



NORWALK-LA MIRADA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Maritza Fairfield
Rochelle Fanali
(909) 445-1001

Project Lead the Way Program Tackles Real-World Problems

Norwalk High School Engineering Students Offer Redesigns of City Skate Park

Sixty-three Intro to Engineering students -- almost all of them freshmen -- stood nervously before a panel of judges on April 28 as they presented redesign plans for the City of Norwalk's skate park, offering solutions that incorporated concrete-made obstacles and ramps, green space and even a recreational pool.

The project, sponsored by Norwalk High School's Project Lead the Way Program, challenged 12 teams of students to apply cross-disciplinary knowledge to solve a real-life dilemma -- in this case, the new park design. The redesign proposals meshed engineering, environmental science, language arts and mathematics to revitalize the older park.

"To be 14 or 15 years old and given the task to redesign something that already exists in your city is a tall order, but the students tackled the challenge head on," Norwalk-La Mirada Unified Board of Education President Jesse Urquidi said. "I was extremely impressed with the level of research, thought and innovation that each student group put into its presentations."

Urquidi volunteered his time to serve on the panel of judges, which also included City of Norwalk Mayor Leonard Shryock, Superintendent of Recreation Bill Kearns, Cerritos Community College Trustee Bob Arthur, Plains All American Terminals Operations Manager John Rifulato and chemical engineering student Danielle Noriega and architectural engineering student Donatie Santos.

Judges evaluated the 12 group presentations, which averaged five minutes, on their use of effective language, accurate statistics generated from a Survey Monkey survey, environmental impact and overall organization.

Students initiated this project in February and met with Norwalk Director of Recreation and Park Services Dave Verhaaf. The students examined the park setup and sampled the soil for nitrogen levels to understand the potential level of plant life sustainability.

Back in the classroom, students worked in teams to brainstorm potential redesigns and learned how to conduct surveys, tabulate results and design skate park models using Inventor software, a computer-aided design program that creates two- and three-dimensional representations of physical objects.

Jennifer Elam, mother of Norwalk freshman Yannick Kabamba, said the experience gave her son a taste of handling a real-world challenge that will serve him well in his future endeavors.

"This is such an incredible experience for him," Elam said. "When he's old enough to interview for a job, or if he meets with college admissions representatives, he'll already have experience and feel comfortable communicating his ideas clearly."

Project Lead the Way is part of the District's College and Career Pathways focus which is specifically designed to equip students with essential job skills through meaningful experiences.

Norwalk-La Mirada Superintendent Ginger Shattuck said a strength of the effort lies in how it marries the latest in technology with core educational tenets.

"We are witnessing an accelerated rate of emerging technology that affects the way our teachers are able to communicate concepts and ideas to students," Shattuck said. "With the support of amazing teachers, students are gaining experience to learn what they want to do and have a pathway in their minds as they continue to advance in their high school careers."

Project Lead the Way offers its curriculum and teacher professional development to more than 6,500 elementary, middle and high schools in the United States. Its approach to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is focused on activity, project and problem-based curriculum.

Design Team Results

Twelve teams of Intro to Engineering students from Norwalk High School competed to present skate-park redesign plans to Norwalk City Council.

First place:

- **Team Mocking Jay:** Amy Avila, Jocelyne Cruz, Valerie Martinez, Savannah Drinkard, Ed Mares and Brenda Venegas.

Second place:

- **Team Brown:** Oscar Rodarte, Jose Valdiva, Carlos Espinoza, Carlos Beltran and Fernando Olguin.

Third place:

- **Team Blue:** Albert Espinosa, Joshua Ortiz, Garrett Sun, Alexis Lara and Kevin Guzman.

PHOTO CAPTION: PLTW engineering students from left to right: Sebastion Silva, Pablo Guerrero, Dominique Vasquez and Anthony Gonzalez.

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District • 12820 Pioneer Blvd. • Norwalk, CA 90650
(562) 868-0431 • www.nlmusd.k12.ca.us

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