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Young scientists learn what ideas fly — or explode

Olympiad draws students from 18 east Cobb schools to put their skills to the test against foes such as eggs and paper airplanes.

By [Jamie Gumbrecht](#)
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
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Ah, the thrill of competition: the beep of the timer, building of a team, exuberance of an epiphany, tears of stress, glances at competitors, last-minute mathematics, hugs from mom.

That's right, math and hugs — just what 400 east Cobb County elementary school students needed to get through Saturday's Science Olympiad events.

Eighteen schools sent students to Walton High School for a practice run before the state competition in May, giving them a chance to test their science skills. The contestants were mostly fourth- and fifth-graders.

After weeks and months of training in aerodynamics, architecture, geology, crime solving and bridge building, some paper airplanes flew, and some took a nose dive; some water rockets landed safely, and some smashed into the ground.

Jim Morris, a Mount Bethel Elementary teacher who organized the event, said it's all about getting kids excited about science and learning — and wowing them with stuff that flies, explodes and solves mysteries.

"I hope that, if nothing else, they just have a good time," Morris said. "Every one of these events is hands-on."

Hands-on — and sometimes high-pressure.

In the straw egg drop, teams had 20 minutes, 20 straws, one meter of masking tape and a pair of scissors to build a protective structure for an egg to be dropped on a target two meters below.

Eggs broke, and eyes welled with tears, but some structures surprised everybody by keeping their contents safe, despite the laws of physics.

Outside, teams shot parachute-equipped plastic soda bottles into the air. Around the corner, they fashioned paper planes to measure how far they'd go. Next to that, kids estimated how many nickels a piece of foil bent into the shape of a boat could hold.

"Teamwork is really important," said Darrell Edwards, a fifth-grader at Murdock Elementary.

He and his partner, fifth-grader Sydney Curry, knew their boat design could hold about 75 pennies, but the pressure was on when the competition used nickels. They guessed a nickel weighs about twice as much as a penny and cut their estimate to 39.

"If we went too high, it would just sink," Sydney said.

"You have to trust your partner," Darrell said.

Piece by piece they filled the boat, until finally it sank — holding exactly 39 nickels.

Said Sydney: "We make a good team."

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