

Pemberton opens outdoor learning lab

PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP – You can learn a lot by getting outside and exploring.

The Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center is testing out that theory with its recently opened Educational Outdoor Learning Lab, a multi-faceted outdoor classroom area that provides students the opportunity to play outside and the educational benefits of being there.

“Kids today are growing up in a world that is increasingly more technology infused and as a result, they’re spending more time indoors than previous generations,” said Deborah Ceplo, assistant director of early childhood and principal of the center. “We wanted to provide our preschoolers with an outdoor classroom where nature provides the sensory stimulus and tools for their play-based education while they develop skills essential to their success.”

The outdoor lab was years in the planning and opened last week. The center offers free, quality, full-day preschool programs.

Funded primarily through donations from fundraising projects held over the past few years, the lab has a host of activities targeted specifically for 3 and 4 year olds, officials said.

A large kitchen area provides pots, pans, and baking utensils for students to create “food”



Savannah Adams spots a caterpillar on the large blocks and quickly investigates with a magnifying glass in the outdoor learning lab at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center. [CONTRIBUTED]

by mixing soil and water. Ball and ramp sets encourage creativity while learning about force and gravity, and cascading water tables, sensory tables filled with natural materials, and large blocks all add to the fun and learning. Large cylinders allow students to measure rainfall, while binoculars and magnifying glasses give them glimpses into the habits of local insects and birds.

“Research has shown that when children are outdoors, they are more engaged, curious, focused and relaxed,” Ceplo said. “This outdoor classroom takes advantage of those attributes while involving children in activities that

promote everything from scientific inquiry skills such as classifying, sorting and observing, to social/emotional skills that build cooperation, communication and empathy.”

The center’s Supervisor of Early Childhood Danielle Hosey and master teachers Traci Haines, Anne Donovan and Debbie Binz helped bring the lab to life.

“We’re proud to provide one of the only preschool outdoor learning labs in the state,” said Ceplo. “Through the planning, collaboration and generosity of our staff, parents and community, we are now able to provide our preschoolers with this invaluable experience.”



Lucas Hornor and Landon Kiper test their newly built ramps to see how far their ball will roll in the outdoor learning lab at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center. [CONTRIBUTED]



Lillian Adkins investigates the water flow at the cascading water table in the outdoor learning lab at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center. [CONTRIBUTED]