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This summer, science is a hot topic at camps

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By **MICHELLE L. KLAMPE**
The Press-Enterprise

Summertime is the right time for science.

Hundreds of Inland students are spending part of their school vacation learning physics, chemistry, the laws of motion and more through activities such as building rockets, making robots and growing crystals in a test tube.

Science makes a great theme for summer camps because it's an easy academic subject to make fun for the students with hands-on experiments, said Patricia Beal, a longtime science teacher for the Murrieta Valley Unified School District who has directed Camp Invention in Murrieta the past two summers.

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Rodrigo Peña / The Press-Enterprise
Brady Ellis, 6, of Temecula, watches
his model rocket launch during the
Champions Science Adventures
summer camp at Hillcrest Academy
in Temecula.

"Science is all around us all the time, and science is fun," Beal said. "You hook them when you show them something cool."

Also, with focus in schools on language arts and math, the primary subjects of standardized tests, "The time devoted to science is far less than it used to be," said Pam Clute, associate provost of educational partnerships at UC Riverside.

At summer science camps, students "have the time to explore, to fact-find. It gives kids a more relaxed atmosphere to absorb science."

Clute, a mathematics professor, also oversees UCR's Academy of Learning through Partnerships for Higher Achievement, or ALPHA Center, which works with schools to improve student performance in mathematics and science. The center offers several summer programs for middle and high school students.

Riverside City College hosted several Destination Science camps this summer. The

nonprofit science program, headquartered in Orange County, has offered summer science campus for elementary-aged students for 10 years, said program director Heena Desai.

"That's a good age to target science," Desai said. "If they're exposed to it, and they know it's part of their everyday life, you remove that fear (of learning science.)"

Summer science camps are designed to be fun but also offer a chance to build confidence in students as they learn more about science, said Nina Conway, area manager for Science Adventures, which offered camps at Hillcrest Academy in Temecula, Tomas Rivera Elementary School in Riverside and University of Redlands in Redlands this summer.

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Kurt Miller / The Press-Enterprise

"With our program, every child succeeds while they're doing science," she said.

Confidence is a key component in keeping students' interest in science and math, especially for girls, said Clute of UCR.

"Girls in general have a lower academic confidence than boys," she said. "It doesn't mean they can't do it. In camps, they learn they have the ability to do it."

Week-long science camps can run \$200 or more, depending on the type and its length. Some camps offer scholarships or secure corporate sponsorships to help defray the costs. Clute's camps at UCR are offered at no charge.

Scholarships were available this year at Murrieta Valley's Camp Invention, Beal said. The school district partnered with Camp Invention, a division of the nonprofit National Inventors Hall of Fame, to put on the program, and the national organization provided the scholarships.

At Camp Invention, campers, among other activities, build shields from cereal boxes and duct tape and work as a team to stay dry as other teams throw water at them in "H2O Throw." They also make parachutes out of plastic bags and paper cups in a study of flight so their comic book superheroes could fly; and create shelters out of recycled materials as part of a Viking quest to find treasure.

Campers said they loved the water games and the chance to take apart small appliances and electronic equipment so they could see how they worked. The students later turned the parts into new devices.

"We're making machines," said Abigail Kane, 6. "We have a problem and we're using our machines to solve it."

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