

A STEM PROGRAM

SMILE

Science and Math Investigative
Learning Experiences

Newsletter

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32 Years of Service!

As we kick off the new year, the SMILE Program is excited to showcase all the amazing work our clubs have been doing! From hands-on STEM activities during meetings to participating in Family Science Night, our students have remained curious, engaged, and active in their communities. Read on for updates, highlights, and a look at what's been happening across SMILE!



Road To College



Whether you're starting your first honor's class or finishing your last AP class, it's never too late to plan ahead! For our SMILE high schoolers considering higher education, here's how you should prepare.

Freshman

College planning begins as early as your first year in high school. Meet with your guidance counsellor to find out your graduation requirements, and work with them to create fitting yearly schedules. Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses show colleges you're ready for more challenging coursework; decide if these courses are achievable for you. Indulge in your interests! Find things you like, and get involved in activities, events, and community service opportunities.

Sophomore

Next year you'll take your SATs, which scores your level of college readiness. Higher scores could make you eligible for Merit Scholarships, which award you based on your achievements. Consider taking the PSAT, and start considering financing options for college including [scholarships](#), grants, jobs, etc. For assistance in studying for the PSATs and SATs, check out the [collegeboard](#) website.

Junior

Time to register for your SATs. Depending on the college, a strong score can boost your application. You may be in for your first round of AP exams in May. A passing score could fulfil some general education or intro-level course requirements in your chosen college. Explore college options, including majors, financing options, locations, and [scholarship opportunities](#).

Senior

Plan college visits, narrow down your options, and aim to apply for early-decision deadlines. In the fall, you should work with parents/guardians to complete your [Federal Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA Form). Review your [college application checklist](#)—which usually requires transcripts, letters of recommendations, and personal essays—and plan to gather these ASAP!

Remember!

- It's best to consider two "safety schools," two "good matches," and at least one "reach" college.
- As you work on your applications, have parents/guardians, teachers, or counsellors review them.
- The SMILE Program Challenge Days grant you the opportunity to speak to college students about their experiences and ask for advice.

Many students across the state are applying for college and strengthening their applications. It's a difficult road, but YOU ARE NOT ALONE! RISLA's offers free assistance at their [College Planning Center](#) locating in Cranston, RI. Visit their website for more detailed information. Good luck SMILE students!

SMILE SCHOLARSHIP

The Saul Nulman SMILE Program Scholarship

To Our SMILE Seniors

Every year, The SMILE Program recognizes the efforts and successes of Saul Nulman, a man whose dreams, determination, and discipline paved the way for his success. Raised in Fall River with limited financial means, Mr. Nulman joined the US Merchant Marines after high school during WWII, sending his earnings home to support his family. Unknown to him, his mother saved that money in a “college fund,” which she gifted back to Mr. Nulman when he returned home, allowing him to further his education while training for a job. His schooling equipped him with textile skills and business experience, allowing him to start up a small company with the money he saved up from work.

Mr. Nulman grew his business over time, developing it into a thriving corporation that employed dyeing techniques which he invented. He was a lifelong philanthropist, supporting children, medical facilities, and learning institutions. In honor of his legacy, the Saul Nulman SMILE Scholarship provides \$500 scholarships for up to 6 SMILE seniors pursuing higher education. If you’re a senior preparing for higher education and meet the below criteria, we urge you to apply!

Application Requirements

- ◇ At least 3 years in SMILE (but not necessarily your senior year)
- ◇ Attendance at 3 SMILE Challenge Events
- ◇ Academic Merit: C average or better
- ◇ Acceptance at a post-secondary educational institution
- ◇ SMILE Teacher Letter of Recommendation
- ◇ Official high school transcript
- ◇ 250-word essay (prompt listed on application)

APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY APRIL 28TH TO BE CONSIDERED!

To access the application, talk to your guidance counselor or visit the URI SMILE website at:

https://web.uri.edu/smile/wp-content/uploads/sites/910/SMILE-Scholarship-Application.docx_.pdf

CLUB UPDATES

Deering Middle School West Warwick

Chris Baccej, James Owen
By: Deering Middle SMILE Club

This year in our middle school program at West Warwick, we started delving into engineering by working in small groups to build **paper tower structures** that had to withstand wind forces and meet specific height requirements! Although simple in concept, this activity helped us to practice important skills to move forward with; **collaboration, planning, revising, and learning from our mistakes.**

We also worked on activities such as Alka-Seltzer rockets, a basketball net and launcher challenge, and a paper ball run. Activities like this helped us to learn about concepts like **Newton's Laws of Motion**, forms of energy, and general engineering design.

Everything we learned from these experiments allowed us to prepare for **Family Science Night!** For this event, we were organized into several groups to better explain our experiments to friends, family, and members of URI SMILE. The presentations were so much fun to give and to look at! We are looking forward to our big Challenge Day at URI and meeting up with all of the other clubs next semester!



CLUB UPDATES

Globe Park Elementary School Woonsocket

Brittney Letendre, Rhonda Bootland

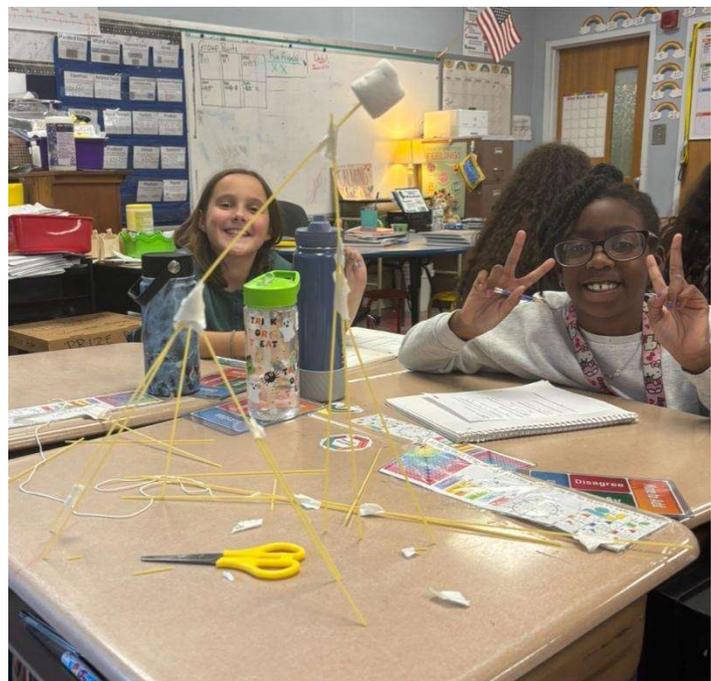
By: Coleman SMILE Club



This year is Globe Park Elementary Schools' **fourth year with the SMILE program**. We have been having a great year thus far! Students enjoyed many engineering activities. Students have loved getting to create and experiment with changes.

We also had our family science night. Our students shared what they learned about magnets. They also shared a building activity with spaghetti, that had to hold up a marshmallow. They loved trying to build the tallest tower and out-build their classmates.

As we head into the second half of the school year, the students are excited to **learn about ecology**. They are really looking forward to growing plants. We will also be creating our stewardship project and attending Ecology Day at URI.

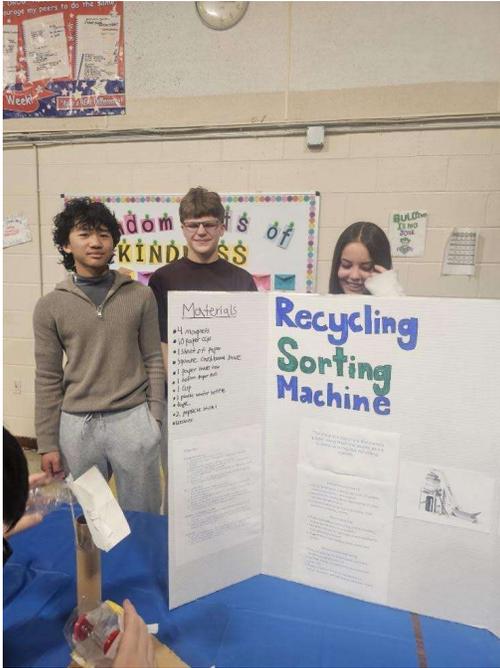


Johnston Senior High School Johnston

Anna Herbert, Marion DiLeonardo

By: Johnston SMILE Club

Johnston High School SMILE Program Showcases Student Innovation at Family Science Night!



Johnston, RI — November 19, 2025 — Johnston High School celebrated a milestone evening as students in grades 5–12 participated in the SMILE Program’s annual Family Science Night, an event designed to highlight hands-on STEM learning and strengthen school-community connections. Now in its second year partnering with SMILE, Johnston High School continues to see growing enthusiasm for the program and the real-world engineering challenges it offers.

Families filled the event space as students presented the STEM projects they have been developing throughout the fall. Each display featured student-built prototypes, engineering explanations, and demonstrations that reflected weeks of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving. The excitement was unmistakable — and even inspired a new senior to join the SMILE group after attending the event, drawn in by the innovative projects on display.

Showcased Student Projects:

Mechanical Hand

Students explored biomechanics and engineering design by constructing functional mechanical hands capable of gripping and movement.

Recycling Sorting Machine

This group tackled an environmental engineering challenge by designing a machine capable of sorting materials for recycling — a project that blends sustainability with mechanical innovation.

Hydrobot Rumble

Students put their engineering and competitive spirits to the test by building Hydrobots.



CLUB UPDATES

Thompson Middle School Newport

Alex Hogland Erin Kirby
By: Thompson SMILE Club

Over the past weeks at Thompson Middle School, our SMILE group has been getting to know each other through various STEM activities. One of our favorite activities so far has been making rockets using Alka-Seltzer tablets, water, and old film canisters.

Students have been enjoying working hands-on with different types of chemical and physical reactions. Our SMILE students also came together and created popsicle stick catapults and cardboard basketball hoops. Students had a blast learning about trajectory and potential energy while trying to launch ping-pong balls into each other's hoops.

The SMILE students are avid learners and have shown up each week energized and eager to get to the next activity! Our students are enthusiastic and looking forward to the remaining SMILE sessions!



CLUB UPDATES

Veterans Memorial Elementary School Central Falls

Karen Cardoza, Leslie Gibbons

By: Veterans SMILE Club



We started this year in Smile with a fun activity which was **building a spaghetti tower** that could support a large marshmallow. Students loved this activity so much that we decided to present it at our Family Science Night on December 4th.

Smile students taught about **the importance of a strong base** and guided families through the activity. Many fantastic towers were built and the families had fun building them.

Another favorite activity was teaching about **Mobius Loops** which the students also presented at Family Science Night. Everyone had fun making different shapes like hearts and big squares from the paper by cutting it correctly.

This fall, we learned a lot about **Potential Energy and Kinetic Energy** through activities such as Falling Water, creating a water wheel, studying magnetism, making a model of how the lungs work, making a battery from a potato, and making an electromagnet.

We used the Engineering Design process of Ask, Imagine, Plan, Create, and Improve to work through our activities each week. **We love Smile and are happy that we are in our second year at Vets!**



CLUB UPDATES

Westerly High School Westerly

Pina Alfiero, Stephanie Lenihan

By: Westerly High SMILE Club



The Westerly High School SMILE Club had an exciting and highly productive season, engaging students in a full series of hands-on engineering challenges.

We began with **firefly circuits** to build foundational **electrical engineering skills**, followed by our crowd-favorite Hydrobot Rumble to explore mechanical engineering concepts. Students then combined electrical and mechanical systems to construct light-tracking robots, applying their growing understanding of circuits, sensors, and robotics.

In the weeks that followed, members designed **articulated mechanical hands**, engineered recycling-sorting machines using principles from environmental and civil engineering, and deepened their knowledge of circuitry through investigations of series and parallel circuits.

The season concluded with two capstone builds: a fully functioning streetlight system and a windmill design challenge. Throughout all eight activities, **students collaborated, troubleshot design issues, and applied iterative problem-solving with enthusiasm and persistence**. The WHS SMILE Club continues to provide rich, engaging opportunities for students to explore STEM pathways and develop authentic engineering skills, making this year's club experience a strong highlight for both students and mentors!



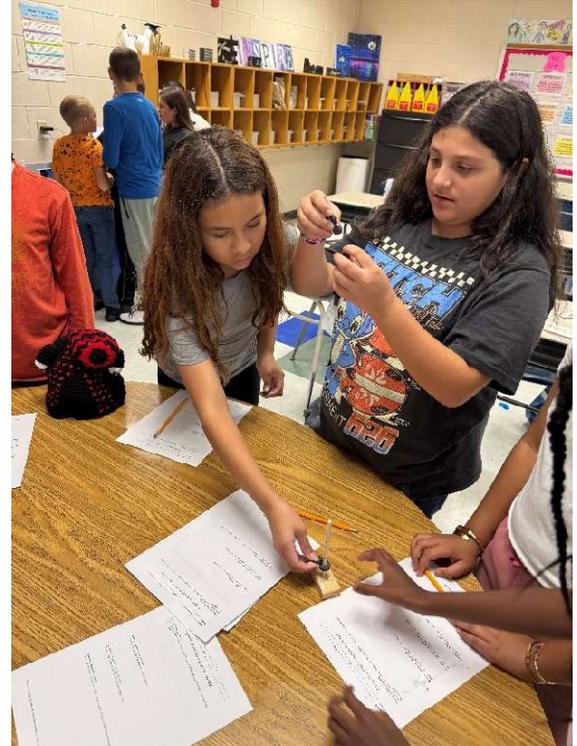
CLUB UPDATES

Winsor Hill Elementary Johnston

Dionna Gajdowski, Gabrielle Harwood
By: Winsor Hill SMILE Club

The SMILE Club at Winsor Hill Elementary has had an exciting start to the year, with our 4th- and 5th-grade students diving into hands-on **STEM challenges that build creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills**. During our annual Family Science Night on November 19th, students proudly showcased their projects. They explained the science behind their work to families, making it a wonderful celebration of their learning and confidence.

This fall, students engineered spaghetti and marshmallow towers, **explored gravitational potential energy** using falling water, investigated different types of magnets, and experimented with Möbius strips. They also constructed a human lung model using a soda bottles and balloons. This challenge didn't work on the first try, but it inspired a powerful lesson on perseverance as they redesigned it the following week with success.



Our fan-favorite activity so far has been the **potato battery**, where students discovered how ordinary potatoes can be turned into working power sources to light small bulbs.

We are so proud of our young scientists and look forward to continuing our journey of creativity, exploration, and discovery throughout the rest of the year!

CLUB UPDATES

Woonsocket High School Woonsocket

Brigette Hernandez, Ethel Locke
By: Woonsocket High SMILE Club



Over the past four months, our SMILE Science Club has been a hub of creativity, collaboration, and discovery. Students began the semester with team-building activities designed to strengthen communication, problem-solving skills, and trust—laying a strong foundation for successful collaboration throughout the year.

Our learning extended beyond the classroom with an educational visit to a local recycling plant, where students explored real-world applications of environmental science and sustainability. This experience helped connect STEM concepts to everyday life and emphasized the importance of responsible innovation.

Hands-on engineering and design were at the heart of many club meetings. Students built light-sensitive robots using breadboards, gaining experience with circuitry, sensors, and troubleshooting. They also constructed glowing “fireflies” using simple circuits, combining creativity with foundational electrical engineering concepts. Another highlight was designing and constructing robotic arms using popsicle sticks and wooden dowels, challenging students to think critically about mechanics, balance, and movement.

The semester culminated with Family Science Night, where students proudly showcased their projects and explained their design processes to families and community members. We also took time to celebrate academic accomplishments, recognizing students for their dedication, curiosity, and growth in STEM skills.

These past four months have reflected the mission of our SMILE Club: to inspire curiosity, encourage collaboration, and empower students to see themselves as scientists, engineers, and innovators.



PARTNERSHIPS

We want to thank the following funders that have allowed SMILE to grow and continue to provide high quality after-school STEM programming to our Rhode Island students:

CENTRAL FALLS

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Tish Biggerstaff

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The SMILE Program

The Science and Math Investigative Learning Experiences (SMILE) Program is an enrichment program for educationally disadvantaged students in grades 4-12 in seven districts in Rhode Island. SMILE's goal is to provide group activities for these students in science, technology, engineering and math. Generous gifts by participating donors make this program possible. The SMILE newsletter is published three times a year. We encourage your comments and ideas. Please share this newsletter with others who might be interested in SMILE.