

Deerfield schools send record 11 teams to Destination Imagination globals

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[Steve Sadin](#) Pioneer Press

11 teams from Deerfield to compete in global problem solving competition May 20-23 in Nashville

Anticipation of problems and drilling to solve them are a key element in the success of Deerfield Public Schools District 109 students in Destination Imagination, a problem solving competition.

A record 11 teams from five of the district's six schools will compete at the DI Global Finals May 20 to 23 in Nashville — in part because they have learned to expect the unexpected.

Those 11 teams qualified with a top three finish at the statewide competition or a wild card invitation through a high enough score. Three were state champions and all six schools have programs.

"This is the world's largest creative problem solving competition," said Sheila Shifrin, the library information specialist at Caruso Middle School who brought DI to Deerfield in 2004 and oversees the district's program. "There are more than 45,000 attendees from 45 states and 14 foreign countries."

Shifrin first started mentoring DI teams in 2004, sending nine teams to Global Finals several times. She said 11 is a record for Deerfield.

Each team picks a category to enter and develop a project around such as science, building a structure or community outreach. All groups will deal with an instant challenge — a spontaneous activity in a given area where a task must be done in an allotted time — during the competition.

"We spend a lot of time practicing instant challenges," Shifrin said. "It can be anywhere from 45 to 85 points in the competition."

Shifrin drills teams at Caruso with practice instant challenges and works with the team manager's showing them how to do it. Jenny Meyerhoff, who manages Everyone, a team of fourth grade boys from Wilmot Elementary School which won the state title in the scientific category, put her charges through their paces during a recent practice.



Meyerhoff told Brian Dahlberg, Nick Shapkarov, Aaron Berk and Noah Meyerhoff they had to build as many 12-inch towers as they could using specific materials in a specified amount of time. No ingredient could be included more than once. The squad went to work delegating tasks to each other. They made two.

"One person has the job of making sure two people don't talk at once," Berk said.

"He knows he has to hold back," Meyerhoff added, explaining how Everyone polices itself. One person must keep track of time remaining.

When the team was done with the practice instant challenge, it was time to look inward with Meyerhoff and assistant manager Peter Berk.

"We took too much time on the first one," Shapkarov said.

Ben Grabow is also part of the team.

Winning the state crown in the outreach category was If It Doesn't Say You Can't, You Can, a group of seven girls from Caruso consisting of Hope Leman, Ava Thornton, Sydney Berk, Megan Segall, Evelyn Jaskowiak, Katelyn Polovin and Zoe Goldberg.

The girls knew they wanted to develop a community service project to help people and had a few brainstorming sessions before they got the idea of a cart loaded with toys and games for children at a hospital.

The team felt hospital bound children were underserved when it came to community service projects.

"We talked about things like helping the homeless," Segall said. "There didn't seem to be a lot of things for children in the hospital."

Before the cart was fully developed, the team went to visit an administrator at Highland Park Hospital. The conference was part of its success.

Taking a state championship in the structural category was the Non Licensed Whiz Kids from Walden Elementary School consisting of Madeline Kluge, Sara Ellis, Matthew Neumann, Alexander Lambermon, Drew Spiegel and Lindsey Apple.

"Being there was a great thing but first place I didn't expect," Neumann said.

Other teams heading to the Global Finals are This Is Being Pronounced Incorrectly consisting of Shepard Middle School students Megan Bergin, Xander Ambrose, Savanna Jackson, Griffin Minster, and Jason Dahlberg as well as Geek Bros Gone Wrong composed of South Park Elementary School children Varun Goel, Oliver Nye, Evi Schwartz, Tomas Zapp and Andrew Zhangson.

Also representing Shepard are Brandon Kluge, Kyle Neumann, Aidan Morrison, Zach Lefkovitz and Josh Widman as part of Luck of D.I.rish.

The Think Five team from Wilmot of Maggie Montgomery, Lyla Prass, Eden Chaban, Shayna Goldberg and Kate Shapiro are heading to Nashville along with schoolmates Emme Sang, Darren Liao, Max Kaufman, Alexandria Shick and Ethan Kim of Lightbulb.

Other Caruso participants are the Flaming Ice team of Eli Feingerg, Zach Berger, Jason Lin, Jeremy Lu, Hollan Obinger, Rich Song and Eric Lapporte, the DInosaurs of Jason Shrago, Evan Montgomery, Mike Liv-Feyman, Charles Hsu, Ian Ward and Chase Weiman along with Sleep or DI made up of Spencer Kent, Melanie Silver, Julia Aguilar, Matthew Seltzer, Erin Keating, Ben Zuckerman and Bailey Sachs.