





BIG CYPRESS — Preschool graduates stepped into big kid school with a summer prekindergarten boost at Ahfachkee School.

“They are loving it and learning at the same time,” said Gina Goldsmith, an early childhood intervention specialist with the Tribe’s Children’s Center for Diagnostics and Therapy (CCDT.)

Developed by the Health Department, the summer education enrichment program - known as Cool Science - is all about hands-on kindergarten readiness, loaded with everything squirmy, tasty, wet and wacky.

“It could seem like silliness, but there is a lot of education on the agenda,” said Ali Molina, also an early childhood intervention specialist with CCDT.

On a recent Thursday, while dressed in laboratory jackets and armed with containers of water, test tubes and clementine tangerines, a handful of the school’s tiniest students performed science experiments to “discover” the words “float” and “sink.”

At desks sized for tykes, they dropped the whole fruit into the water. Next, they peeled the fruit and dropped the peels into the water. Some, like John Hall, sneaked quick nibbles of the sweet treat.

Others, like Terrance Robbins, were mesmerized by the displacement of water that occurred when fruit slices were added to test tubes filled with water.

Cool Science was also provided to children at the Hollywood Preschool and for incoming prekindergarten students at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School. The CCDT program is managed by Lisa Izenwasser through Health Department director Connie Whidden.

Allison Mason, CCDT therapy coordinator, said the curriculum focuses on the holistic development of each child. The early childhood specialists zero in on many developmental aspects from fine motor skills and cognitive thinking to building vocabulary and understanding mathematics.

“We make it very fun, but the child is always learning,” Mason said.

At Ahfachkee, excitement for science came with a chant: “Science, science ... fun, fun, fun.”

The children absorbed vocabulary that included funnel, pipette and test tube.

Meanwhile, the children practiced following directions and working in groups. Social benefits include opportunities to share, help others, make friends and build self-esteem, Goldsmith said.

“We get to every area of development, and we get there in a good, good way,” Molina said.

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