



AT THE BLOCK FEST get together Thursday night at Oberlin Elementary School, Ian Thomas (above) looked through a colored building block. His sister, Amber Thomas, (below) played with a giant “brick” looking building block.

## Kids explore at Block Fest

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A Block Fest at Oberlin Elementary School on Thursday allowed kids and parents alike to learn how to build things, and how that in turn builds skills for further learning.

“They had all these different stations with different learning opportunities, like math and science and stuff,” said Jennie Anderson, a parent who attended with her kids. “They went to each in groups, with eight minutes at each mat, so they had plenty of time to play with them and build their stuff.”

“It was also really good for the parents, because it showed us what different skills the children were learning from the different types of blocks. I thought it was really awesome. We have a 4-year-old and 1 1/2-year-old, and they really enjoyed it.”

The event is held once a year at one location in northwest Kansas, but this year, the organizers decided to do it differently.

“We started doing Block Fest about three years ago,” said Deb Helm, a Head Start teacher at the school and organizer, along with the group Parents as Teachers and other volunteers. “This year, they decided to have four different (events) at four different locations, and to invite the surrounding communities to join in. We had someone come from Norton that night, for example, because they wouldn’t have it there this year.”

After dinner and a social hour for the parents, Mrs. Helm said, the business of blocks began.

“They had five different types of blocks in the gym on mats,” she explained. “The idea is to show the parents how creative the kids can be and how good a learning experience it can be. The blocks aren’t interlocking, so they have to be creative with them. They have large cardboard blocks, little tiny ones, cubes with patterns and wooden blocks.”

“It’s a very good learning experience, and a good time for parents to have fun with their kids. It gets them away from the television and stuff like that.”

Mrs. Anderson, in particular, had a lot to say about Parents as Teachers, of which she is a member, and Pam May, who helps run the

group, working out of the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center in Oakley.

“Pam May is our head educator, and she’s awesome,” Mrs. Anderson said. “She comes out once a month and works with our son, and it’s provided through the school system. She brings us literature and activities that we can be doing to help him. And at the group meetings, she also brings in speakers like a nutritionist, and the gal from Smokey Hills Public Television, and it’s really cool. But Block Fest is the biggest, most popular thing they put on. The kids really, really enjoyed it.”

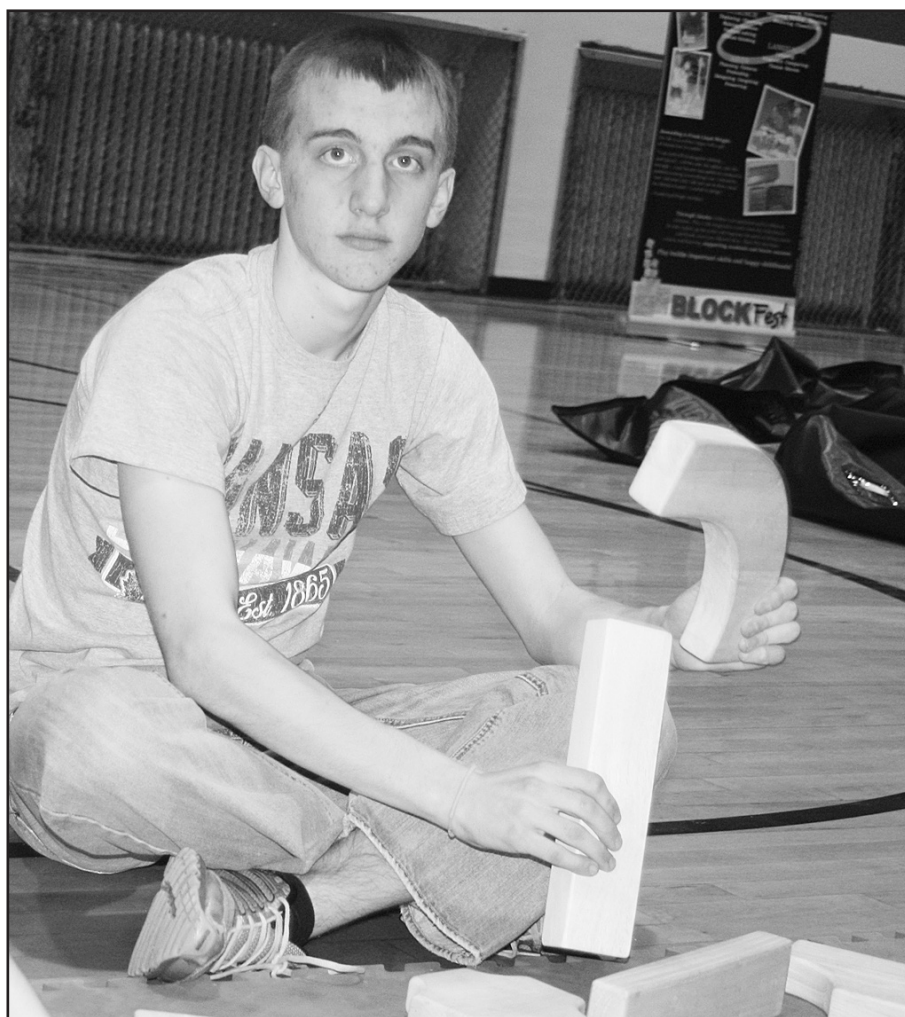
“Parents as Teachers is an early learning program for parents and families,” said Mrs. May, coordinator of the group for northwest Kansas. “The philosophy is that parents are their child’s first and most influential teachers. So what I do is a monthly visit where I take information on the child’s development, language and social and emotional, intellectual and motor skills. And there’s always an activity I bring for the family to do together.”

“We really encourage reading, so they can check out certain kinds of books or activities that I bring in. They receive a newsletter every other month with additional information as well. We also do some developmental screening to make sure the kids are developing with their peers, and to check for any possible delays, because it’s a lot easier to work on those things before a child gets to school.”

The next event for the group is speaker Paige Campbell, Mrs. May said, of the K-State Extension service, who is coming to speak with parents about toxic stress syndrome at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 19, at the elementary school.

“Parents as Teachers is a wonderful asset to our community,” said Mrs. Anderson, “and it should be utilized. People who are interested can call Mrs. May at the service center. (The number is (785) 672-3125, extension 176.)

“I think people don’t know very much about it. When we used to deliver babies in Oberlin, they would tell the mom about it, but now you just hear about it through other moms – that’s how I did. It’s a great program.”



WITH TWO LARGE wooden blocks, Matthew Helm, who helped with Block Fest, started to work on a building project.

— Photos by Kimberly Davis