

Opinion

Science Olympiad students show how hard work pays off

Wednesday, August 4, 2010

We worry with good reason about the end product of our nation's public schools. Too many children learn too little today to enter tomorrow's work force.

But then we read about gifted teachers who have what seems an uncommon ability to coach bright young minds to surprisingly smart results.

A report described students from a couple of communities who took top honors at a regional Science Olympiad held recently at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield.

A team from Birmingham's Covington Middle School placed first in the competition. Second and third places went to Troy's Boulan Park and Larson Middle schools.

Those schools were to compete in the state Olympiad at Michigan State.

For their countywide competition, students in 23 events had to show knowledge of many areas of science. They were required to build and test devices meeting specific requirements.

They had to conduct experiments using the scientific method: Using their knowledge to build a hypothesis, test it with experimentation, analyze the results to draw and communicate a conclusion.

It's not an easy, off-the-top-of-the-head exercise, even for these smart kids. At Covington, co-coach Chris Emmi said children practice all year for the Olympiad three days a week after school.

They learned to analyze materials. They learned to solve a crime. And they learned to build a bridge, judging which construction is both lightweight and strong.

At Boulan Park, two teams were fielded, a competitive team and an alternate team. The alternate team placed first in its competition, but didn't advance to the state event.

At Larson, science teacher Gail Armstrong-Hall praised her "independent researchers with a love of learning. These kids have a lot of heart."

The Science Olympiad isn't the only extracurricular program that lights up young minds. Others have stressed geography, robotics, or asked children to imagine an urban future grounded in science.

When we learn of successful programs, we wish they could be replicated, extended to all schools.

It doesn't appear to be that easy.

The charter school movement was authorized by states in part to determine the best educational programs and copy them to other schools. It hasn't happened.

Likewise, not every school has teachers — coaches — with the enthusiasm of those whose students did so well in the Science Olympiad. Not every school has children with sufficient prior knowledge to be fired up, even by a good coach, by the time they get to middle school.

We don't have the answers, but we're sure they exist, and that money is only one of them.

It's past time for teachers, administrators and parents to find answers that work to improve K-12 education. Perhaps some smart kids can help.

URL: <http://www.dailytribune.com/articles/2010/08/04/opinion/srv0000009002139.prt>

© 2010 dailytribune.com, a **Journal Register** Property