

Nimitz project chosen for space flight

By Ruth Campbell rcampbell@oaoa.com | Posted: Friday, December 21, 2018 11:08 am

A proposal related to cancer treatment developed by Nimitz Middle School sixth-graders is heading for the International Space Station this summer.

The students' proposal, called "Activation of Clostridium Sporogenes, a novel cancer treatment in Microgravity," will study how well the bacteria, Clostridium sporogenes, activates in a microgravity environment. The results could potentially assist in cancer treatments for astronauts if they become exposed to radiation in space, a news release said.

After passing a flight safety review, their experiment will be conducted by an astronaut aboard the International Space Station next summer. Nimitz was one of three Ector County Independent School District finalists in the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program.

The other two finalists were from OCTECHS and Falcon Early College High School. All three groups have a chance to attend the SSEP National Conference next summer in Washington, D.C., hosted by the National Center for Earth and Space Science Education.

Students will be able to present their experiment designs and attend featured presentations by nationally recognized scientists, engineers and astronauts.

Funding was provided by a grant from the Texas Space Grant Consortium, Subaru of America Inc., Chevron and Education Foundation of Odessa. Also supporting the students were Drs. Natalia Schlabritz-Lutsevich, Kushal Gandhi, Seheung Lee and Aneesh Bapodra, from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, along with ECISD Volunteer in Public Schools Mike Schlueter.

Student said the proposal went through several versions.

"It's really, really exciting," student Maryam Akram said of being selected. "Since we learned that we won first place out of the district, we have been very serious in all of our studies and we're very, very excited that now our project's going to be sent up to space."

Along with Akram, the student team includes Sydney Richardson, Eva Brower, Aidan Gomez, Maison Leet, and Jean Machado Torres who was unable to attend.

Akram noted that the sixth-graders went up against older middle schoolers and high school students to take the top spot in the district.



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Nimitz Middle School, from left, 12-year-old Maison Leet, 11-year-old Eva Brower, 11-year-old Sydney Richardson, 12-year-old Aidan Gomez, and 12-year-old Maryam Akram, talk about their project that was chosen to be launched to the International Space Station this summer. The name of the project is Activation of Clostridium sporogenes, a Novel Treatment for Cancer in Microgravity.

Richardson was pleased with the team's achievement. She said they were thinking that it was just for fun and they wouldn't win.

"It's pretty breathtaking that this is our first year in middle school and this is already what we've accomplished," Richardson said.

"... What we've learned from this is that in school we aren't supposed to learn about cells until much later, until seventh grade so we've already learned about that whole area of science," Richardson said.

Later on, when she goes to high school and college and when she's trying to find a job, Richardson said this will look "really good" on her resume, especially if she's going for a spot with NASA or in aerospace engineering.

Eighth-grade science teachers Courtney Smith and Priscilla Torres guided the students through the proposal process. Smith said the students deserve this recognition.

"Our students are amazing. They put in so much work and effort. They've really stepped up and done a lot to get this project going. They've done the research; asked for help when they've needed it. They've gotten to see ... the process of science, so it's really neat to see them learning as we go," Smith said.

Torres said she signed up to be the facilitator at Nimitz. Smith joined the school this year, which Torres said she was thankful for, "because without her, we wouldn't have been able to do it."

"We do everything together and her help has been great," Torres added.

At first, she said there were close to 50 students in the meetings about the ... This group kind of stuck together and here they are," Torres said.

Schlabritz-Lutsevich praised her team and the students and noted that they got help from the scientific community who are very interested in the youngsters' success.

Bapodra, who said he used to teach, found an illustrating program and drew out how he imagined the project would be, helping to simplify the proposal for students.

"... I think it's amazing it's an amazing opportunity for them," Bapodra said.