

# San Bernardino aeronautics academy hopes to teach scientists, engineers of the future

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SAN BERNARDINO - A charter school whose founders hope will educate future scientists, engineers and mathematicians opened Monday with all the usual first-day-of-school excitement, jitters and emotions.

The Norton Space and Aeronautics Academy welcomed more than 200 kindergartners, first-graders and second-graders, all dressed in pressed khaki and navy blue uniforms.

Some relished their new start. Others cried. A few clung to their teacher's hand.

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Marlene Vizcaino, 4, cries Monday during the first day of classes at the Norton Space and Aeronautics Academy.

The East Central Avenue charter school is the first approved through the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools' office. The county school board granted the Lewis Center for Educational Research its charter in April 2007.

The school will expand by one grade each year until it includes 12th grade.

The academy, near the former Norton Air Force Base, is the second for the Lewis Center. It also operates the Academy for Academic Excellence, a charter school in Apple Valley with a science and technology focus.

The Norton academy also has a science, math and technology theme.

A miniature space suit hangs from a doorway in the office and photographs of astronauts on missions decorate some of the walls.

Rick Piercy, the Lewis Center's president and chief executive officer, said math and science skills are needed for a strong workforce. Students at the academy one day could be working on alternative energy solutions or colonizing the moon, he said.

"The 21st Century is going to really revolve around science, math and technology, and we have such a shortage of engineers and scientists," he said.

The future also was on the minds of parents who looked on Monday as their children lined up to head to class.

Highland resident Ban Yousif said her 6-year-old son Andy Essa's former teacher encouraged her to apply to the charter school after observing that the second-grader was advanced, especially in math and science.

Story continues below



**Ramon Mena Owens / The Press-Enterprise**

Parents and students gather at the front of the academy, which welcomed more than 200 kindergarteners, first-graders and second-graders on Monday.

"She said we must go for it," Yousif said. "She said, 'This is a good thing for Andy.' "

Maria Tayrien, also of Highland, said she likes the smaller class sizes and flexibility in teaching methods that a charter school offers for her son James, a 7-year-old second-grader.

"I couldn't pass it up," she said. "This is the closest I'm going to get to private school in a public sector."

The school is dual immersion, with all students in kindergarten through fifth grade studying Spanish. Mandarin Chinese will be added for the sixth through 12th grades.

On opening day, students recited the Pledge of Allegiance in English, then repeated it in Spanish.

Teachers lined up their students and gave them instructions in both languages.

Principal Robert Barksdale, who has worked at traditional public schools and opened a Los Angeles-based charter school founded by boxer Oscar De La Hoya, said he sees some advantages with charter schools.

"You get to be more innovative," he said. "It's higher expectations and smaller schools, so you get to try different things."

Barksdale said the academy plans to host a grand-opening celebration Thursday that will include Mayor Pat Morris, San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzales, and 102-year-old Dorothy Inghram, the first black teacher in San Bernardino and first black superintendent in the state.

The academy sits on the site of the school where Inghram first taught, he said.

"We're excited," he said. "We've been doing so much work and now that the kids are here, it's great."

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