



Preschoolers Rutendo Mbabali and Annabelle Ferrer, left, play with Family Counters, which were named the 2019 TIMPANI Toy of the Year by Eastern Connecticut State University on Monday. Julia DeLapp, co-investigator and director for the ECSU Center for Early Childhood Education, and co-principal investigator Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, right, reveal the toy of the year. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

# ECSU study really is child’s play

## Family Counters named 2019’s TIMPANI Toy of the Year

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WILLIMANTIC — For parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles shopping for the children in their lives, Eastern Connecticut State University can knock one gift off the list.

Every year, the TIMPANI (Toys that Inspire Mindful Play and Nurture Imagination) Toy of the Year is announced in December.

And Monday, Eastern officials announced Family Counters by Learning Re-

sources has been named the 2019 toy.

Researchers, students and teachers, among others, gathered at the Center for Early Childhood Education to hear the results of the toy study.

Eastern President Elsa Núñez said she is one of the many grandparents who eagerly await the yearly toy announcement.

“The study answers parents’ important questions,” Núñez said. “It’s provocative, data-driven, empirical student research on this campus.”

Every year for the past 10 years, the

study has investigated how young children learn as they play with a variety of toys in natural settings.

Toys were placed in preschool classrooms at the university’s Child and Family Development Resource Center.

Researchers then filmed and coded the footage to assess how each toy inspires children’s problem-solving, cooperation with peers, creativity and use of language.

The Family Counters are an example of a “replica play toy,” meaning chil-

**FAMILY COUNTERS, Page 4**

# Family Counters named toy of year

Continued from Page 1

dren pretend the counters are parents, teachers, siblings or pets.

The miniature plastic people and pets of various sizes and colors can be grouped, sorted, counted and then used for acting out “house” and other make-believe play games.

“A lot of times children collaborated to carry out family-play narratives,” psychology and early childhood education student Allison Lundy said in a release issued by Eastern. “Children enacted elaborate, imaginary scenarios with their peers to act out stories of their own invention.”

The 72-piece set is currently for sale on Amazon for \$23.

The toy is not suitable for children under 3 years old.

New this year was an interactive “toy museum” for children enrolled in the Child and Family Development Resource Center.

The museum was in honor of the 10th year of the ongoing study.

Researchers selected 30 of the best-performing toys from previous years and invited children and families to explore the toys.

Placards displayed information on each toy and why



**Preschooler Isabella Barbosa plays with Family Counters and star-shaped flexible connectors with Ashley Anderson at Eastern Connecticut State University’s Center for Early Childhood Education on Monday.** Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

it was considered a good fit for children.

The museum opened last week and continued until Monday.

Over the last 10 years, researchers like Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, former chairperson of Early Childhood Education, said the toys that often win are simple, nondescript and open-ended.

“They don’t have a lot of detail to them and that allows children to play with them in almost any way they wish,”

Trawick-Smith said.

Center for Early Childhood Education Director Julia DeLapp said families don’t need to purchase expensive, elaborate toys because children use their imaginations to bring toys to life.

Trawick-Smith suggested children should have two types of toys.

He recommended construction toys like Lincoln Logs, Duplo bricks or last year’s winner, Magz Clix.

Secondly, he recommended

replica play toys, like Family Counters, doctor’s play kits or play food and cooking sets.

Trawick-Smith said, in the future, researchers hope the study can expand on toys for children of different genders, cultural or language backgrounds, as well as toys for disabled children.

The study will also continue to look at adult involvement in playtime.

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