



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 20, 2017 CONTACT: William Diepenbrock PHONE: 909-206-5304

Baldwin Park Students Face Off in 21st Century Engineering Challenge

Event replaces spelling bee as district intensifies STEAM focus

BALDWIN PARK – Student teams from 12 Baldwin Park Unified elementary schools will learn during a special showcase at 6 p.m. **Monday, April 24** who has won the District's first-ever 21st Century Challenge, a contest to devise a Rube Goldberg Machine that can pluck a tissue from a box.

The showcase, presented to an audience of students, parents, teachers and administrators at the Baldwin Park Performing Arts Center, replaces the District's long-running spelling bee – a shift representative of a growing focus on science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) fields.

"We modeled our 21st Century Challenge after college-level contests, hoping to inspire our students to step beyond any preconceived limits and teach them that all possibilities are within their reach," Superintendent Froilan N. Mendoza said.

At the heart of the effort is Susan McNamara, a teacher on special assignment who has long helped lead Baldwin Park Unified's Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. McNamara and a committee of advisers developed the idea for the contest, which is inspired by the clever contraptions of the longtime newspaper cartoonist Rube Goldberg, who was himself a UC Berkeley-educated engineer.

McNamara created a four introductory lesson plans, a website with resources, videos to promote the contest at the schools and trained facilitators at each campus on understanding the engineering mindset.

In fall semester, each school created a team of 10 students from grades four, five and six, with the limit that no more than half the students could be part of the GATE program. Students were required to apply to take part in the after-school program and had to obtain recommendations from teachers.

The machines use recycled materials gathered by the 120 students, who created simple machines – such as levers and pulleys – that work together to extract the tissue. Students created two-minute videos demonstrating their machines as well as three-minute videos explaining their effort and teamwork.

"It was about being resourceful," McNamara said. "Our contest promotes collaboration, critical thinking and creative thinking – all key elements of our new statewide standards and a hallmark of the skills we want to teach our students."

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McNamara said the students face a tough challenge, but the results blew away the judges.

“They far exceeded my expectations. We originally intended to award just a first and second prize, but then we saw the videos. They were so good that we added a third place and two honorable mentions,” she said.

Winning schools will receive trophies at the showcase and winning students will receive medals.

The Performing Arts Center is at 640 Maine Ave, Baldwin Park.

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