

# Comal Independent School District

## NEWS RELEASE

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**Release Date:** Aug. 27, 2010

### Comal ISD students plan trip to Mars

While many students were taking trips to the beach or mountains or floating the river at home over the summer, seniors Tara Hutchison and Alyssa Pappas were planning a trip to Mars.

As part of the prestigious NASA High School Aerospace Scholars program, both Hutchison, a senior at Canyon High, and Pappas, a senior at Smithson Valley High, completed 10 online lessons during the spring semester scoring at least 75 percent on quizzes that followed. As a result, they became eligible



to attend a week-long summer session at the Johnson Space Center in Houston where they were both part of teams that helped plan trips to Mars.

Pappas' team planned a 500-day trip, while Hutchison's took on the task of preparing for a one-way trip for the colonization of the red planet.

"Our team had to pick out what kind of equipment would be used and how it would get there," Hutchison said. "We also chose what kind of people the crew would be comprised of and what they were going to do once they got there. I think we chose the one-way trip because of the adventure and the challenge of truly colonizing Mars."

Pappas' team helped decide what kind of government would run on Mars and what the budget would be for the mission.

"We decided it should be a democracy," Pappas said. "We determined it will basically be an extension of the United States of America."

Pappas added that, while challenging, the NASA program was very rewarding.

"I don't usually do a lot of thinking during the summer," she said. "I'm really into math and science, so it's the type of thing I really love. Plus, not many people tryout for the program, so I wanted to represent my school."

Hutchison agreed Johnson Space Center, where both students were able to tour the facilities and meet actual NASA astronauts, was a great place to spend a portion of her summer.

"It's definitely worth doing all the assignments in the spring because you learn so much here at NASA," Hutchison said. "I went in thinking I was going to major in biology and pre-med, but now I'm thinking about going the engineering route in college."

Pappas said she's considering working for NASA in the future.

"I think it would be a very interesting life to be a flight surgeon at NASA," Pappas said. "Everyone I met there was interested in the same things as I was, and it's hard to find a place where that's the case."

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IN PHOTOS: Smithson Valley High senior Alyssa Pappas stands in front of a NASA manned rover during her week-long trip to the Johnson Space Center this summer.

Canyon High senior Tara Hutchison (third from left) and several friends she met at the NASA High School Aerospace Scholars program stand in front of a NASA rocket at the Johnson Space Center.