

Hundreds of kids square off on science

[Candice Williams](#), The Detroit News Published 2:49 p.m. ET May 20, 2017 | Updated 2:54 p.m. ET May 20, 2017



Mt. Clemens Montessori Academy third grader Stephen Krause, left, 9, of Mount Clemens, and fifth grader Alex Cartagena, right, 10, of Clinton Township, repack their water bottle rocket parachute before firing it again. (Photo: Todd McInturf / The Detroit News) Buy Photo

Every week for the past few months, hundreds of elementary students in Macomb County have gathered in pairs and small groups to ponder science.

Some are building devices to safely get an egg down a ramp; others are learning how to estimate the mass, volume or number of items in a container.

Now, the 1,200 pupils from 78 schools will test what they've learned in 16 events Saturday during the Macomb Elementary Regional Science Olympiad Tournament. The day-long event for grades three through six takes place at Macomb Community College South Campus.

"They learn teamwork, cooperation, how to study, a lot of science because they are working on things that are advanced for children this age," said Mike Sikorski, executive board elementary liaison for the event, hosted by the nonprofit Macomb Science Olympiad.

The competition, in its 32nd year, has evolved, said Ruth Cummins, a fifth-grade teacher at Cherokee Elementary School in Clinton Township. She's been a coach since the beginning.

"The kids have to do some pretty complex thinking," she said. "Much more than we used to do."



Oakbrook Elementary School Team 85 fourth grader McKenzie Johnson-Ross, 9, of Sterling Heights, reacts after launching her water bottle rocket on Saturday during the the 32nd Annual Macomb Science Olympiad Elementary Tournament at Macomb Community College's South Campus in Warren. (Photo: Todd McInturf / The Detroit News)

One recent afternoon, Anthony DiBartolomeo and Dylan Blank, sixth-graders at Crissman Elementary School in Shelby Township, studied for their event, "Charged up," which tests knowledge of electricity and related concepts. Coaching them was Anthony's dad, Dale DiBartolomeo, who works in electrical design for General Motors.

Anthony, 12, said he got started with the science olympiad after seeing that his sister enjoyed it. "I thought it would be fun to try to do that, too," he said. "It's just fun to compete and see what scores we'll get, what placement."

Dylan Blank, 11, said he's been practicing for his second event called "Bridging the Gap," where teams have to build a span that will support the weight of a tennis ball. The team got a list of possible materials that will be supplied the day of the event.

"We built some good bridges that worked except for one," he said.

Dylan's mother, Lisa Blank, is a parent volunteer who has coached the Crissman Elementary team for four years. She said some children like the hands-on events, while others favor the ones involving a lot of study, like the "Wildlife Safari" competition.

"It is absolutely amazing what these kids learn," she said. "They have to identify 112 birds by sight quickly and 40 bird calls on top of that."

After a day of competition, the students learn how they placed and receive their medals.

Cummins said it was she finds it refreshing to see how excited the students and parents are about the event.

"You see so many kids that continue on into middle school and into high school," she said. "We've had lots of students, now that they are working at NASA, they're doctors. A lot will attribute their interest in science back to when they were in science olympiad when they were younger."

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