



# Academy to stress science

Charter school takes off at San Bernardino site

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SAN BERNARDINO - How to go to Mars (easy version):

1. Get a really powerful rocket.
2. Learn how to fly it.
3. Take off and look for the big red rock that's a few million miles away.

An actual journey to the Red Planet would be a little more complicated. It's probably the kind of thing one would have to go to school for.

Only time will tell if Norton Space and Aeronautics Academy, a new charter school in San Bernardino, will be the school that a future Mars-bound astronaut begins his or her trip beyond earth's atmosphere.

When the new school was dedicated on Thursday, Rob Piercy, chief executive of the Lewis Center for Educational Research, stood before a crowd of students, parents and politicians and said the academy's students may be part of the generation that achieves the long imagined feats of colonizing the moon and exploring Mars.

"The students we have here now will be just the right age for those trips," Piercy said.

The kindergarten, first- and second-grade children who make up the academy's inaugural student body aren't quite ready for that kind of mission. Thursday, while they sat through about an hour's worth of speeches and presentations, they looked as if they would be happy enough just to have lunch and take in their next class.

Norton Space and Aeronautics Academy is the second charter school opened by Lewis Center for Educational Research, which also has a charter school in Apple Valley.

In San Bernardino, educators are counting on working with aviation-based businesses around San Bernardino International Airport to help provide students a chance to see applied science up close.

The new school is the first-ever charter school approved under the auspices of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office. Classes started Monday for students in kindergarten through the second grade.

The school has a staff of a dozen teachers leading classes for about 210 children, Principal Robert Barksdale said.

Parent Efren Vizcaino of Upland chose the new academy as the place for his daughter Marlene to begin kindergarten.

"We decided to enroll our kid because it was a high academic level," Vizcaino said.

All students at the academy will be taught in English and Spanish, Barksdale said. Eventually, the school will become trilingual, with Mandarin Chinese lessons added to the curriculum.

Educators plan to add one grade level per year until 2018, the year when 12th grade classes are expected to be offered.

Inside the new campus' main office, a NASA jumpsuit hangs on the wall as an obvious reminder of the academy's intended focus on math and science.

"They'll have skills that we don't even know about yet," said Piercy, predicting that academy students will pursue learning at the forefront of technological advancement.

But the past is also important to the new school. The campus is on the same site that once held Mill School, where Dorothy Inghram worked as San Bernardino County's first black teacher.

Thursday, Inghram and several of her former Mill School students attended the new school's dedication ceremony.

"It isn't my day, it's your day. You made teaching at Mill such a joy," Inghram said to her students while holding a microphone in front of the day's crowd. "Thank you for making my profession one of the most beautiful and enjoyable ones you've ever seen."

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