

Family

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Tech Ed students from Merrill Middle School had an opportunity to present to their peers as well.

Rick Helms attended Family STEM Night with his two daughters, Meghan Helms, an eighth grader at Merrill Middle School, and Tori Helms, a first grade student at Read Elementary School.

He said both girls were excited to attend the after-school activity and nearly pulled him out the door as soon as he got home from work.

"They asked — or begged and told," he said about his daughters' eagerness to attend the event. "They were excited to come."

The Feb. 19 event was the first of five similar events taking place in February and March that are designed to promote science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, in a fun, hands-on and family-friendly way.

Reynee Kachur, Director of Science Outreach at UW-Oshkosh, helped organize the series of Family STEM Nights, which began last year as a single event at Merrill Middle School.

With cooperation from the Oshkosh Area School District and the university, Kachur said she is optimistic that all five of this year's events will be successful.

"I've heard a lot of posi-



Oshkosh North student Zack Vilski watches over Alaine Smith as she learns about forces. OSHKOSH NORTHWESTERN

tive feedback from all of the different schools," she said. "There's a buzz, an excitement from all of the schools."

She said she's hoping that same excitement carries over to parents attending Family STEM Nights because a support structure is an important part of preserving a child's interest in learning.

To encourage parent participation at Merrill's Family STEM Night, families were encouraged to eat pizza together and take part in a spaghetti tower building contest.

Each participant was given the same amount of uncooked spaghetti and marshmallows and challenged to construct the tallest tower possible.

"The reason that we put that activity with the meal was to help show families that you can do educational activities and have educational conversations while you're eating supper," said Cindy Olson, principal at Merrill Middle School.

After observing the activities, Olson and Kachur both said they felt their message was getting across that STEM is important and can be fun.

"Just looking over here at the interaction that's going on as they're building spaghetti towers, that's really what we wanted to happen," Kachur said.

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