

Mandarin students get inventive with science projects

From Freezer Beeper to Running Tables, students made their ideas become reality

- BY DAN SCANLAN
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Photos by DAN SCANLAN/Staff

Bryce shows off his Ollie Starter at the Invention Convention at Mandarin's Center Academy on Feb. 27. The shoes and skateboard are connected, so skaters have an easier time pulling off ollies - hopping with both wheels off the ground.

What kind of invention would a 10- to 17-year-old come up with, if they could?

Almost all of the 60 students at Mandarin's Center Academy had that chance recently, and many inventions were designed to make life easier or safer.

How about a Freezer Beeper that beeps when you open a refrigerator door so you don't forget to close it? Or a lamp shade with different picture inserts and a reflective dog collar with a light?

This was the annual all-grades activity at the private school at 3571 Cardinal Point Drive, and the school's director, Stephanie Thompson, said her students were "very proud" of their work.

"This is the first time we have participated in Invention Convention," she said. "It goes beyond science fair. We felt it was a great opportunity for students to delve into many academic disciplines and also spur their creativity and have a little fun."

Center Academy is a private school that offers a more personalized education for students with learning problems. There are three other campuses in Jacksonville and one in Orange Park. The Mandarin school works with students in fourth through 12th grades.

Students had to identify a need or solve a problem and spent six weeks building and testing their inventions, which were judged on how well each was researched and addressed a problem.

Bryce's idea melds shoes and a skateboard into the Ollie Starter, to help a skateboarder lift the board in the air in a hop.

"These shoes are attached to the board," Bryce, 14, said. "Instead of doing it the old school way, they can just jump. ... For this, you can't push with your foot so you will have to push off a wall."

Everyone wanted to check out Kajuaan's invention, which mated a small laser light, a magnifying glass and a rear-view mirror.

"If you are reading, it has a magnifying glass that makes it bigger," the 14-year-old said.

Ivan had visitors chasing his radio-controlled Running Table, designed to bring a drink to someone. It joins a radio-controlled model truck with an end table.

"I was on the couch and I wanted a soda," he said.

Cameron's Branch Harness, with quick-release clips and a stout rope, helps him do what it says it does.

"It drags branches and makes the job easier," said Cameron, 17. "I don't have to bend over, pick them up by hand and drag them."

Not every invention was a product. Juan developed a prison system where inmates don't just serve time.

"You will have to work in the prison," he said. "Texas Instruments makes their calculators in China now. Why can't they make them here, using cheap labor - all these prisoners. This would bring millions of jobs back to this country."

Juan also told the crowds of parents around him that his program would need managers, truck drivers and others from outside the prison, thus making more jobs.

And the winners are ... Here are the top winners at the Feb. 27 Invention Convention at Center Academy: - First Place: Emily, eighth grade, Laser-Guided Air Conditioning Filter Changer. - Parent Choice: Matthew, fifth grade, Hide-A-Pocket. - Student Choice, High School: Rose, Water Reclamation Cistern. - Student Choice, Middle School: Ian, Stethoscope Cover. - Student Choice, Elementary School: Elizabeth, Automatic Dog Washer. - Most Creative: Mason, sixth grade, Pop-A-Toy.