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Michelle Anderson talks to her sixth-grade class at Vista Magnet Middle School about their recent project. The class is using science to figure out who wrote a mysterious note addressed to the class.

Sean DuFrene | Union-Tribune

Magnet school attracts a partner

Northrop Grumman will provide mentors, equipment

By Triveni Sheshadri | triveni.sheshadri@tlnews.net

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Morning light streams through large windows into the rooms tucked away in the back of the campus. Once home to wood and welding shops, the two cavernous spaces now serve as storage areas for old chairs, work tables, planks and saws.

As he surveys the rooms, Vista Magnet Middle School Principal Jose Villareal sees something else. He has visions of engineering labs where his students will build on their designs for the future.

The magnet school, with an emphasis on math and science, has taken a giant step toward making this transformation a reality. It has formed a partnership

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with Northrop Grumman's Unmanned Systems Division in Rancho Bernardo. Beginning early next year, the company will give money, equipment and the expertise of its engineers to develop labs for future scientists and engineers.

releases

Vista resident Mark Evilsizer, an engineering planner at Northrop Grumman, is the company's liaison with the school.

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"It will provide very valuable real-world, hands-on experience for the students," Evilsizer said. "We are hoping to bring in lab equipment from our company's surplus and provide funding."

Along with extending help for developing the labs, Northrop Grumman engineers will be a regular presence on campus. They will coach teams for competitions including TOYchallenge, a toy design contest by Sally Ride Science. They will mentor students of a new engineering club.

Although the partnership will provide a boost to students, Evilsizer said it would have long-term benefits for Northrop Grumman.

"In a way, it's a selfish reason. We hope the students will end up becoming engineers and come work for us," he said.

Vista Magnet Middle School opened in the fall at the site of the former Lincoln Middle School. It has 200 sixth-graders who were admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. The Title I school receives federal funding for academic programs to help low-achieving students.

In the summer, the school teamed with San Diego State University and Project Lead the Way to offer a two-week camp where students built rockets and tested model cars. Recently, science students participated in a videoconference with a chemistry class at Cal State San Marcos.

Villareal hopes to build on the connections with businesses to offer students a window to the working world.

"By the time they are in the eighth grade, we want every kid go through job shadowing," he said.

Villareal and his staff are trying other approaches to help students get a head start when they move on to the working world.

This includes wearing collared shirts and name tags and using composition books to take notes and record data. Science teachers wear lab coats in class.

Elaine de Neef, whose daughter Anna attends the school, said she was pleased with the new campus.

"The communication is excellent," de Neef said. "She is learning to take college-level notes. I like how they have integrated technology into the curriculum because the world we live in is so steeped in technology.

Reach reporter Triveni Sheshadri at (760) 752-6757.

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