

Astronomy Night

Rocky Mountain Classical Academy

Colorado Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Rocky Mountain Classical Academy (RMCA) hosts an Astronomy Night as the capstone event within its Core Knowledge Sequence curriculum. Grades first, third, and sixth study Astronomy, each in greater detail. In addition to the academic objectives, school staff sought to involve parents and caregivers in one of the students' favorite events. The event's planning committee aligns its desired outcomes with the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

Over 500 guests attended this free, annual event that impacts 432 students in grades one, three, and six. RMCA coordinates with staff members who own telescopes, as well as the Colorado Springs Astronomical Society, to provide as many telescopes as possible for nighttime viewing. RMCA also coordinates with the Colorado Springs Challenger Center to provide a portable planetarium.



Teachers and parent volunteers crew multiple astronomy learning stations at which students complete games, scavenger hunts, and projects related to Astronomy. One logistical challenge is ensuring parents understand they need tickets to attend the planetarium shows. To solve this challenge, RMCA advertised advance tickets because the planetarium's capacity is limited.

RMCA evaluated the practice based on attendance and by specific student statements and accomplishments during the evening. For example, students viewing the star Mizar and recognizing it as a double star demonstrate their understanding of basic stellar mechanics. One of RMCA's fourth graders shared her thoughts about Astronomy Night with a reporter from a local media outlet: "I got to look at the stars in Canis Major through the telescope. The big one [Sirius] was cool because it was so sparkly. It's actually two stars--a binary star."

The school's Director of Strategy, Innovation and Development offers the following advice about conducting a successful Astronomy Night: "Ensure you have plenty of mounted telescopes available. Choose an evening with a first quarter moon. Doing so ensures that even with light cloud cover, students will see the Moon telescopically, providing first-hand experience with cosmology and history. In case of poor weather, have a portable planetarium on hand."

Standard 3--Supporting Student Success