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Students Launch Experiments Into Space

NASA's 'Summer of Innovation Program' sponsored the third annual launch at Spaceport America for hundreds of students in New Mexico, Texas and Arizona

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POSTED: 1:21 pm MDT May 20, 2011

UPDATED: 7:10 pm MDT May 20, 2011



UPHAM, New Mexico -- A shiny, metallic reflection at Spaceport America may not look look like much from far away, but it is actually the launch pad where the SL-5 rocket took off into space Friday morning.

"I've never seen that before," Joel Herrera, a fifth grader at Columbia Elementary School, said.

In a matter of seconds, or traveling at five times the speed of sound, the UP Aerospace Sounding Rocket vanished into the blue sky, and left behind a thick trail of white smoke.

"It was pretty amazing," Fredrick Hansen, an eighth grader at Sierra Middle School, said. "It went up there really fast, and it's just great to know that I had the opportunity to send an experiment up to space."

Hundreds of elementary to high school-aged students from Las Cruces, El Paso and as far away as Tucson, watched with wide eyes as their year's worth of projects launched into space.

The impact for students goes far beyond those brief exciting moments.

"Inspiration...that is the huge importance of this," Jeremy Sanchez, a fifth grade teacher at Loma Heights Elementary School, said.

Watching the 780 lb. rocket take off, was priceless, Sanchez said.

"Having this opportunity to actually try a real idea and see it come to full-term, it's just phenomenal for these kids," Sanchez said. "They just love it."

Experiments reached an altitude of 72 miles.

"These students designed, built and flew their experiments in one year; even NASA doesn't do that," Pat Hynes, Director of the Space Grant Consortium, said.

Some students say, this is the icing on the cake for them.

"We built a model rocket at the camp, but now that we're doing it in real life, it's really cool," Ethan Hentzel, a seventh grader at Brown Middle School, said.

Projects ranged from tracking temperature and radiation changes, to what happens to a marshmallow during weightlessness.

"We want them to understand how the pathway is constructed; when you have an idea, how to design it, build it, fly it," Hynes said.

NASA's 'Summer of Innovation Program' sponsored the third annual launch.

"This would be our work paying off," Victor Hernandez, a seventh grader at Brown Middle School said.

The experiment portion of the rocket returned back to the ground by parachute about 15 minutes after take off. That data collected will be analyzed by students to help prepare for next year's launch.

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