



University of Idaho Parents as Teachers Focus on Early Math & Science

WINNER
of the 2006



Parents as Teachers National Center

In recent years Idaho policy makers have become increasingly concerned about student success in math and science, two domains that are critical in today's technology-based economy. Research shows that children build math and science skills from the earliest years of life, and that play provides a natural learning lab for such development.

In response to these concerns, the University of Idaho Parents As Teachers program developed Block Fest to introduce young children and their parents to early concepts of math and science. Studies show that young children's block play is related to their math success in the junior high years, when concepts get more difficult. Block play also offers a context for the development of the whole child including learning in the social, emotional, language, motor, and cognitive domains.

Block Fest features different types of blocks at five building stations. As adults and their children visit each station, children enjoy block building while parents learn about block play and ways to support their children's math and science learning. Information and coaching about early science and math is available at each block station, and each family takes home the *Block Play Handbook: Learning and Playing with Blocks*, developed by the University of Idaho PAT for Block Fest. Major support for Block Fest is provided by the Micron Foundation and the Qwest Foundation.

After Block Fest, parent surveys showed that:

- Parents could see how their children learned through block building (76%) and learned ways to support early math and science learning for their children (66%).
- Children of all ages enjoyed the exhibit, showing problem solving, sharing and building with others. However, children three years and older were more often observed by their parents to be engaged in math, science, and language behaviors.
- Three months after the event parents reported continued effects of Block Fest: getting out blocks at home (70%), playing blocks with their child (89%), seeing opportunities to talk about math and science with their children (55%) and seeing math and science in everyday activities (72%).

These results show that Block Fest provided a context for lasting learning for children and parents. Months after the event Block Fest was still strong in the minds of parents and in their activities with their children.

Block Fest is a traveling exhibit hosted by the network of Parents as Teachers programs around the state. Block Fest is a resource around which new partnerships are created to achieve important outcomes. For example, Parents as Teachers educator Suzy Woozley worked in Malad with Head Start and the elementary school to extend the reach of Block Fest to many preschool and kindergarten children. Students from the early childhood professions classes at the high school worked with parents and children at the block building stations. The result was an event that reached more families, with positive effects on young children, youth volunteers, teachers and parents. By reaching out to community partners, PAT maximizes the positive impact of the Block Fest program.

In its first year of travel, Block Fest engaged over 4,000 children and parents in southern Idaho reaching families in: **Kuna, Meridian, Boise, Nampa, Middleton, Twin Falls, DuBois, Rexburg, Rigby, Idaho Falls, Preston, Dayton and Malad. Block Fest will continue traveling throughout the state in 2007.**



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Parents said they would tell other parents:

- “It was a great way to experience some of the learning a child works on every day!”
- “Experience a fun time that inspires enthusiastic, truly interested kids.”
- “Great way to encourage math and science at a young age.”
- “Go and let your children have fun while they develop their brains.”
- “What a great way to get down on the floor and see the world they do.”

Child care providers' comments on Block Fest:

- “Block Fest was a fabulous outing for our little ones. Their imaginations and bodies ran wild as they enjoyed the different stations and tried out all the fun shapes, colors, and sizes.”
- “When children are playing with blocks, I saw that they plan, communicate and compromise about what they are going to build.”

Building Blocks and Building Sustainability: Parent educator Sandra Jacobson gathered many partners for a community-wide Block Fest in DuBois. The school principal was the master of ceremonies, and the mayor dipped ice cream while the Lion's Club served pie. The LDS Young Women's group sold chili dogs, the high school classes made blocks for families to paint, and helped with set up. PAT parents provided decorated cakes for a silent auction and all the funds raised were matched by Wal-Mart. Block Fest in Clark County drew over 250 people - more than one fourth of the people who live there!

Over the past 6 years, Parents as Teachers has extended to communities throughout Idaho, developing a network of supports for families with young children. Block Fest demonstrates the potential of that network to bring current research information to families statewide. Through Block Fest, PAT brings the message of early learning in math and science to communities of all sizes.

