

Effort teaches hands-on science

By CANDICE WILLIAMS
The Detroit News

STERLING HEIGHTS — Learning is all about experimenting for Nick Rende and his classmates.

The ninth-grader spent a recent morning using a makeshift parachute to test weights for a kite his group is designing as part of a program at the new

Sterling Heights

Center for Science and Industry in Sterling Heights. After making a few tweaks, Nick — who

attends Malow Junior High in Utica — said he was confident the group was headed in the right direction.

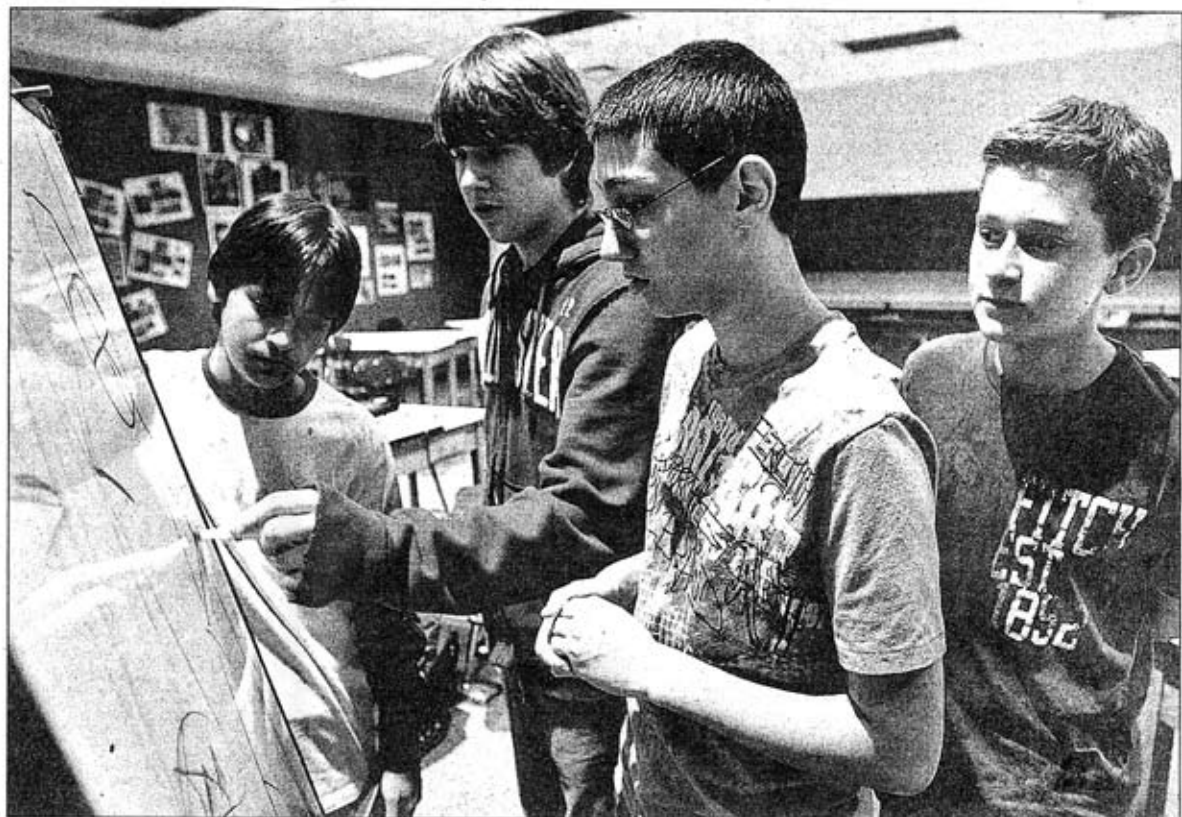
The kite project is just one of the hands-on assignments Nick and almost 70 other ninth-grade students will complete at the center. The program, funded by a \$2.7 million annual federal grant, is housed in the Joan C. Sergent Instructional Resource Center.

The classes are loosely structured, providing students with a chance to learn while completing projects, said Scott Palmer, program coordinator.

"These are the students that are not limited by structure," he said. "The philosophy and culture that we're creating here is not about doing what the teacher says to do. It's about getting the job done."

For almost three hours each morning, the students are bused to the center to work on group projects to develop their skills in three areas: engineering, multimedia and mechatronics, which combines mechanical and electronic elements. Then, they return to their home schools.

Opened this year to ninth-grade students from Utica Community Schools, Armada Areas Schools and



Todd McInturf / The Detroit News

Ninth-graders Jack Knight, left, Mike Coluzzi, Jacob Glasgow and David Chisholm, all of Shelby Township, design a kite at the Center for Science and Industry. The program aims to build engineering, multimedia and mechatronics skills.

Mount Clemens Community Schools, the program will add an additional class of students each year.

Students will build and program robotic devices, use animation and create multimedia presentations. And they'll earn math, English and elective credits toward graduation. The students seem to enjoy the classes, said Stacey Soderman, a math teacher.

"If they're interested, they're going to put better effort into this," she said. "These are the kids that like to build. The visual arts kids want to make this look good."

Christina Harkiewicz, 13, a ninth-grader at Utica's Davis Junior High, said she plans to follow in her father's footsteps and become an engineer. She said the program gives her an early

start.

"There aren't many places where you can go toward engineering," she said. "It's nice because you get to meet new people and they're interested in what you're interested in."

You can reach Candice Williams at (586) 468-0529 or cwilliams@detroitnews.com.