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- **Poll: Do you plan to vote to re-elect Donald Trump in 2020?**
- **Drink 1 Glass In The Morning - Lose 3Lb Of Belly Fat Per Day**
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**Why I Treated Joint Pain With CBD?**

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TOP STORY

# WKU participates in middle science experiment's space launch

AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) 1 hr ago

Western Kentucky University hosted a watch party Thursday to view the launch of a middle-school science experiment developed by WKU faculty and participants in the national the National STEM Scholar Program. Middle school students from across the country experimented and shared data to predict how much acceleration marshmallows could bear during launch on a Blue Origin rocket.

AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com)

Western Kentucky University faculty helped send an astronaut into space Thursday – but not in the way you might think.

Middle school students from 30 classrooms in 20 states have been experimenting and sharing data to predict how much acceleration a marshmallow, wearing a custom spacesuit, can survive during a rocket launch. On Thursday, project contributors gathered in WKU's Ogden College Hall to watch a livestream of a launch in West Texas by private spaceflight company Blue Origin.

Aboard the rocket were two “mallownauts,” named Marvin and Melvin, of different different masses. Students across the country have been form their predictions as part of the National STEM Scholar program sponsored by the National Stem Cell Foundation.

“The question is: Will either or both of them survive the flight?” said Rico Tyler, a master teacher with WKU's SKyTeach program, who helped design the experiment with biology professor Kerrie McDaniel and Liam Seymour with WKU's Makerspace.

“They're graphing. They're analyzing data. They're doing all the science skills that we want them to be able to do,” McDaniel said the project.

Every year, the partnership between the foundation, WKU's Gatton Academy and its Center for Gifted Studies selects a national cohort of 10 middle-school science teachers to participate in professional growth and development. McDaniel said the teachers are brought to campus in the summer and then get funding to bring a project back to their school and receive mentorship along the way. They also attend an annual conference put on by the National Science Teacher Association, McDaniel added.

"They get to network with thousands of teachers over the United States," she said. "It builds a community, a network and it empowers them to do things that they didn't think they could do."

While designing the experiment over the last year, Tyler enlisted the help of Liam Seymour with WKU's Makerspace.

"Rico came to me with an idea and said this is what we want our payload to do, and I immediately just started thinking about, you know, different ways to go about it," Seymour said, adding the two bounced around ideas until they found solutions that worked.

During the flight, the two mallownauts rode in a Nanolab, a Kleenex box-sized payload designed with miniature circuitry and cameras to record the experiment, a news release said. Students used the data collected to measure the accuracy of their predictions.



“We have two more launches scheduled so there will be a series of experiments that we’re planning,” Tyler said, adding the project could also include deep sea experiments. He said they hope to see the results of the launch next week when Blue Origin ships the payload back.

“We’ve learned a lot about what to do the next time we fly,” Tyler said.

In a news release, Paula Grisanti, National Stem Cell Foundation CEO, described the experience as an extraordinary opportunity for students.

“We are proud to partner with The Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science and the Center for Gifted Studies on the campus of Western Kentucky University to ignite the imaginations of students across the country and inspire a new generation of STEM pioneers,” Grisanti said.

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## **Aaron Mudd**

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.