



Photos by Kendra Lolio

Fourth grade students Cadence Fagan, left, and Sophia Sigman, right, smile while showing off their presentations.

# Tinkering at Tiogue

## Coventry students show off STEM skills to officials

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COVENTRY — As part of the regular school committee meeting last week at Tiogue Elementary School, students and faculty were able to show off some of their recent work. Committee members scattered across different classrooms to check out the projects teachers have been working on with their students.

Over in the school's library, Media Specialist Esther Wolk demonstrated the "Tiogue Tinker Table" with her third, fourth and fifth graders. At the table, or multiple tables in this case, students participated in "Makerspaces," which are places where people gather to create things. They are provided with tools to invent in a community space.

Wolk said she learned about the concept at a conference she attended in the fall of 2013 for the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) in Hartford, Connecticut. While at the conference, she participated in a workshop about makerspaces, which she had never heard of previously. She decided to try it out with her students.



Emma Sullivan builds with "Brain Flakes" during a science demonstration at Tiogue Elementary School.

The makerspace is made up of five different stations, including magnetic poetry, legos and "Brain Flakes," which are small, interlocking plastic discs that can be used to build a wide variety of things. Students that night constructed a tree using brown discs for the trunk and green for the leaves. Like legos, the possibilities for what can be built with the flakes are endless.

Wolk also included a fun activity done with tools known as animal tessellations,

or plastic stencils in various shapes that fit together to make different designs. Wolk said the animal tessellations, which she found on Amazon, tend to be a big hit with students and are very affordable.

They also worked with tangrams, or small geometric puzzle pieces that can be arranged to make different shapes. Tools like these, Wolk said, help

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students gain hands-on experience in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) skills, and have grown quite popular in libraries around the state.

“It is a natural partnership since both libraries and makerspaces are places where people learn and explore new things,” she said. “Makerspaces allow the learning and exploring to be hands on.”

The AASL has standards in four main categories, which makerspaces help promote, including thinking, creating, sharing and growing.

These days the students get to work in their makerspaces once a month during their Library and Media classes.

“At first the students wanted me to tell them what to do,” Wolk said. “But then they got the hang of it and lots of great ideas and conversations happened.”

Now that the students understand how it works, all she has to do is give them the materials and some basic rules. The rest, she said, comes from them.

Wolk also laid out all of the different Common Core State Standards that the makerspaces touch upon, printing them out and lining them across her desk.

Students in Tara D’Aleno’s fourth grade classroom showed off their computer abilities with a demonstration of their Google Slide presentations on Midwestern states. The kindergarteners in Katie Briggs’ class impressed school committee members with their PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Strategies) reading as well as their social and emotional learning skills for “Thankful Thursday.”

Needless to say, school committee members were quite impressed with what they saw.

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