

Science workshop brings wonder to Mission students and families

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The Guardsman



Cesar Chavez Elementary School students paint their ceramic creations during an afterschool session of the Mission Science Workshop on Jan. 19. Hands-on classes at the workshop expose Mission district students to a level of learning unavailable in most classrooms. RAMSEY EL-QARE / THE GUARDSMAN

What began nearly 20 years ago as a City College engineering technician tinkering in his garage to try and understand some of the basic science behind his job has evolved into a workshop of wonder for students of Mission district schools.

“It’s not about me lecturing. They don’t want that,” said Dan Sudran, founder of The Mission Science Workshop. “They want to do stuff and learn by doing stuff.”

The workshop has a focus on hands-on experimentation. Aside from bringing physics, biology, earth science and chemistry to life, the workshop teaches students mechanical skills, such as how to build a table.

“For kids in the Mission, the Exploratorium might as well be on Mars,” said Will Maynez, City College’s physics department lab manager, who helped Sudran collect equipment for the workshop.

Elementary school student Kimberly Hernandez has been attending the Mission Science Workshop for two years. She said she likes biology the best.

“One cool thing is that sometimes you can touch the snakes and parts of the body, like on the skeletons of animals,” she said.

The workshop boasts an elastic curriculum to accommodate teachers from all the schools it serves.

“It’s a little bit like a restaurant,” Sudran said. “They say, ‘I wanna order some of this for my class,’ except it’s a curriculum.”

He then negotiates with teachers to try to give them what they want, keeping in mind what the workshop has to offer.

“The main objective of the science workshop is to get kids excited about science, to see their curiosity, to give them a chance to explore new things and experiment,” Sudran said.

The workshop primarily serves schools in the Mission district, but Sudran said they try to accommodate schools from other parts of the city. It has grown from a modest beginning to teaching 3,000 students per year. It also teaches teachers through professional development courses run by Sudran.

“It’s so awesome, so amazing, so rewarding,” said Michelle Evans, a City College student employed at the workshop through the child development department. “For me, it’s not a job. It makes me feel good to help the community.”

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