

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

# FROM HEAD START TO THE NATION'S CAPITAL



What are the odds that all four members of a national championship rocketry team once sat in Head Start classrooms? “Not a coincidence,” says Debra Baca, YDI Vice President of Early Childhood Education & Family Development. “It’s proof that a strong early foundation launches futures.”

Meet Enzo D., Roberto B., Ezra D., and Fred L. – students from the Albuquerque Institute of Math and Science (AIMS). They are heading to a national competition in Virginia, representing New Mexico against 1,300 teams. Their rocket, named “Liberty Mutual Junior,” must hit a target altitude. The team has simulated altitudes between 725 and 775 feet, but the official altitude is unannounced until the night before the launch. They must also descend in exactly 36 to 39 seconds – with their egg astronaut still intact.

## PERSEVERANCE OVER PERFECTION

Building a competition-ready rocket wasn't easy. The team broke five rockets. Fins snapped. A 3D printer caused spiral cracks. One rocket turned into a “spaghetti strap.” But they never quit.

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“Persevering and manifestation are gonna be your best friends,” says Enzo D. “It's gonna be hard to stick with something, especially if you've had a lot of problems. But in the end, it's going to be worth it.”

Ezra D. adds, “We've had many rockets that have been broken in the past, and we stayed dedicated and kept building more until we made it.”

### THE HEAD START DIFFERENCE

All four team members credit their early years for giving them a head start. Enzo D. recalls, “I was ahead of the other kids in math. I can probably attribute this to the Head Start program.”

Ezra D. remembers his teacher, Miss Regina: “She was always there to support me, correct me, and help me learn.”

Roberto B. smiles about Cook Danita: “She made the best pancakes.”

Their instructor, Philip Watji, puts it plainly: “They had a clear goal, the grit to work through imperfect situations, and they turned community support into success.”



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### PARENTS, MENTORS, AND COMMUNITY

Behind the team are engaged parents. Christina F.R., mother of Enzo and Ezra, says, “All four boys have very involved parents. We are right there for every event – carpooling to launches, attending meetings, supporting our kids.”

Mentors from Air Force Research Labs, Space Force, Sandia Labs, and the Department of Energy provided motors, materials, and guidance. Without them, the team says, “we couldn't have done it.”

### ALREADY WINNERS

No matter what happens in Virginia, these young men have already won – for themselves, for their families, and for every child who ever sat in a Head Start circle. As Enzo D. says, “Even if you fail, it's important to still try and learn something.”

YDI is proud to have been part of their journey from the very beginning. We'll be cheering them on every step of the way.

