

# Competition fierce to make Science Olympiad team at CV Middle School

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By Liz Serrano

The Carmel Valley Middle School 2006 Science Olympiad team is hoping to make "intellete" a common household word.



**Cindy Morrin and Nirmala Kashyap**

"It's not just all about sports," said Cindy Morrin, coordinator of the Science Olympiad Team. "Students who have accomplishments in intellectual fields should be showcased as well."

Comprised of just 45 students, competition to become a member of the Olympiad team is tough.

"It's becoming a popular thing to be involved in," Morrin said. "We had to turn kids away and even have a waiting list to join. This year we had to call one kid up from the wait list to replace someone who couldn't attend meetings. He was thrilled. He even volunteered to take part in some of the less-popular events."

Once on the team, the competition doesn't stop; it's just begun.

Throughout the course of an entire school year, students work together in groups of 2-4 from three teams in a variety of science and mathematic based programs. The overall Olympiad program is broken into two forms of events, testing and building. Building, Morrin said, is the most popular with the students.

"They love it," she said. "Kids lean about science in a hands-on way, learning fundamentals they would never be able to do in school."

In the testing events, students learn intricate details of a topic, such as geology, and compete through testing on the materials, Morrin said.

There are dozens of events for students to choose from, ranging from bottle rocket and catapult building, to

forensic and gene study, Morrin said. Each subject has a volunteer coach, devoting several hours a week to the team and students.

"All of our coaches are volunteer parents," she said. "And all of them have diverse backgrounds. We have doctors and engineers, and scientists – people who can really give the kids a first-hand application of science and math."

One of the biggest advantages to being part of the Olympiad team is exposure.

"This program is an excellent way for middle schoolers to have career exploration," Morrin said. "For many of them this is the first time they've seen the real-world application of a job they might be interested in."

Morrin, a career and college counselor at Mesa College, knows first hand how this exploration can aide students in the future.

"One of my goals for this program is for them to become passionate about future careers," she said.

Nirmala Kashyap, assistant director of the Science Olympiad program at CVMS and professor of math at Mira Costa College, has had a long involvement with the program. She has a child in high school who began the Olympiad program while in middle school and she currently has an eighth grader on the CVMS team as well.

"The students take this very seriously," she said. "They are very involved and they are very excited to excel outside of the classroom. It gives the kids a different kind of exposure to science that's really important."

Although the students have 23 coaches to help teach them about different principles of science, in the end, it all comes down to them. The coaches are forbidden to show the students how to solve the problems at hand. Instead, they must work together as a team, utilizing the things they have learned, and devise solutions on their own.

"We can guide, but not help," Kashyap said. "The program teaches teamwork and how to adjust to working with partners."

On Feb. 4 the team will go to Rancho Bernardo High School and compete against 60 other schools within the county for the regional title. If they do well there, they will go onto the state competition in the fall. So far CVMS has won the regional title in the past, but never the state title.

"I would love for our kids to win state and go onto nationals," Morrin said. "We're really proud of them and their progress."

Much like a sports athlete, competition is what drives this group of intelletes.

"The kids love to compete and get a lot of recognition with awards," Kashyap said. "The competition really boosts their confidence and morale."