

Doolittle Exploratorium

School/City: Doolittle School, Cheshire

of Participants: 21 Students, 3 Adults

Total Service Hours Completed: 2,706

Academic and Social focus areas: Science, Math, Reading, Writing, Cooperation, Community Awareness,



Cheshire Superintendent Greg Florio joins students in forming a hypothesis at an Exploratorium exhibit on catapults.

Fifth grade teacher Mrs. Ajello's year-end challenge for her students was to transform the common science fair into a service-learning experience to benefit the entire Doolittle community. After a year of participating in various service-learning projects, the students knew just what to do. They decided to take their exhibits beyond the usual show-and-tell format, and make the entire experience interactive! Thus, the Doolittle Hands-on Science Exploratorium was born.

The 5th grade scientists worked in pairs to research various topics that covered science objectives from each grade level, with guidance from Mrs. Ajello. Each exhibit included an introduction to the concept, followed by an interactive demonstration, and visitors were prompted to formulate a hypothesis to predict the results. Visitors were given a student-designed

program that included tips on the scientific method, a map of the exhibits, and clues for a scavenger hunt with room to take notes.

The Exploratorium ran for one whole school day, and more than 500 people passed through its doors. Students brainstormed ways to plan visits in advance in order to avoid pedestrian traffic buildups. The 5th-graders came up with a system where each visiting class was broken into smaller teams and sent to different clusters of exhibits. The clusters were in groups of three based on the grade level the science topic first appeared. For example, the 1st-grade cluster included activities on bubbles, colors and shapes. By the end of the guided tour, students and parents were able to survey the scientific concepts taught at Doolittle School as well as see every day events through the lens of science.

The 5th graders' hard work and preparation paid off, and each team presented their experiments with poise and confidence. By becoming masters of their subjects, students were able to handle public speaking in front of an array of guests, including students, parents, Superintendent Florio, and Diane Klotz from the State Department of Education. Everyone was impressed by their efforts and the students were praised for their exciting and interactive presentations. Evidence of their success was demonstrated by the inquisitive comments of fellow students who had been through the Exploratorium. Mrs. Ajello's fifth graders succeeded not only in igniting excitement about science and its applications, but also gave fellow students a great hands-on overview of their science studies at Doolittle School. The Exploratorium encouraged students to be lifelong scientists by continuing to ask questions about the world around them.