

Education Spotlight



LEARNING WITH LEGO

Young or old, it's common knowledge that we learn best when learning feels more like play than work.

Sisters Elementary School STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Teacher Jocelyn Gary Blevins recently led kindergarten teachers in a session exploring ways to use education-oriented LEGO education sets purchased through a STEM grant from Sisters' Roundhouse Foundation. Roundhouse also provided funds for storage facilities for STEM-related equipment and materials.

The grant provides class sets for each classroom. The sets are designed to promote learning in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and in the "social-emotional" arena.

For mathematics, students learn by "decomposing" and putting back together LEGO structures and figures — adding and subtracting as they go. Storytelling is the foundation of the ELA instruction. Kits contain prepared story materials.

"As you're telling stories, the kids are building the pieces of it," Blevins said. "They're acting, playing, and learning a story as they build the background to it..."

They have all the different modalities going on in their heads."

Build Me Emotions helps young children identify emotions through the expressions on LEGO characters' faces. Through a story, the children identify expressions, name emotions, "build" that emotion with the LEGOS, and talk through problem-solving.

Calm Down Construction helps children express feelings through building something. Both elements are tied to the "social-emotional" aspect of learning.

Not only does the directed "learning through play" impart educational benefits — it also builds fine motor skills as the children build and take apart structures and characters.

The use of LEGO is scalable up into older grades, where LEGO

robotics come into play. "They can engineer anything," Blevins said.

The "play" starts to become related to real-world activity. Blevins hopes to see the program link up with the construction of a new Sisters Elementary School over the next couple of years.

"We were thinking we could tie in the LEGO Robotics with the landscape architecture piece," she said.

Teachers brainstormed ways of using the LEGO sets in the classroom — all part of ongoing efforts to use innovative and exciting ways to reach children and not only impart knowledge, but a love of learning. Because learning is easiest and best when it's fun.



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