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Time online adds up for students in program

'First in Math' Web-based program encourages achievement

By Kandis Carper
Staff writer

Jacob Chapman and his friends stayed up until 1 a.m. at a sleepover playing the online games.

Brooke Wayman was up at 6:30 a.m. on a Thursday to improve her online game scores, and Anusha Gollapalli spent eight hours on a Saturday working to maintain her first-place status in the competition.

Anusha, Brooke and Jacob are fifth-graders at Greenacres Elementary. They're spending their free time using the "First in Math" online program.

The school began piloting the program in January. Students work on the Web-based program at school after they finish work in other subjects and during their free time.

Students can log on to the program whenever they have Internet access. They solve math problems and puzzles and complete bonus modules, earning electronic "award stickers" as they progress through the program at their own pace. The range of challenge begins with simple addition and progresses through to multistep algebra.

"When I found out about the program, I thought, 'wouldn't this be great?' We're testing it to see if it's conducive to our needs as a supplement to our math curriculum for second, fourth and fifth



Anusha Gollapalli plays the online math program, First In Math, at Greenacres Elementary School. Many students spend evenings and weekends learning math. They compete against each other within the school and at state and nationwide levels.

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grades," said Janie Hemingway, academic support assistant at Greenacres.

Anusha, 10, has more than 3,300 award stickers and is ranked first in the state and first at Greenacres. She has already advanced to ninth-grade level algebra.

"I work hard. It's really made me more confident. You can get really good at math, and you're all heads up on what's going on in class," said Anusha.

Anusha's mom, Padma Gollapalli, is proud of her daughter's accomplishments. "She's very determined. She wants to win the gold medal. She loves math and spends two to three hours a day working on the program. We were looking for something like this for her."

Jacob is ranked second at the state and school level, and Brooke is fourth in state and in third place at school. They are also working at the ninth-grade level.

Classrooms compete as a team. Students work together to become the top team in their school, school district, their state and the nation. The Greenacres team is currently ranked 31st in the nation.

The First in Math program includes more than 300,000 students in 11,400 online teams in 26 states.

"It really makes math fun for the kids," said Principal Terry Ellifritz. "It supports those on the lower end as well as an accelerator for advanced students who can go beyond what they've learned in the classroom."

Hemingway can log on to the First in Math Web site and track her students' progress through assessment reports.

The school paid \$5 per student rather than the usual \$8 fee because it didn't begin using the program until January.

Ellifritz said she's not sure if they'll use the program next year, but in the past the school's Parent Teacher Student Association has given the school money for reading assistance. If the staff decides to focus on math next year, they may be able to use those funds to help offset the cost.

"It's not an inexpensive program, but I love it," said Ellifritz.