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Los Nietos Students Prepare for Middle School, Celebrate Science at Inaugural STEAM Festival

Whittier, CA – Aeolian Elementary School sixth-grader Jonathan Hernandez leaped into the air and stomped on a plastic bottle, sending enough force through a plastic tube to launch his paper rocket high into orbit. Hernandez was among the nearly 400 Los Nietos School District fifth- and sixth-graders who celebrated science, technology, engineering, art and math at the inaugural STEAM Festival on Nov. 15 at Los Nietos Middle School.

Mixing chemicals to create slime, using balloons to visualize static electricity and constructing spaghetti towers were just a few of the interactive experiments that brought together the District's students, teachers and parents for an event that helped to familiarize elementary schoolers with the LNMS STEAM Academy and ease their transition to middle school.

"The thing I liked most was building LED flashlights, but all of the experiments were fun," Hernandez said. "I'm looking forward to coming to the middle school next year and learning more about the things I can create."

Fifth- and sixth-graders from Aeolian, Rancho Santa Gertrudes and Ada S. Nelson elementary schools were bused to the middle school for a day that began with an Engineering Challenge activity put on by Trash 4 Teaching, an organization that turns recyclable materials into tools to support STEAM education. Next, the young learners enjoyed lunch on campus before they were sent to explore STEAM Festival booths hosted by LNMS teachers and middle school students.

The booth activities allowed the students to experience the science and engineering curriculum in exciting ways. Souvenirs of self-made spin art and homemade catapults were just a few of the items parents and students took home.

"This festival was a way to give elementary students and their parents a glimpse into the exciting possibilities of our STEAM Academy," LNMS Principal Shanonn Zelaya said. "We want our incoming middle school families to be as excited about transitioning to middle school as we are about welcoming them here and helping them reach their full potential."

The LNMS STEAM Academy offers diverse coursework that allows students to explore math, art and science in a variety of ways. STEAM electives include a computer coding course, digital yearbook production, beginning and intermediate band, as well as drawing and painting. Students are prepared

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for college and careers through university visits and learn about college pathways to STEAM and other careers through a strong partnership with Rio Hondo College.

STEAM Academy pupils are immersed in technology using a variety of devices as tools to transform the learning environment. At Los Nietos Middle School, every eighth-grader receives a Google Chromebook to use at school. Seventh-graders receive access to laptops, iPads and computer labs. All teachers use Google Classroom software to post assignments.

“We’re proud of our STEAM Academy program and the crucial role it plays in helping our students become high achievers,” Los Nietos Superintendent Jonathan Vasquez said. “Exposing our elementary kids to the high caliber of learning experiences they will encounter in middle school a year or two early ensures they will be prepared to achieve their goals when they arrive at middle school.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

111716_LOSNIETOS_STEAMFESTIVAL1: Students apply paint colors to their spin art during the inaugural STEAM Festival on Nov. 15 at Los Nietos Middle School. The event celebrated science, technology, engineering, art and math while introducing elementary schoolers to the middle school’s STEAM Academy.

111716_LOSNIETOS_STEAMFESTIVAL2: A student displays her spin art, one of many activities that allowed students to experience science and engineering curriculum in exciting ways at the inaugural STEAM Festival.

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