kenosha Technology Enhanced Curriculum teacher Bonnie Skurski helps eighth-grade student Hannah Leischner with programming software during an automation and robotics class.**

in the state whose instructors are employing the hands-on Gateway to Technology instructional methods, which emphasize six distinct projects taught in nine-week units in each grade. The projects involve:

■ Design and modeling using computer-aided drafting.

- Automation and robotics.
  - Energy and the environment.
  - Space flight.
  - The science of technology, including applied chemistry, physics and nano technology.
  - Electrons and electricity.
- McMillian and Skurski said the

design and modeling unit is a large part of the hands-on learning.

"Students learn how to use computer-aided drafting and then we carry this through to where they build and test prototypes, and they're building other things like rockets, CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide run) vehicles and magnetic levitation vehicles," Skurski said.

In McMillian's class, students end the school year learning about the engineering and science behind bottle rockets reusing materials, such as two-liter bottles filled with water and launched with the help of compressed air.

"We're doing flight in space," said McMillian. "And what we do is we don't always give the students the answers. They have to discover why something didn't work out. And they know that we have to fine-tune it and make it better because it's a process."

## Teaching other teachers

With the help of a state dissemination grant, the school's science teachers have been able to present their methods of teaching to other schools. Earlier this year, Skurski presented to teachers in western Kenosha County.

Even before it received formal rec-

ognition, the school has been a place where representatives from various sectors — public and private — have come to observe. It also partners with LakeView Technology Academy, which is recognized as a Project Lead the Way school for high school students.

"We've had teachers from all over the country come visit us, and one of the things they're impressed with is how the kids stick with the process," Skurski said.

McMillian added: "(They see that) 'how and why' are often more important than giving them right answer at that point in their learning."

The teachers said they want to dispel a lot of the myths and perceptions about who can do science and how it applies to the world kids live in. The teachers are especially aware of the need to be models for young women who, although they may have the aptitude, would otherwise shy away from high-tech careers because the jobs traditionally have been filled by men.

"It's not some dorky guy with some pocket protector and glasses anymore," McMillian said. "It's really for everyone. And if you have any amount of scientific interest at all, there's a niche for you."