



Kids delve into desert, look to the stars

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Jimmy Biggerstaff photo

Kaleidoscope kids

Joshua Tree National Park rangers give students a GPS primer Wednesday, June 20, during Kaleidoscope Days at Copper Mountain College. The students will use their navigation knowledge to provide suggestions for a nature trail in the park.

MORONGO BASIN — “Green group to this tree,” Dr. Deborah Turner shouts Wednesday morning, June 20, to students in the Copper Mountain College courtyard.

“Blue and gold bees over here,” the curriculum specialist for Morongo Unified School District continues as she directs her charges toward an awaiting classroom.

The 110 [Gifted And Talented Education](#) students who have just promoted from grades four through nine are participating in summer Kaleidoscope Days.

During the two-week session, students take astronomy and desert studies and either art or bodyworks. The program, funded by a Department of Defense Education Activity grant, is in its third year.

The school district’s GATE children filled out applications to attend Kaleidoscope and were enrolled first come, first served. There is a waiting list.

One of the strengths of Kaleidoscope is the community involvement, Turner explained. The desert studies class is taught by Joshua Tree National Park rangers, the space and astronomy class instructor comes from Sky’s The Limit observatory and art is taught by a local artist. The bodyworks teacher is from the district’s Regional Occupational Program.

The Kaleidoscope experience has an added benefit of giving the kids early exposure to a college’s academic environment.

“They get a kick out of telling their friends they went to college over the summer,” Turner said.

Class runs from 8 to 11:40 a.m., when they break for lunch. A limited bus schedule picks up and returns students to a central point in their communities.

Students are learning basics of global positioning system navigation in preparation for a trek to Skull Rock in the national park. They will explore the area and make suggestions to park officials for an extension of the nature trail.

The space/astronomy class is planning a star party. They’ll use telescopes purchased with the Department of Defense grant.

Astronomy and art have been offered all three years of Kaleidoscope; this is the second year the national park has been involved. Economics was offered in the past. Kaleidoscope has grown from 68 students the first year, then 76 students last year.

“Parents like it, kids like it,” Turner concluded. “Our GATE population soaks this up.”