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Teens examine science, health careers in summer program

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STEM Scholars Program students studying at the ASU Polytechnic Campus this summer include (from left) Kera Benally, Kimberly Encinas, Samantha Alvarado, Aryam Garcia and Martiza Salas.

Patricia Rodriguez

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Submitted by Patricia Rodriguez, director of the STEM Scholars Project, a program of the East Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Ten students from Mesa Public Schools received a sampling of what a career in the health and engineering fields would be like during a four-week program designed to help them prepare for jobs in those fields.

The students participated in the STEM Scholars Project, presented by the East Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

The pilot program, funded in part through a grant from Mesa Counts on College and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, introduced students to enrichment activities and paired them with mentors.

Students took field trips to the Arizona Science Center, Arizona State University's Polytechnic and Tempe campuses, Mesa Community College, Mercy Gilbert Medical Center and Intel.

"It was a great opportunity to get a head start in our science and engineering careers," said Jackie Salcido, a student scholar who attends Dobson High School. "We did labs that made us understand how things work. We learned about UVA light, the human body and construction engineering. Overall, it was an excellent experience."



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▶ "This program really helped us prepare for the future," added Bibiana Arias, who attends Mesa High School. "We learned more about science, went on field trips, checked our DNA and dissected a frog."

Participants also developed bonds with each other and staff and mentors.

"I loved this program because it really helps you think about what you want to do in your life," said Samantha Alvarado, who attends Westwood High School. "Not only that, but you get to know the people you're with. We then become a family of our own."

The mentors, drawn from the professional ranks and graduate students in the medical and engineering fields, are expected to have ongoing communications with the students.

"The EVHCC believes that these MPS students, who were exposed to the presentations and tours made available through the SSP project and who will be mentored throughout the year by the volunteer doctors, engineers and technicians, will be better suited to, not only graduate from high school and attend college, but also advance in the fields of science, engineering and medicine," said Phil Austin, chairman of the East Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

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