

Elm Street kids come up with ideas for products

Spencer Lahr Aug 5, 2017



As part of learning how to spin their own cotton candy on Friday, Aug. 4, 2017, Elm Street Elementary first-graders learned about safe food handling, with Jonathan Puac Perez (from left) Ethan Barnes and Donovan Tzoy Gonzalez donning hair nets, safety glasses and plastic gloves. (Spencer Lahr / RN-T.com)

Elm Street Elementary first-graders in teacher Ashley Greenway's class got a chance to test run one of their products that will be included in their maker market later this year, capping off the first full week of school with hunks of cotton candy Friday.

The first-graders are able to establish their own maker market, which will be filled with goods they make right in the classroom, through a \$10,000 Innovation Fund Tiny Grant from the **Governor's Office of Student Achievement** the school's first grade received earlier this year.

Students are still in the early stages of opening the market — Greenway's class is piloting the project — coming up with ideas of what they'd like to make, setting the Dojo-point prices and developing their advertising methods.

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Dojo points are essentially digital Wolf Bucks, which students earn for showcasing positive behavior in school, and will be used as currency for the market, Greenway said. Teachers can reward students for their actions by logging in points for them online, she added.

Before the kids tried their hand at wrapping the spun sugar fluff around a plastic cone — all under the supervision of Greenway, Principal JoAnn Moss and Assistant Principal Laura Walley — they talked over product ideas that had been sketched into composition books. The prospect of slime drew widespread enthusiasm, as did the generational, sweet-treat favorite chocolate chip cookies — producing graphic T-shirts is also a student venture.

Greenway explained that the class is waiting on a few orders to come in for vinyl cutters, a heat press, a sewing machine and a stamping press. There will also be a woodworking area in her classroom.

Through the grant, the first-grade classrooms have been redesigned into collaborative workspaces, with flexible seating and more tables — instead of using chairs, students have wobble stools.

Students are thrilled by the project, as they get to make something that other people will want, Greenway said. It's crucial to get kids this STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — exposure early on, she continued, and not get hung up on the all-too-often underestimation of younger kids.



Especially for this project, younger students tend to be less timid and less self-conscious, nurturing their development of soft skills through communicating in the entrepreneurial spirit. The market is a way for students to see the value in their own ideas, Greenway said, and is an opportunity for them to dig into their imaginations and have something materialize from it.

For the first year, the market will only be held once every nine weeks and only be open to first-graders, as it will fill their hall with student booths. In the future, Greenway hopes to increase the number of market days by having one every four weeks.

Greenway said community members who want to help students create or teach skills related to the project are welcome to come to class.



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