HARLINGEN - Kites can be made from paper, plastic or nylon and can have almost any shape imaginable.

Students from Harlingen High School put their geometry skills to the test Tuesday, as they took advantage of the high-speed winds to fly their homemade kites.

Stephanie Sandwell, Pre-Advanced Placement geometry teacher at the high school, said she's been assigning a kite-making project to her students for 11 years. Students have seven days to research, design and build their own kite for a grade.

"We're learning about quadrilaterals ... and about angles," Sandwell said. "My goal is for (the students) to see geometry in the real world."

To pull off the kite project successfully, Sandwell gets help from expert kite flyer and maker Bill Doans, owner of B&S Kites on South Padre Island.

For the past six years, Doans has visited Sandwell's students to teach them about the history, shapes, sizes, aerodynamics and evolution of kites. He also helps them correct any last minute glitches before students test their creations.
"It teaches (the students) about work ethics because they have to do a little planning, homework, and they have to make it go (up in the air)," Doans said. "The best thing is when the kids see their creations fly and it puts a smile on their face. It gives them a sense of accomplishment."

Doans said he’s been flying kites since he was 4 years old and has been teaching people about kites for the past eight years.

"It's a hobby, a high and a major thrill," Doans said. "I just want to paint the sky and make it colorful."

For the first time, Sandwell also invited students from Rodriguez Elementary to be part of the project. High school students teamed up with the elementary children as they tried to get their kites airborne.

Alyssa Castillo, a ninth-grader, said she made a sled shaped, 8-inch by 10-inch kite out of construction paper.

"The wings needed to be even for it to fly and it had to have a 3-foot tail," Castillo said. "I've flown a kite before but this is more of an experience because (a store bought) kite is guaranteed that it will fly but with these (homemade kites) you have to wait and see if they will fly."

Castillos's elementary partner, Brianna Rodriguez, a fifth-grader, said she was impressed by the high school students' hard work and the many different types of kites there are.

Beulah Rangel, Gifted and Talented program teacher at the elementary, said this was a great learning opportunity for all the students.

"The collaboration between teachers is very important because my students see what the high school students are doing and they see value in what I do and what they learn now," Rangel said. "We lay the foundation for what is to come in middle school and high school."

Jose De La Fuente, another ninth-grade student, said he made his kite using a black trash bag, duct tape and sticks in just 20 minutes.

"It's not that easy," De La Fuente said. "There has to be four right angles in the center (of the back of the kite) and the sticks have to be perpendicular."

Rangel said she hopes her elementary students can make their own kites and test them with the high school students next year.

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