

Applying knowledge: Students hold a 'Learning Fair' at Madison Middle School

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During a hands-on science experiment, a student tries to make a small bulb light up using a long strand of wire.
(Chad Morelli photo/Suburban Journals)

There were robots and roller coasters, planes and polarizing magnets, balloons, blimps and even a bungee jumper.

And chocolate. There was all kinds of chocolate.

At the 2006 Madison Middle School Learning Fair on Thursday, the hallways were buzzing with activities, charts and graphs, experiments and dozens of other educational displays.

Each class at the middle school chose their own theme, loosely sticking to a general idea and coming up with ways to illustrate what they have learned throughout the school year. For the sixth-graders, the focus was on flight. In their corner of the school, dozens of paper airplanes could be seen hanging from the ceiling. A few students even created blimps and hot air balloons, using various materials to show many of the aspects and lessons of gravity, wind resistance and flight.

"The creativity some of these students showed is just beyond belief," said Anne-Marie Foret, the Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator at Madison Middle School. "We have a little bit of everything."

The eighth-grade class chose theme parks for its theme, already focusing on a field trip the class will take to Six Flags next week. Students put together a 6-foot-tall plastic roller coaster, snapping in the batteries and sending a car flying around the track.

Other students used paper to display some of the twists and turns that make roller coasters so much fun. Others created some of the more unusual attractions people find at amusement parks.

In one corner, a plastic Barbie was suspended by her feet with rubber bands. The message: nothing shows gravity in action like a bungee-jumping Barbie.

And then there was the chocolate. Seventh-graders at the school, utilizing chocolate as their theme, collected thousands of M&M candies, counting and categorizing each individual morsel. The data analysis showed that each bag of M&Ms contains red, orange, yellow, green, brown and violet. Students also found that most bags have an inordinate number of green and blue candies.

Students also used M&Ms to make a world map. North America was decorated with green M&Ms, showing that it is rich with forests and grasslands. South American received blue for its Amazon River and dependence on the ocean. Africa was yellow with the Sahara Desert, Asia was brown with its many mountains, and Europe was red as a result of its many wars. Australia was orange due to its heat and undeveloped outback.

Seventh-grade students also used science to break down the elements of chocolate, referencing the Periodic Table to describe candy on a molecular basis. Many students even created their own brands of candy, marketing everything from new caramel bars to giant cookies.

"Our students put in a lot of hard work into these projects and we thought this was a great opportunity for parents to come in and see some of their creations," Foret said. "It's some very visual examples of all the different things they've learned throughout the year."

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