

# Program: Keeping up the passion of learning

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Leon worked with two partners on the project, which he was excited to get ready for parents and community members to see next Thursday during the conservation celebration, an event for parents, community partners and school leaders to see what the students have learned from the program. This is the first year of E3. Eligible students test into the program with higher than average test scores, and are for grades fourth, fifth and sixth. Leon hopes to join the program again next year and has learned a lot this year about water conservation and pollution.

"I can use it to tell my other friends to use less water, and if they keep doing it, it can effect our world," he said.

He hoped more students would want to join to learn but also to have fun. He said the teachers have been nice and the activities have been cool.

"I would just recommend to join because it's a very educational thing, and it's fun and there's not a lot of homework," he said. "There's a lot of hands on activities."

Gifted and Talented



Andrew Hernandez, from left, Leon Kong and Yahir Amador, all from Albert Lea, go over ideas on how to make their experiment in flood control better during Project E3 Thursday at I.J. Holton Intermediate School. Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

Coordinator David Wolff hopes the students walk away not only with more knowledge about conserving water, but with skills that can help during their other academics and classes.

"I'd love for them to become more community scientists and advocate for environmental sciences in their own community," Wolff said. "I also hope that they learn just more about themselves

and relationships."

Organizers encourage all students to apply for the program, but they also hope the diverse region will be mirrored through the students. He said, while there are some very diverse districts in the collaborative, some are less diverse and this is a good chance for students to learn more about students who have a different culture or background than their own.

"We all can learn from each other," he said. "We all come from different backgrounds, but we all have such good perspectives to make the picture whole, rather than just our one-sided perspective."

For 10-year-old Aluel Deng of Austin, it's been fun learning about water conservation.

"We've learned about water pollution and how you can save water," she said. "Then we learned

about how plastic is going into the sea, and fish and seagulls are eating it and they die from it, and we're learning how to save plastic and the animals."

She is excited to tell friends and family about the things she learned, so they can also learn how to help the planet. She's also had fun during the program, which started in November and will end next Thursday. The students have prepared projects for Thursday's conservation celebration — some worked on an engineering project building a dam or a water filter, some researched solar-powered water heaters and hydropower dog feeders, and some worked on a play.

"We try to keep it open enough for the kids to have an activity that they are passionate about and use their talents then to demonstrate their talents in some shape or form," Wolff said.

The students have done many activities and gone to many field trips, such as to the Wastewater Treatment Plant in Austin to see how water can be cleaned for re-use, the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center to do pond-scooping, Wolf

Creek and Todd Park to see animals and macro invertebrates, or bugs, and see how bugs can tell if the water is polluted or not. The students have also worked with water samples from around the community and tested the quality of the water, and watershed organizers have come in to the class to talk about what happens when people pollute. Aluel's project was building a water filter.

"It's a fun program learning about stuff that you can do to change the world," Aluel said.

The program provided the students with lunch during days they met and transportation, and was free to attend. Wolff said this year there were three teachers for the whole program and one success coach during the summer, and next year there will be four teachers and two success coaches throughout the whole program. For more information, visit <http://projecte3.weebly.com>.

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