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Andy Peterson, 7, and Chase Bautista, 5, watch as their homemade rockets head skyward at Hillcrest Academy on Friday. They were part of about 30 children at the Champions Science Adventures Summer Camp that experimented and investigated principles of space and rocketry while they've worked on building their own rockets and motorized Mars rovers. (Photo by Don Boomer - Staff Photographer)

TEMECULA: Science program a blast for kids

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TEMECULA ---- Four days of hard work ended in about 20 seconds, but that didn't bother participants in the Champions Science Adventures Summer Camps at Hillcrest Academy.

Twenty-seven children entering kindergarten through sixth grade spent the last week learning about and building rockets.

On Friday, they launched them.

With a whooshing sound, the rockets shot high into the air, reaching heights up to 200 feet, then floated back to earth.

Well, most floated back to earth. One landed in a tree and a couple descended onto the roof of a portable classroom at the Temecula private school.

Vivianna Gonzalez, one of the few girls in the Space and Rocketry program, saw her rocket, neatly decorated with animal stickers, alit in a tree.

"I'm really into science. It's my favorite topic in school," said the 11-year-old Temecula resident, who is headed into sixth grade at Julian Charter School.

Andrew Werthman, 10, of Fallbrook, an incoming fifth-grader at Hillcrest, said campers worked on their rockets each of the first four days of camp.

The body was a red, 15-inch hard cardboard tube and campers glued on fins. Students were

encouraged to decorate their rockets, and items such as Popsicle sticks and drinking straws adorned the sides.

A metal contact at the bottom of the rocket was connected by wires to a battery-operated launcher. The children sat about 10 feet back and turned a key that sent their rocket high into the sky with an explosion of dust.

Andrew said he designed his rocket with a nose cone that would pop off, so it would gently return to the ground instead of crashing down.

His mother, Nancy Werthman, said the camp has increased her son's interest in science.

"He's coming home, talking to us about the solar system," she said. "(Teachers) are throwing a lot of learning in. It's not just coming out and launching rockets."

Rocket master Lawrence Achacoso said participants are taught things such as the stages of rockets and Newton's law of motion.

"They learn about concepts the whole week," Achacoso said. "There's a lot of science."

The students worked on their rocket for about 45 minutes each day, using concepts they learned in class.

The rocket class was the second of four weekly sessions operated by Science Adventures Summer Camps at Hillcrest.

Last week, participants learned about robots, with planets and physics the topics scheduled for the next two sessions.

"We teach them science in a fun and hands-on manner," camp director Mary Smith said. "When they use their hands, they retain more."

For information of the camp, visit www.scienceadventures.com.

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