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## Love of science transforms an empty classroom

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Christopher Zajac

Emma Becotte, left, and Claudia Stavidlo, right, observe some goldfish swimming in their aquarium in the Science Lab at Flanders Elementary School in Southington, May 6, 2010. The science classroom features a variety of fish, reptiles, and other live animals all living in tank for students to observe. (Christopher Zajac/Record-Journal)

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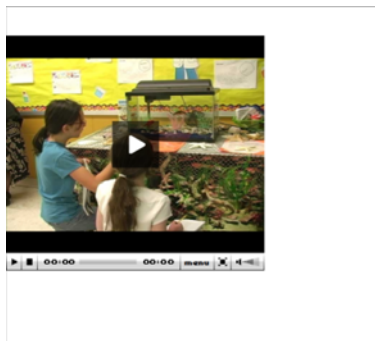
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SOUTHINGTON - A Flanders School classroom once described as an "empty shell" has recently been transformed into a unique room for learning.

Walls are draped with artificial vines, science posters are taped to the walls and the steps of the scientific method hang from the wall on fluorescent pieces of poster board. Aquariums filled with goldfish, red-eared turtles, hermit crabs and other creatures have found a new home in the back of the classroom.

On Thursday morning, Flanders School held an open house to introduce its new science lab. The lab was created with help from Principal Patricia Mazzarella, but fourth-grade teacher Joyce McAloon's love of science played a major role as well. McAloon applied for a \$500 grant through the Southington Education Foundation in early December and found out in January that she would be awarded the money to transform the empty

third-grade classroom into a room celebrating science.

"We brought in habitats and environments. We wanted every aspect of science to be hands-on," McAloon said.

Students get a chance to observe the creatures and plants each time they enter the room, but the lab also provides all of the kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers with a room to conduct their inquiry-based science lessons. McAloon said the lab gives teachers ample space to perform certain experiments and students continue to utilize their science kits.

"You should have seen their faces light up when they first walked in," McAloon said. "The kids said to me, 'Thank you for winning that grant.'"