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District student space station designers invited to NASA
Surrey secondary school students finalists in prestigious, worldwide competition

Things are looking up – way up – for four Princess Margaret Secondary students.

The science-minded seniors have just been named finalists in the [17th annual International Space Settlement Design Competition](#) and will travel to NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston in July to compete alongside 11 other teams from around the world.

The PM students are the only Canadian team to be a finalist in the competition's 18-year history.

"For a school to make it to the finals on a first submission is unheard of," says teacher-sponsor Joe Sihota. "What they've done is astounding."

The competition puts high school students in the moonboots of aerospace industry engineers in designing a city in space for 10,000 people, taking into consideration the housing, health, education, recreation, nutrition and employment needs of the population.

Students Supreet Singh, Smruthi Nair, Nikhil (Nik) Dhingra and Seshan Nair spent a staggering 45 hours a week from November to March working on their project while still keeping up with their regular school work and part-time jobs.

The result is a comprehensive, [55-page proposal](#) submitted by the teens' fictitious company "PM Aerospace" for the design, development and operation of "Auroria," a donut-shaped luxury space colony located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.

"It was a really intense, detailed and different type of project," says team member Nik Dhingra. "We just wanted to give it a try."

Students had to rely heavily on their familiarity with physics, engineering and economics in order to provide the level of detail the project required, and even their teachers were struck by their knowledge.

At the finals in Houston, the foursome will be placed on a team with other finalists from around the globe and will have 48 straight hours to once again design a city in space. The difference this time, is that actual engineers from NASA will be on-site to provide guidance.

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PM principal Neder Dhillon says the school is extremely proud of the group for accomplishing something that no other Canadian team has managed to do.

“When they first submitted their proposal, a couple of students came and spoke at a staff meeting and shared what they were doing. We were completely blown away.”

Dhillon also applauds sponsor teacher Sihota for the time he dedicated to the project, giving advice and direction to students and making his classroom available for their use.

Students won't have to worry about fundraising for the trip: After making a presentation to the Rotary Club of Surrey-Newton, members were so impressed they agreed to cover the students' travel expenses, estimated at \$7,900.

[Link to image](#)

Photo caption: Able to accommodate 11,000 people, Auroria would take 17 years to build and cost an estimated \$212 billion. Constructed primarily from materials mined from Mars, the moon and an asteroid, Auroria includes highrises, schools, stores, warehouses, a wastewater recycling facility, a thorium power plant, a public transit system, areas for growing food and an animal farm.

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