

Schools get out of this world chance

UP, UP AND AWAY

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Proposals submitted by OCTECHS, Falcon Early College High School and Nimitz Middle School were chosen for the possibility of having their microgravity experiments sent to the International Space Station next summer. A community review board considered a variety of proposals at the administration building Monday. Announcements will be made to the campuses today. **This** is the second year in a row that Ector County Independent School District has been accepted into the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program (SSEP) Mission 13 to the International Space Station.

SSEP is designed as a STEM education initiative and gives students the opportunity to become researchers where they are able to design and propose real microgravity experiments to be conducted by an astronaut aboard the ISS, a news release said. About seven representatives from ECISD, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and the University of Texas of the Permian Basin reviewed the proposals.

“We’re selecting the top three proposals,” said Gabriela Granado, strategist for the Innovation Department, said Monday.

The proposals will be submitted to a national selection committee assembled by National Center for Earth and Space Science Education (NCESSSE), which will select one flight experiment proposal to be sent to the ISS in 2019. After the national round, students will have time to tweak their proposal until the launch date, Granado said.

An astronaut aboard the ISS will conduct the experiment, and after a typical four- to six-week stay in orbit, the experiment will be

returned to Earth for harvesting and analysis by the school’s student flight team, the release said.

Granado said more than 70 proposals were submitted and that was narrowed to eight, Granado said.

The proposals included everything from the survival of tardigrades, often called water bears or moss piglets, in microgravity and the efficacy of *alcanivorax borkumensis* in microgravity to the reaction of erythrocyte to viper venom in microgravity.

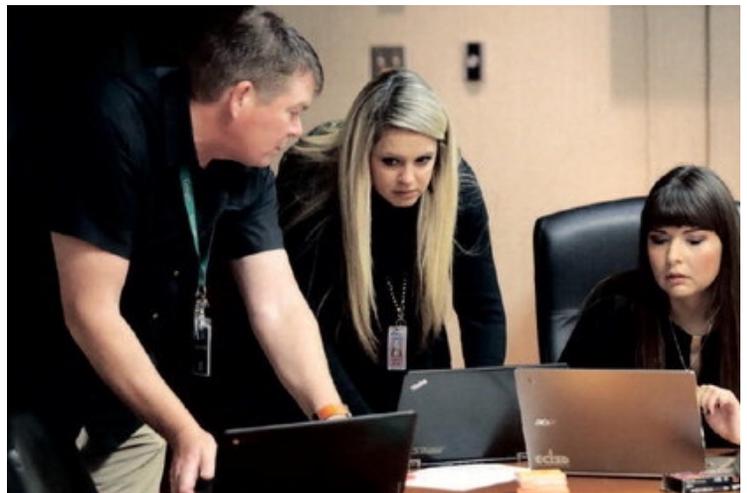
Alcanivorax borkumensis is a rod-shaped bacteria that relies on oil to provide it with energy, according to Scientific American.

Erythrocytes are a type of red blood cell, the National Cancer Institute website said.

It was decided that the projects would be judged on innovation, feasibility; protocol (how well the proposal was written and explained); and its application on Earth. Panelists used a scale of one to five, with five being the best.

Dr. Natalia Schlabritz-Lutsevich, regional associate dean of research at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Odessa, said **this** was the second time she had participated in the review process.

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Jason Osborne, Ashley Bryant and Gabriela Granado talk about experiment ideas.

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Schlabritz-Lutsevich said it's very exciting that Chief Innovation Officer Jason Osborne brought **this** project to ECISD. She added that she couldn't stress enough how amazing a **chance this** is for students.

"It's an amazing opportunity for them to be involved early in **this** stage (in) the science," Schlabritz-Lutsevich said.

She added that **this** could prompt students to start thinking about careers in medicine.

Schlabritz-Lutsevich said last year was the first time proposals were developed for possible space flight. The decision process, she added, is very tough.

"I feel **this** year they have put more thought into the development **of** the ideas. Last year, some **of** the proposals were not very much focused. The ideas ... were fantastic, but I ... feel that now the proposals are more focused," she said.

SSEP is an opportunity brought by ECISD's Innovation Department's program,

PICK Education, which serves to bring real-**world** experiences into the classroom, make learning tangible and promote student ownership in their education.

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