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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Young Toy Testers Recommend Top 3 Educational Gifts for Holiday Shoppers

Hartford, CT, November 24, 2014 — This fall, the Connecticut Science Center has employed some very special help: member children, aged 5 to 12 years, have become “Official Toy Testers” to help take the guesswork out of holiday shopping endeavors. Members signed up to participate in toy testing “playsshops” in October and November, meeting at the Science Center on selected Saturday mornings to put toys found in the Science Center’s Gift Shop to the test.



The toy testing is organized by Connecticut Science Center staff and University of Hartford Assistant Professor of Health Sciences Dr. Beth Taylor, who also serves on the Science Center’s Women in Science Steering Committee. Dr. Taylor provided parents with toy testing guidelines to help them gauge their kids’ interest in the toys, which ranged from tried-and-true gift shop favorites to newer, unproven toys. Kids tested 6 toys per session as their parents gathered feedback about their experiences with the toys.

"There's so much information out there about kids' toys," Taylor said. "But it's often not helpful. For example, if you go online to order a toy, you see lots of feedback about the packaging, the ease of assembly, and the long-term durability—but very little that's useful in understanding if your child will actually play with the toy and learn from it. As a parent, as well as a scientist, I value autonomy and creativity in play. So the questions I want to ask, and that I hear from my friends as well, relate to these topics. How likely is my child to play independently with the toy? Is he or she inspired by it? And let's face it—there is no truer test of these questions than to see children in action with the toys."

Toys were scored based on several criteria, including level of engagement, the ability to play with a toy independently, whether a toy encouraged creative thinking, and the toy’s price and perceived value. Parents were encouraged to help their children with the toys if asked. After the toy testing sessions, Dr. Taylor tabulated the data for the Science Center’s first Toy Testers program. The kids’ comments, along with their parents’ observations, shaped the final list of the recommended toys on offer for the 2014 Holiday season. Based on the results, the Connecticut Science Center Gift Shop is stocking up on recommended toys and also offering them online at

CTScienceCenter.org/Gifts. Connecticut Science Center staff will again host toy testing sessions throughout 2015, and plans to release an official Best Toy list recommended by the Science Center's young Toy Testers for Holiday 2015.

The Connecticut Science Center's Top 3 Recommended Toys for Holiday 2014:

[Kinetic Sand](#)

Price: \$19.99



Kinetic Sand, composed of 98% sand and “2% magic”, allows kids to mold and shape grains of sand just as they would Play-Doh or clay. The sand keeps its shape, sticks only to itself, is reusable, and does not dry out. An added bonus: the sand leaves no mess behind on a play surface. Kinetic Sand can be used independently, but is also great for group play when multiple kits are used together. Toy Testers were captivated by the sand for an extended period of time, and parents noted that the pliable sand inspires creative and imaginative building. Toy Testers agreed, giving Kinetic Sand the highest rating possible.

[KEVA Contraptions](#)

Price: \$26.99



KEVA Contraptions look simple—the set comes with long, flat wooden blocks, wooden balls, and a stack of cards—but there is seemingly no end to the simple or complicated structures kids can build. The set comes with cards that suggest how to build; kids can also cause different reactions by rolling wooden balls through their creations. Many Toy Testers designed on their own, bringing their imagined creations to life. Toy Testers were “entirely and completely” engaged with the toy, not wanting to stop playing once they had started. KEVA Contraptions are perfect for one child or for groups of 2 to 3, regardless of age. One tester’s comment says it all: “Can we buy this?!”

[Suspend Family Game](#)

Price: \$24.99



Suspend is a tricky hanging balance game, where players take turns placing bendy, twisty game pieces onto a tree-like structure. The real trick is to keep from knocking other pieces off the base or tipping the whole structure over! Suspend encourages collaborative play and is great for a broad age range, making it the perfect family game or parent-child activity. The most-often-heard comment from our Toy Testers: “I LOVE IT!”

The Top 3 Recommended Toys are available at the Connecticut Science Center Gift Shop. Visit in person, or at CTScienceCenter.org/Gifts, to purchase these kid-approved toys and to browse the full collection of cool, fun, and brainy toys and games.

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About the Connecticut Science Center The LEED-Gold certified Connecticut Science Center, located in downtown Hartford, sparks creative imagination and an appreciation for science by immersing visitors in fun and educational hands-on, minds-on interactive experiences while maintaining an environmentally conscious presence. Serving 1.7 million people since opening in 2009, the Science Center features more than 165 exhibits in ten galleries and a range of topics, including space and earth sciences, physical sciences, biology, the Connecticut River watershed, alternative energy sources, Connecticut inventors and innovations, a children's gallery, and much more. Other features include four educational labs, a 200-seat 3D digital theater, function room, gift store, and ongoing events for all ages. The Science Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing science education throughout the state of Connecticut and New England, providing learning opportunities for students and adults of all ages, and engaging the community in scientific exploration. The Connecticut Science Center is also the home to the **Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Academy for Teachers**, offering powerful Professional Development for educators. More information: www.CTScienceCenter.org or 860.SCIENCE.