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Norwalk and Windham Students Embark On An Odyssey Thanks To CTOM's Anderson Award

CONNECTICUT, FEBRUARY 18, 2020: Creative problem solving is a critical life skill and a core component of STEAM education. Students participating in The Odyssey of the Mind program work in teams to build solutions to problems in one of five categories: Vehicle, Technical, Classics, Structural and Performance.

Since 1981, thousands of Connecticut students, Kindergarten through College, have participated in the Connecticut Odyssey of the Mind (CTOM) Annual State Tournament.

Each season, new teams are eligible to apply for the Anderson Award. Named after longtime volunteers, Jon and Claudia Anderson, it helps fund first year membership and registration costs.

CTOM funds this award so that more Connecticut students benefit from this popular STEAM education program. The selection committee gives special consideration to applicants who demonstrate how their effort extends Odyssey's inclusiveness within underserved areas.

This year, CTOM's Anderson Award recipients are both public middle schools. The Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy (Barrows) is a K-8 Magnet school in the Windham School District. West Rocks Middle School is in Norwalk. Both schools will compete in Division II, with students grades six through eight.

Teachers Lead Both Efforts

Chelsey Greer is the middle grade technology teacher coordinating Barrow's participation.

Greer believes the program is perfectly aligned to the Magnet school's inquiry-based instruction model, where teachers work to 'extend students' thinking beyond what [students] think is possible, and teachers incorporate STEM learning into all academic areas.'

After hosting an information session during a Barrow's open house, it was clear the students were excited about participating too.

Jessica Stargardter, a Gifted & Talented teacher at West Rocks, sees coaching 'as an opportunity to foster team-building in a safe space, where laughter and exploration help promote learning.'

Once her administration approved her proposal to hold auditions for Norwalk's Odyssey team, she reveals 'We were shocked to see how many students were interested in participating!'

Learning How To Problem Solve is Fun

CTOM President, Dave Schaller, often gets the same feedback from established Odyssey programs. "Students have fun learning to solve problems on their own. This encourages other students to participate in future years."

He adds, "It's one of the most cost effective and inclusive STEAM programs available. Odyssey of the Mind is designed to span the Arts and the Sciences and every team member plays a role in solving problems with creative solutions."

CTOM volunteers help guide new teams on getting started and preparing for the competition. Coaches benefit from training seminars and newsletters. During Odyssey Day, students join their coaches for free STEAM-skills and creativity workshops taught by experienced presenters.

Anyone interested in participating or contributing should visit www.CTOM.org for contact information.