

# Finance NM: Tech education turns real

Jennifer Sinsabaugh, NM Manufacturing Extension Partnership 1:02 a.m. MST November 14, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

ALBUQUERQUE - Like her classmates at Technology Leadership High School in Albuquerque, Paola Rodriguez always wondered what went on behind the doors of neighboring businesses in the Sandia Science and Technology Park. On Oct. 30, the 16-year-old freshman and about 60 other students and six teachers satisfied that curiosity on a tour organized by the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership as part of Manufacturing Day — a national celebration of American manufacturing.

"These buildings are all around you — businesses with names like 'Air Products' — and you wonder what they do," Rodriguez said. "I was very curious."

That interest in the larger world and a desire for interactive learning drew Rodriguez away from a traditional high school to the tech-oriented public charter school, which opened just this year in Sandia Science and Technology Park with support from the city's tech, startup and entrepreneurial industries.

The school's mission is to develop future innovators and technology leaders by providing an immersive educational environment where students apply science and math knowledge to projects that solve real-world problems or create new products. Rather than learning from lectures and textbooks, students at Technology Leadership do things like use algebra to write code for animated games, for instance.

"I think it really opens students' minds about what technology means — not just smartphones and computers, but *making* something," said Velana Chavez, the school's director of community engagement. "We provide the 'why,' the relevance element, through projects, and we embed (educational) content in those projects."

That approach made the school a natural fit for Manufacturing Day. This annual event aims to inspire young people to embrace careers in engineering, technology and science by showing them what modern manufacturing is and the skills and education required for a career in this bedrock American industry. Chavez said Manufacturing Day tour organizers invited the school to participate "and it was good to be recognized."

On tour day, students and their teachers split into three groups that rotated among the host manufacturers, all of which are within walking distance of the school. Businesses hosting tours in the industrial park were Air Products and Chemicals, TEAM Technologies and the QC Group.

Air Products was Rodriguez's favorite stop. It began with a meeting, where managers explained the history of the 75-year-old company based in Pennsylvania. Air Products supplies industrial gases and equipment and chemicals to a variety of industries worldwide, but Rodriguez was particularly intrigued by the tubular forms she saw being created there. "I was interested in becoming a nurse, but now I'm thinking about Air Products and what they do. We should do another trip there."

The relationship between the math and science fundamentals she learns at school and a career in engineering and manufacturing isn't obvious at first, Rodriguez said, but the Manufacturing Day tours clarified that association. "There is a connection," she said, "but you don't see it right away."

Manufacturing Day is celebrated annually in New Mexico during the first week of October. For more information, visit [mfgday.com](http://mfgday.com) or contact New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership at 505-314-9131.

*Finance New Mexico is a public service initiative to assist individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to [www.FinanceNewMexico.org](http://www.FinanceNewMexico.org) (<http://www.financenewmexico.org/>).*

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