THE SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT ON THE

BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMS

to New Jersey's Youngest Library Users, their Families and Caregivers

Connecting people with information through libraries

NJ State Library
An affiliate of Thomas Edison State University

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I like that there are experiments that you wouldn’t necessary think to do, but you are able to continue the experiment/activity at home. We now have a box of various size cardboard tubes and blue tape sitting in our hallway so [my child] can build a marble run whenever the need strikes him!

– PARENT, FAMILY M.E.S.S. PROGRAM
CRANFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY

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MASTERING EARLY LITERACY SKILLS AT A YOUNG AGE LEADS TO SUCCESS LATER IN LIFE

It has been proven again and again that the single most effective thing parents can do to help prepare their children to succeed in school is to read aloud to them from the time their children are born. This shared time reading together instills a habit in children that can open countless doors throughout their lives. Public libraries play a vital role in helping young children achieve proficiency in early literacy skills. More and more librarians are being trained in early childhood education and early literacy, and are gaining legitimacy as early literacy specialists. They understand how critical these skills are to a child's success in school and beyond.

Each year since 2009, the New Jersey State Library has recognized four public libraries for their Best Practices in Early Literacy Programs. These winning public libraries all provide easily executed and replicated early literacy programs for children from birth to age six that are fun and educational. All of these programs demonstrate that the size or budget of the library is not a deterrent to providing exemplary early literacy programming.

The Nation's Report Card, submitted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2016, indicates that only 36 percent of students in Grade 4 in the nation performed at or above proficient in reading in 2015. The *New Jersey Kids Count* pocket guide, a project of Advocates for Children of New Jersey, funded by the Anne E. Casey Foundation, reports that in 2014 (the most recent year data is available), 74.6 percent of 4th grade students passed the New Jersey state achievement tests but of that only 60 percent passed the language arts state test, which includes listening, speaking, writing, viewing, visually representing and reading.

These findings, and other studies, substantiate the ongoing need for children to become literacy proficient from a very young age. Public libraries are providing the materials necessary to make this happen. New Jersey's public libraries continue to lead the way in encouraging good reading habits for young children by offering storytimes and STEM and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) activities that model reading and stimulate the children's imaginations and critical thinking skills. All of these experiences position the library as a fun and welcoming place that also builds a solid foundation for mastering literacy skills.

Congratulations to these public libraries on their outstanding programs that feature some of the best early literacy programs currently being offered around the state.

Mary L. Chute

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State Librarian of New Jersey

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2016 BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY

WINNING LIBRARIES

MOORESTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE 1,000 BOOKS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

CRANFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE FAMILY M.E.S.S. PROGRAM

BERNARDSVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE READING RUMPUS PROGRAM

ROCKAWAY TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE SCHOOL SKILLS PROGRAM

MOORESTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE

1,000 BOOKS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

The Moorestown Public Library joined the national movement encouraging families to read *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* in fall of 2014. Parents keep a log of all the books they read to their children with the goal of reading 1,000 books before the child enters kindergarten. It is an easy way to promote the family's role in developing early literacy skills by encouraging reading together from a very young age.

Parents and caregivers may record their books in a reading log provided, or online by creating a *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* shelf on Goodreads.com. Either way, children earn prizes as they reach 250, 500 and 750 books read. The milestone prizes are a great way to keep children motivated on their way to completing a long-term goal. They also create check-in points for librarians to praise and encourage children and their families. Children who participate through Goodreads also receive encouraging messages when they add new titles to their bookshelves.

Graduating kindergarteners celebrate their success with a big party and receive a certificate, prizes and a t-shirt featuring the program logo declaring them "Ready for Kindergarten."

The library program, supported by a Moorestown-based community sponsor, specifically promotes reading

during the first five years of life, but it also establishes a lasting pattern of family reading. By the time they have read 1,000 books together, sharing books becomes a very enjoyable activity that parents and children alike wish to continue well beyond the start of school. One proud grandmother said, "My grandson has always loved reading, but now, watching his excitement as his list grows longer is especially thrilling for me too! The whole family is involved in the endeavor! Thank you!"

To date, 233 children have taken the *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* Challenge and that number continues to grow steadily each month.

CRANFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE

FAMILY M.E.S.S. PROGRAM

Cranford Public Library's *Family M.E.S.S.* (Math, Engineering, and Science Saturday) *STEM Program* has been running every other month since November 2014. The library was looking for a way to engage families in "learning by doing," and wanted a structure that would allow families to explore at their own pace.

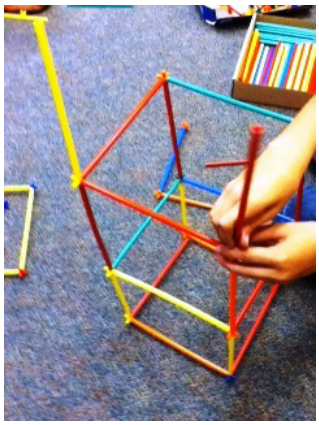
Family M.E.S.S. provides families with stations of simple, open-ended activities based around math, science, and engineering. Each family is a team, and each team receives a journal containing instructions, relevant information, and simple extension activities or educational apps to explore at home. The journal is used as a jumping off point for conversation, and drawing or writing are encouraged as means to record results, employing Every Child Ready to Read 2 early literacy practices.

Families spend about 10 minutes at each station before rotating to the next activity. Families with children ages 2 – 10 are encouraged to participate, but mostly toddlers and preschool aged children attend. *Family M.E.S.S.* attracts regulars, along with new faces, including more fathers than typically seen at programs. Registration is limited to 15 families per program. The activities at each station have to be easy enough to be completed by a toddler (with assistance), but easily adaptable to older children. They also must be interesting enough to fill 10 minutes, and affordable, so that the activities can be reproduced at home.

Some STEM topics explored include centripetal force, chemical reactions, buoyancy, creating "rainbow milk," "elephant toothpaste," measuring pumpkins, and making a balloon-powered Lego® car.

BERNARDSVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE

READING RUMPUS PROGRAM



A growing number of caregivers at the Bernardsville Public Library expressed concerns that their children were too active to sit through a whole story time and that they might fare better at programs that were "just for fun." Simultaneously, the staff observed ever increasing energy levels and discipline issues during story times. As a result, *Reading Rumpus* was created as an immersive story time program that focuses on one story and relies on active participation throughout.

In contrast to more traditional story times, *Reading Rumpus* appeals to active and distracted children because it relies on dynamic engagement and emphasizes having children actively "tell" the story. After listening to one book, the children re-enact and tell the story multiple times using an array of props and activities ranging from puppets to boxes and finger paints to creating a river from bubble wrap. Children who are physically involved in the story become invested in it and take ownership of the program. Repetition gives them time to absorb and appreciate the story and learn the vocabulary while the varied activities keep them engaged. Each child leaves the program with a "story reminder" consisting of a simple prop or activity to aid the child in retelling the story to others.

Although developed to fill a need for active children, *Reading Rumpus* also works well with shy or reticent children. It has also been extremely effective with children and families for whom English is a second language. The repetition and visible activity reinforces words and word meanings that may be unfamiliar.

Many of the *Reading Rumpus* activities for 2½ to 5-year-olds require sharing, taking turns and even group problem solving. An unexpected, but advantageous outcome has been the teamwork developed over time among regular attendees. Best of all, as a 3-year-old child said, "It's so fun!"

ROCKAWAY TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE

SCHOOL SKILLS PROGRAM

Rockaway Township Library began the *School Skills Program* in January 2015. They sought to meet the needs of families looking for an age appropriate STEAM experience. Initially the library offered the program for ages 5 and 6, but changed to ages 4 and 5 in fall of 2015 when the kindergarten in town was changed to a full day program. Parent interest was initially sparked by the fall 2014 session when the library introduced Bedtime Math on a preschool level.

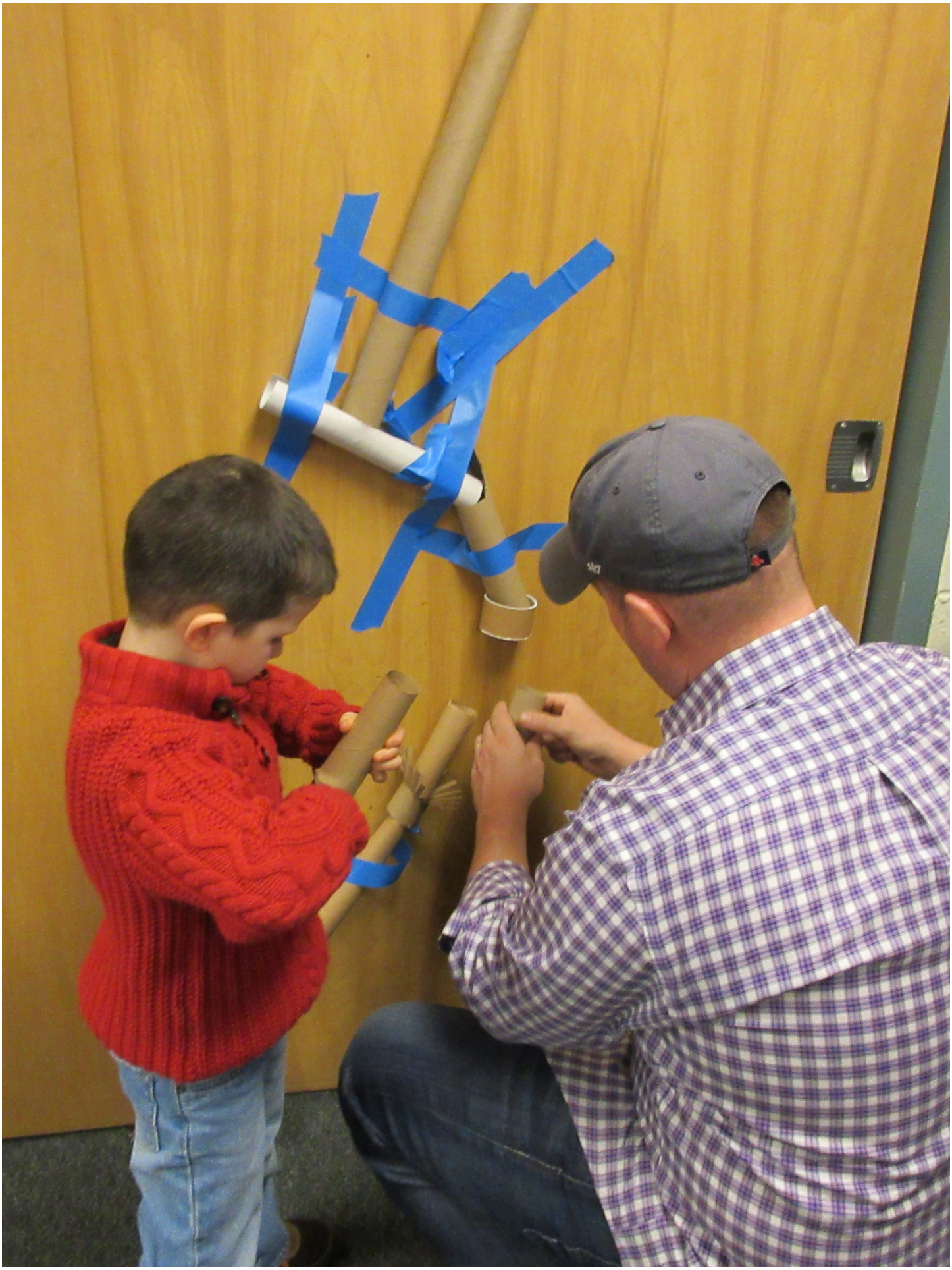
School Skills expands that interest further into science, technology, art and engineering while linking fiction and non-fiction books to the themes presented. Preschool is a wonderful time to introduce STEAM learning as the children's natural curiosity encourages them to want to experiment and explore in a hands-on manner. The class also invites caregiver participation, creating a family experience.

Having a program like this at an early learning level lays the groundwork for patrons viewing the library as a hub of lifelong learning of all kinds, not just reading. The library has hosted three sessions so far with 20 children and 20 caregivers registered for each. Each session is eight weeks in length.

Darlene Steinhart, head of Children's Services, said, "The children and parents leave the program feeling that their children have been introduced to new concepts prior to starting school – making for a less stressful transition to kindergarten." Consistently, there has been a waiting list of children beyond what they have been able to accommodate.

"We enjoy coming because the activities are unique and provide hands on learning. Our favorite was making frost in a tin can and then examining it with a magnifying glass, but a close second was making play dough and seeing the ingredients transform from their original state into a solid."

– PARENT, SCHOOL SKILLS PROGRAM
ROCKAWAY TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY



BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY

PAST WINNING LIBRARIES

Alfred H. Baumann Public Library, *Passaic County*
Bernardsville Public Library, *Somerset County*
Cherry Hill Public Library, *Camden County*
Franklin Township Free Public Library, *Somerset County*
Hilton Branch Public Library,
Maplewood Memorial Library, *Essex County*
Jersey City Free Public Library, *Hudson County*
Lake Hiawatha Branch of the Parsippany-Troy Hills
Public Library, *Morris County*
Mary Jacobs Branch Library, Somerset County
Library System, *Somerset County*
Matawan-Aberdeen Public Library, *Monmouth County*
Middletown Township Public Library, *Monmouth County*
Monroe Township Public Library, *Middlesex County*
Moorestown Public Library, *Burlington County*
Mt. Tabor Branch Library, Parsippany Troy-Hills
Public Library, *Morris County*
Otto Bruyns Public Library, Northfield, *Atlantic County*
Princeton Public Library, *Mercer County*
Somerset County Library System, *Somerset County*
South County Branch, Camden County Library System,
Camden County
Swedesboro Branch Library, Gloucester County
Library System, *Gloucester County*
Watchung Public Library, Somerset County
Library System, *Somerset County*