



El Paso students' experiments on rocket that lifts off today

by Ramón Rentería \ El Paso Times

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Aileen Montana acknowledged that science had not always been her favorite subject in school -- until last summer.

"Now I love science and astronomy," she said. "It's been a great experience."

Montana, 14, an eighth-grade student at Brown Middle School in El Paso, will push the button that will launch a rocket and payload of 27 student experiments -- including an experiment designed by Brown students -- this morning at New Mexico's Spaceport America near Truth or Consequences.

An estimated 800 students from New Mexico, Arizona and Texas, teachers and parents, are expected to watch the third New Mexico Space Grant Consortium student launch scheduled at 7 a.m. today.

NASA sponsors the launch and yearlong education plan to build student experiments.

Montana earned the privilege to press the launch button by winning an essay contest describing her three-week space camp experience last summer.

"I'm glad I got to do this," she said.

The Discovery Channel plans to interview Montana and other Brown Middle School students after the launch.

Teachers at Brown Middle School recruited eight teachers and more than 200 students for the

2010 summer camp. The New Mexico consortium funded the El Paso program and other area efforts that promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics for students.

Brown Middle School will send an estimated 70 students to the launch, including a handful of students from Desert Wind School in far East El Paso. Students from El Paso's Da

Vinci School for Science and the Arts designed the launch's mission patch.

Brown Middle School students designed an experiment that will determine the effects of microgravity and acceleration forces on a marshmallow.

Eric Garcia, 13, a seventh-grade student at Brown Middle, came up with the idea for the experiment while watching a space shuttle astronaut eating a marshmallow on television.

"That inspired me to think about what would happen if a marshmallow was in space and it is not pressurized like on the shuttle," Garcia said.

Darron Saunders, a Brown Middle School science teacher, helped organize the space summer camp for students.

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"It's a big deal," he said. "It was their ideas and hard work during the summer that led to this happening."

Brown Middle School Principal Victoria York is optimistic that the whole experience will not only beef up science learning but also expose her students to future career possibilities in the aerospace industry.

At Socorro Independent School District's Desert Wind School, Principal David Solis applauded the efforts of his students in the NASA program.

"We're very proud of the fact that they will come back and generate more excitement and more interest not only in science but also space exploration," Solis said.

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Watch it

- Pre-launch and launch coverage of the student experiments can be viewed at KRQE.com or launchnm.com.
- The rocket launch is scheduled at 7 a.m. today at New Mexico's Spaceport America.

An advertisement for personalized M&M's candies. The top text reads "Getting married? Make your favors as special as your big day!". Below this, three circular candies are shown: a pink one with a white 'm', a white one with the text "Jen & Al 11/14/10", and a white one with a black and white photo of a couple. To the right is a small photo of a smiling couple. Below the candies, it says "Personalized M&M'S® Candies Choose from 25 colors!". At the bottom, there is the M&M's logo, the text "Get 10% Off Now!" with a "GO" button, and a small disclaimer: "Minimum purchase required. See site for details. ® / TM trademarks © Mars Incorporated 2010".

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