

Big Learning, Inc. is a non-profit dedicated to promoting school and life success through hands-on, real-world learning experiences for children and families.

*"Thanks again for creating another excellent program...yesterday's program was truly inspired, and the students seemed really engaged."*  
– Adrian Durlenster,  
Educator

*"What I like best about Toymaking is the wonderful teachers and projects. What I would change? Nothing. A+!"* – A student in Big Learning's after-school program at Garrett Park Elementary School

## Big Learning Awarded Freeman Grant

Big Learning was recently awarded a grant by the Carl M. Freeman Foundation to teach its *Knowledge Builder* after-school program at the Boys and Girls Club of Silver Spring, MD. The grant was awarded under the Freeman Foundation's FACES program, which supports innovative projects in Montgomery County, Maryland and several other areas. The Freeman Foundation has been an active philanthropist in the Washington, DC area since 1960.

The *Knowledge Builder* program is a new approach to aftercare-based academics. Rather than duplicate the work

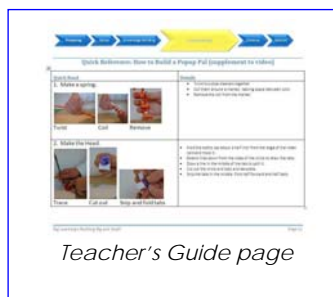
that students do during the school day, *Knowledge Builder* uses content-rich, hands-on activities to provide knowledge that is crucial to reading comprehension, math and science concept development, and school success.

There are now two fully-developed after-school series in *Knowledge Builder*,

*Toymaking*, and *Building Big and Small*. In *Toymaking*, children make sophisticated moving toys from wood, wire, and other materials. In *Building*, they alternate between building toy-size structures that they take home, and collaborating with other children to build full-size temporary play structures, such as tents and clubhouses.

Using feedback from pilot studies of these classes, we've enhanced both the projects and the teaching materials. The teacher's guide has been reworked so it provides information for class preparation as well as teaching. We've also

*Continued on back*



## Summer Reading Day Event

Big Learning's Insect Extravaganza kicked off the Summer Reading program at the Bethesda Library, and was a huge success.



*Dragonfly Wings*

Several hundred children and their parents solved insect symmetry puzzles, built models of insect wings, and started seeds for their own butterfly gardens.

They also learned about hissing cockroaches from Dr. David Adamski of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History.

Dr. Adamski had the children screaming as they cheered on real hissing cockroaches in a series of races. The children then had the opportunity to build their own hissing cockroaches to take home.

Thanks also to Cindy Guthrie of the library for all her help.



*Dr. David Adamski*

## Why Big Learning Matters

*By Jim Cole, Big Learning Board member and teacher*

School curriculums have become more and more structured in the last decade, making it more difficult than ever for teachers to do project-based learning. Big Learning complements school learning by providing hands-on, project-based activities that are academically rich *and* exciting to children. It supports school success by providing concrete, real-world experiences with academic concepts (e.g., fractions), and by enhancing children's background knowledge across a wide spectrum of disciplines (art, language, history, science, etc.).

Big Learning is more than an enrichment program with a different approach, though. It teaches children that life is more fun when you explore, find answers, and solve problems. So in addition to promoting school success, Big Learning promotes life success. As I've taught Big Learning classes this fall, I've seen first-hand how Big Learning positively affects children's ability to tackle problems on their own. Many kids have started out afraid or unable to do even the first step of a project on their own; I'm not exaggerating when I say that some of the kids start out unable to tear masking tape off the roll by themselves. By about halfway through the 8-week series, these same kids are completing complicated projects completely on their own. By the end of the series, they're insisting every week on building projects

that go beyond the sample project. They're coming up with creative ideas, running into problems implementing those ideas, and coming up with solutions on their own or with their classmates' help. And every week, virtually all of the students are actively engaged throughout the class period. It's really amazing to see.

I've also seen how well Big Learning works in classes with more than one age (e.g., grades 2-4 in one class), and with children of widely different "academic" abilities. In a Big Learning class, everyone's smart, and everyone's proud of what they accomplish.

So why does Big Learning matter? It's highly engaging. It enhances children's self-esteem. It teaches them background knowledge and concepts that support their school success. It teaches them to ask more of themselves. It shows them that they can solve hard problems, and also that they can help others solve problems.

We're actively working with partners in the DC area to bring Big Learning to more and more children. If this sounds like something you'd like to support or help with, please email us at [info@biglearning.org](mailto:info@biglearning.org).

## 501 (c)3 Status

Big Learning, Inc. is now officially a non-profit organization with 501 (c)3 status. This means that contributions to Big Learning are tax deductible to the fullest extent.

## Freeman Grant, cont'd

added how-to project videos to help teachers prepare.

The Boys & Girls Club will teach the classes and work with Big Learning to further improve the projects and teacher materials. We also appreciate the support of the Staples store at 9440 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring and the store's

general manager, Helen Loomis, who have donated \$100 of materials for this class.

All of this support will enable children at the Boys and Girls Club to take both Knowledge Builder classes this winter. The grant also funds the development of teacher training materials and evaluation metrics to collect data to support our view that engaging real-world activities can teach key academic concepts that support school and life success.

## How You Can Help Big Learning

Big Learning, Inc. is a 501 (c)3 non-profit dedicated to promoting school and life success through hands-on, real-world learning.

You can help Big Learning achieve its goals by:

- Spreading the word about Big Learning
- Volunteering to help Big Learning develop and teach its unique hands-on programs
- Making a tax-deductible contribution

Questions about volunteering can be emailed to [info@biglearning.org](mailto:info@biglearning.org).

Our tax ID is 45-0558119. Contributions can be mailed to:

Big Learning, Inc.  
P.O. Box 27  
Garrett Park, MD 20896

**Yes, I'd like to support Big Learning's mission with a tax-deductible contribution**

- \$10
- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- Other amount