

The Learning Curve

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Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Bibb County Students Take Top Math Honors at the State Level



First in Math Vice President Barbara Asteak congratulates Alexander II students on their hard work.

Even after an exciting morning of county-wide competition, Bibb County's math-oriented students didn't stop competing in the Math24 and its online version, FirstinMath. Using the online game, the students who won at the county found an outlet to hone their skills in the person-to-person head-to-head competition. As the year progressed, they got better and better, gaining points, surpassing other online players, and ultimately taking top honors at the state level.

In the competition, a card is placed in front of the students (either on a table or computer screen). Four numbers are on the card, and it is up to the students to combine those numbers by any means (adding subtracting, multiplication, division) to come up with the number '24.' The first person to do taps in; if correct, they keep that card. At the end of 20 minutes, the student with the most cards wins the round. A twist added this past year is that the student has to work backwards from 24.

For example, on a card with the numbers nine, three, two, and seven, a correct answer would be: Twenty four is fifteen plus nine; fifteen is five multiplied by three; five is seven minus two. $[(7-2) \times 3] + 9 = 24$.

Rounds vary by difficulty: they can have single or double digits. There is even a doubles round where two sets of numbers share a number, and instead of figuring out how to make 24, the stu-

dent has to figure out what the number is that is shared that would make each set combine to 24.

Throughout the year, students (whether county winners or not) logged onto the www.firstinmath.com as individuals and parts of a team in their school to compete against students across the state and the nation. As each individual competed, they earned points and awards, adding to their and their team's total, progressing them up in the ranks. This past year, more than 300,000 students in 11,400 teams across 26 states competed online.

At the end, Bibb County students could claim to be at the top of their game, masters of the math skills they had been practicing all year long, from simple one-step addition to multi-step algebra. In online competition, Alexander II Magnet students not only claimed the top spot in the state of Georgia in team competition, they could also boast the top two performing individual players in the state.

Obi Ndubuisi and Shoil Patel (1st and 2nd respectively) were both a part of the Alexander II team, 'hotshot3GA,' and, according to First in Math Program Vice President Barbara Asteak, surpassed close to 4,000 elementary and middle students. With both the individual and team accomplishment, the school held a ceremony to honor its high-performing students. Asteak herself even made the trip from Pennsylvania as part of a special awards ceremony held at the school.

"We are proud to enhance mathematics education for students through the First In Math program," Ast, said Alexander II Principal Penny Smith. "This initiative offers a fun and innovative learning experience for children in math and technology to prepare

them with critical skills for the future."

"The 21st century will be defined by technological, scientific, and mathematical advancements, and America's prominence in this age cannot be assured without talented students," says Asteak. "Praise must also be given to the math teachers at Alexander II Elementary for providing an environment for achievement and Bibb County for offering this program to highlight scholastic excellence."

The day after the awards ceremony, Ndubuisi and Patel headed to Atlanta with a few of their classmates as well as other students from around the county for the state competition. Head-to-head, Bibb's county winners, its brightest and quickest, competed against other counties' brightest and quickest. When they came home, it wasn't empty-handed: 13 students had won a medal or trophy. What that amounted to was the top player in both 4th and 5th grade, 4 of the 6 trophies came back to Bibb, and more than half of all medals and trophies handed out were won by Bibb students for the 3rd year in a row.

In the 4th grade, gold medals went to Jalecia Jones and Vernsheka Jolly of Hartley Elementary; silver medals went to Daniel Zhu of Springdale Elementary, Jessica Whipple of Hartley, and Ndubuisi and Patel; bronze medals went to Sam Bechtel and Cole Chapman of Springdale.

In the 5th grade, Sha'aira Palmer and Jaquise Mays from Hartley won gold medals; Tyeshia Yarbrough of Hartley and Alexis Gundy of Alexander II brought home silver medals; and Katelyn Grandison of Alexander II won a bronze medal.



Asteak, Smith, and Lead Math Teacher Jennifer Doss help celebrate their top-performing team.

Community Partnership Brings Poverty Simulation to Teachers and Administrators

According to the University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy, 28.41% of Bibb County children live in poverty (compared to 17.14% in Georgia and 16.56% in the United States), and 19.12% of the residents in the county (compared to 12.99% in Georgia and 12.38% in the United States). To help people in the community who work with or serve low-income families, the UGA Cooperative Extension has been offering a unique program for the past 8 years titled "Welcome to the State of Poverty; Can you Survive?"

According to County Extension Coordinator Jan Baggary, anywhere from 35 – 75 will assume the roles of up to 26 typical families living in poverty. In the simulation, each member of the family follows a set of rules and role descriptions (including mother, father, son, daughter, etc) through a variety of situations.

In the hour-long program, the family lives through a month of 15-minute "weeks" as they're assigned family and must survive on less than \$20,000 for a family of four. During that month, they must: feed the family each week, keep the utilities on, make loan payments, pay for

daily expenses like transportation, keep their shelter secure, and keep the children in school. In many cases, the 'family' has to make hard decisions and prioritize which of the services they can't live without in certain weeks. Volunteers even help serve as facilitators to represent bankers, employers, grocers, landlords, and government agencies).

"It serves as an "eye-opener" to anyone who wishes to understand more about the realities of poverty," says Baggary.

"We use the poverty simulation to build community awareness of both the numbers and human experience of poverty," says the State Coordinator for the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk USDA Grant for Georgia Sharon Gibson. "It brings a level of awareness that cannot be reached by observation and study alone."

For the second year, Community Partnership, the local collaborative for Family Connections, has partnered with UGA to bring this simulation to Bibb County. This past year, it was held at Bruce Elementary school and involved, not just community members, but teachers, administrators, and Board of Education employees from

the Bibb County Public Schools.

"Participants often express feelings of frustration, exasperation, overwhelmed, and helplessness," says Baggary.

"It was amazing how quickly you feel the frustration of struggling just to get by," says Morgan Principal Diane Rodgers, who played the role of one of two boys (ages 3 and 4) in a home with a single-mother trying to find a job. When the mother did get a job, she didn't have anyone to care for the kids, so the Department of Family and Child Services stepped in. Not being able to find affordable daycare, the 'mother' had to quit her job, and the light bill had to go unpaid in order to make ends meet. "I was



Community members broke into small groups to simulate families living in poverty.

exhausted when we finished and very frustrated."

According to Gibson, they host these simulations about once a month and are planning on partnering with Community Partnership again to host another simulation next year. Rodgers has even scheduled a workshop for Morgan's staff in the Fall, knowing they will gain a better understanding of the families they serve. "I have always had a great deal of compassion for the struggles our parents face," she says. "I would recommend this highly to anyone who works with children from impoverished backgrounds."

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We want your feedback! Please e-mail your comments and suggestions for "The Learning Curve" or information about events in the Bibb County school system to: cfloore@bibb.k12.ga.us and 765.8548

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