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Kids hold summertime science fair

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Lab technicians and graduate science students are usually more at home at a university than at a middle school.

However, on Wednesday afternoon, they gathered in the cafeteria at John F. Kennedy Middle School to demonstrate science and safety to the Boys and Girls Club.

For the past three years, Amy Wilkerson has run a science fair for the Suffolk unit of the Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern Virginia.

Wilkerson, a Holland native and the laboratory and research manager at the College of William and Mary, said the science fair offers an opportunity for the kids to learn about safety and the so-called "STEM" subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"We want to bring science to kids in a fun way," she said.

In the previous two years, the event has been successful at demonstrating safety procedures and showing science experiments. However, Wilkerson said she wanted to improve this year's science fair by retaining activities and dem-



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Science: Malia Edwards laughs as she covers her gloves in shaving cream, which represented contaminants. The kids attempted to remove the gloves without getting shaving cream on themselves.

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Science: Fair for kids

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onstrations that the kids liked, while adding even more hands-on experiments.

"There are some events that kids love so much," she said. "They can't get enough of the fire or safety."

This year's event featured tons of engrossing experiments.

Representatives from William and Mary showed the kids experiments with light and refraction. Professors and students from Norfolk State University and Christopher Newport University introduced the kids to molecules and atoms through visual aids. There were balloons, tornadoes in beakers, spinning toys and two 3-D printers. Reggie Carter, director of the Suffolk Boys and Girls Club, said the wealth of demonstrations for the kids to observe makes the event special.

"I think it's just a phenomenal event," he said. "I'm always amazed at how many volunteers come in."

One of the biggest attractions at the science fair was the first aid demonstration, provided by Sandra Prior, director of environmental health and safety at William and Mary.

Prior used powder and UV light to demonstrate how easily germs can be transmitted. She sprayed shaving cream on the kids' latex gloves and showed them how to safely remove gloves without contamination. The centerpieces of her table were her two dummies: one for CPR and one for the Heimlich maneuver. Kids took turns saving "Choking Charlie" with the anti-choking technique.

"It's always useful to know basic safety," Prior said. "It's important for kids to understand how to actually do it. It puts them in the moment."

Six-year-old Malia Edwards said the first aid was her favorite activity "because it was fun to learn to help people."

What garnered the most attention, however, was a new setup to help kids understand fire safety. A pole with a smoke detector, a fire alarm and a phone was brought in. The most exciting new addition was a screen that displayed virtual fire, which the kids put out using empty fire extinguishers. After the fire was out, the screen displayed the time it took to extinguish it.

"It's like a video game," said Bradley Meirs, fire safety officer at William and Mary. "We use a lot of hands-on tools, because a lot of people don't get to do these things."

Adriana Alexander, 9, said the fire demonstration was the best part of the science fair.

"It's really nice," she said. "You get to learn more and you learn how to be safe."

Carter said the science fair is one of the most important events the Boys and Girls Club offers because it teaches about a crucial subject.

"STEM is one of the most important things for kids to learn," he said. "There could be future scientists in here right now."