

# West Valley View

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## Reaching for the stars

*Youths launch rockets in summer physics program at college*

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DIEGO REYES, 12, of Buckeye prepares his team's rocket for launch, part of a project for Ace Physics 299, at Estrella Mountain Community College.

Instead of being upset that his students had their heads in the clouds, Estrella Mountain Community College professor Dwain Desbien chalked it up as a success Thursday at the Avondale campus.

Rather than daydreaming, the 22 pupils entering seventh and eighth grade were staring skyward following the sizzle and smoke as their class projects rocketed into the clouds on an overcast day.

In Physics 299, youths spent five weeks learning basic math and physics skills in order to design and fly model rockets.

"The kids have been very enthusiastic," the ninth-year instructor at the school said. "Even though this is on their summer break, we've had great attendance every day. They have a lot of questions and I think this has made them even more excited about math and science."

In a dirt field to the north of the main campus, six groups shot their rockets.

In order to be eligible for the Physics class, children attended the Mars Academy last summer. Both programs are part of ACE, Achieving a College Education Program, one that targets youths who may not consider going to college and helps them view attaining a bachelor's degree as an achievable goal.

Amid a cloud of smoke, each rocket disappeared into the clouds before gently spiraling down to the ground thanks to the parachute tucked inside the nose cone.

Although one flight ended in a local resident's backyard, the day was ruled a success on a number of levels including the fact that there were no lawn darts in the group.

A lawn dart is the nickname given to a rocket in which the parachute doesn't open, a scenario that ends with the rocket planting itself into the ground at a high rate of speed.

From the first week of the class, when the students started with premade models that required little construction beyond some Elmer's glue, to the final project that required the building of the models and the use of epoxy resin to hold the rockets together, the students learned about concepts such as velocity and center of pressure among others.

"I was already interested in science, but this made me even more excited about it," said Matthew Markuez, 11, of Verrado Middle School in Buckeye.



DEVASIA NELSON, 11, center, of Avondale launches a model rocket into the sky as her classmates from Ace Physics 299 watch.

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Devasia Nelson, 11, said she couldn't believe how high the rockets went.

"That was cool," she said. "We learned a lot about math and science. It was fun. I want to be a vet so it's important."

She also was excited about earning three college credits by going through the program.

Along with building more sophisticated rockets during the course of the class, Desbien also increased the power supply going from black powder, used to launch the second of three models built during the class, up to NASA quality fuel for the finale.

"These will shoot as high as 1,500-1,700 feet into the air and go 300 to 400 mph," Desbien said.

When approached about teaching a physics-based class for the program, Desbien said model rockets seemed an obvious choice for a subject matter.

"It's been a hobby of mine for a long time," he said. "It's a hands-on thing that the students can get involved with and excited about."

Desbien said he is hopeful some students in attendance will participate in the Team America Rocketry Challenge, which takes place each May.

"The kids had all sorts of questions so hopefully we've sparked something with this program," he said.

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