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## Kids, parents go outside to celebrate fun, learning

BY KEVIN CALLAHAN • COURIER-POST STAFF • MAY 21, 2009

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The children are having so much fun at the Just Kids Program they do not even know they are learning.

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They think this popular afterschool program affiliated with Archway is just more play time.

But, really, they are learning.

"Half the time I come to pick her up, she is not ready to leave," Danielle Narkin said smiling about her daughter, Cynthia, 5, who attends the Center Square School in Logan Township and stays afterward at Archway's Just Kids Program. "She is in school here and doesn't leave the building. She is where she is comfortable."

Narkin was among dozens of parents, grandparents and students who participated in a recent nature fair conducted by the program at Center Square School as part of the statewide Celebrate Afterschool! Outdoors.

"The activities burn off energy and to learn stuff is a very good thing," said Andy Keleshian, who attended the fair to see his grandson Garrett, 7, celebrate the program with his daughter -- Garrett's mom -- Kandace Hurley.

Some of the activities were a groundwater model demonstration by Marc Rogoff, an educator from the Department of Environmental Protection, a nature find hunt and water charting. The activities were designed to draw attention to the benefits of afterschool programming as well as the connection between outdoor play in nature and children's cognitive and emotional development.

"We use nature as a tool for learning," said Lorin Powell, the director of Archway's Just Kids Program. "We try to get kids to explore nature."

Added Bob Fiscaro, the pre-K to 4 principal at the Center Square School: "It is an extended classroom experience."

In addition to the Logan Township event, about 1,200 students at all 33 Just Kids afterschool program locations throughout Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties participated in special Celebrate Afterschool! Outdoors events during the week of May 11 to 15.

For the last two years, Devereaue Emmi and her husband, Dan, have sent their son, Daniel, 10 and daughter, Sarah, 6, to the Just Kids Program at the Center Square School since they both work.

Daniel said he enjoyed the outdoor activities.

"I like the rocks. They are fun to paint," he said.

His sister, Sarah, added: "I like being taught about water. It is a liquid."



KEVIN CALLAHAN/Courier-Post

Marc Rogoff, an educator from the Department of Environmental Protection, talks to children at the nature fair in Logan.