

Trail students head to state K'nex competition

By Ben Freda
Abington Journal Correspondent



Pictured from left: Fifth-grade teacher Gina Pricci, her students Abby Wilson, Isabella Coleman, Anna Wohlgemuth, and 5th-grade teacher Laurel Kinback. On the table is the ocean obstacle (left) and the All-in-One 3600. Absent from photo: Madison Norman.

Fifth-graders Madison Norman, Abby Wilson, Anna Wohlgemuth, and Isabella Coleman advanced to an upcoming state competition called the STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) Design Challenge at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Harrisburg on May 2.

The four students booked their ticket after building a body mover, which they called "All-in-One 3600," out of K'nex pieces with direction from their teachers Gina Pricci and Laurel Kinback.

"It (body mover) needs to overcome an obstacle, and it needed to run at least four feet across the table," Pricci said. "And it has to be eco-friendly in some way."

The students made their "All in One 3600" with solar panels and a squirrel ball to represent earth-friendly ways to make it mobile. They also added ramps to their vehicle to provide easy access for elderly people to get on board. It also had poles for passengers to hold on to when the people mover was in motion.

"When the car is moving, so that they (the ramps) are not sticking out, we can fold them up, and they tie together," Wohlgemuth said.

Not only did the students construct a vehicle, they also made blueprints to show how they made it. They also created a variety of obstacles for their vehicle to go through. Norman and Wohlgemuth made the blueprints, while Coleman and Wilson made the obstacles.

"A big component is teamwork, and to show that they all worked together to build it," Kinback said.

The obstacles are biomes and included a tundra, an ocean, and a deciduous forest.

"Our car is called the All-in-One 3600 because it can go through all biomes, so we have obstacles for a different biome to show that it can go through it," Wilson said.

In the forest obstacle, the vehicle goes over a stick, which represents a fallen tree. In the tundra obstacle, it goes over an icy lake. For the ocean obstacle, the students add propellers to their vehicle.

"I was impressed with the teamwork and creativity that the students put into it," Pricci said. "And I'm proud of their accomplishments."

Before qualifying to the competition in Harrisburg, Lackawanna Trail students first competed in an in-house K'Nex competition in March. Ten teams of four Trail students competed with two teams advancing to a regional competition at Johnson College on April 4.

In the regional competition, Trail competed against more than 10 other local schools, such as Forest City Elementary School, All Saints Academy, North Pocono Elementary School, and Elk Lake Elementary School. Teams in the 4th-5th-grade category competed against teams in the 6th-8th-grade category. Trail's two teams were in the 4th-5th-grade category.

Students in the regional competition had a 2-hour period to put their project together, Kinback said. They also had to answer a judge's questions about their model. The students were judged on creativity, teamwork, challenge success, design, and presentation.

"We all think it's cool that we're all girls, and usually people think only boys can do science and engineering stuff, but this year, an all-girl group won," Coleman said.

The girls will be using the same vehicle, but will be adding modifications for the state competition. They will also be making seven biomes including the three they made for the regional contest.

NEIU 19 (Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit), the educational service agency that represents Lackawanna Trail, informed Trail about the K'Nex competition. Pricci and Kinback heard about the event in their math classes, and decided to get involved.

"I'm looking forward to the competition," Kinback said. "I'm very proud of the in-house students."

"I think we feel very confident because we saw our score sheets and they were pretty good," Wilson said.

The girls were also glad to have the opportunity to be innovative and work as a team.

"I love the experience of it and using creativity," Coleman said.