

Learnball Tournament Gives EF students Sense of Camaraderie

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World geography students at Elizabeth Forward Middle School show their ability to plan and conduct a large-scale public event.

Throughout the school year, students in Lindy Marwood's seventh grade world geography class are participating in a Learnball Tournament, demonstrating complex academic skills through a combination of sports and variety show events.

"Learnball tries to do for academics what most schools do for sports," she said. "(Students) get that camaraderie of helping their team... by taking a sports format and using the best elements of it to get an academic interest."

At the beginning of the year, students formed two teams—Navigators and Explorers. Teams compete every day to determine which group maintains better conduct, attendance and learning.

Marwood said she learned



From left, Alyssa Baran, Jarrett Briscoe, and Sean Cooper demonstrate their athletic ability, academic skills and good conduct during their participation in an ongoing Learnball Tournament.

of the Learnball Tournament 15 years ago from a colleague. She said Learnball is one of the

most effective ways to keep students focused on learning. "I've always enjoyed

teaching, but it always seemed difficult to keep the children's attention," she added.

After hearing glowing praise from her colleague on the subject, she applied the program as a supplement to her own teaching lessons.

She said her first attempt using the program 15 years ago was a success.

"They took to it like ducks to water," she remarked. "It's much more fun to learn... with an emphasis on academics, behavior and attendance."

Students elected classmates from each team to serve as chairpersons for their team.

These four elected officials appointed an 18-member Learnball Tournament Council to plan and produce the tournament.

During the academic question and answer portion of the tournament, presidents can challenge the question of the opposing team for double points.

Scholars on the respective team advise presidents which questions to challenge and aid in formulating answers.

Marwood said this type of challenge keeps students

interested in the question.

Students expressed enthusiasm for the tournament.

Nikki Gwynn, Carolyn Dzurko and Alyssa Baran, public relations coordinators for the event, said they enjoy the unity the tournament provides.

"It's different from other classes, but we're also learning at the same time and it's easier to understand," the coordinators agreed. "You're not shy anymore and it's easier to be with classmates."

The three coordinators spent two months arranging halftime activities, preparing publicity posters and programs.

Learnball Tournament is a yearlong team competition. The winning team is announced after school is adjourned at the end of the year.

This rule, competing to the last day of school, keeps student motivation high with no year-end letdown in work, attendance or good behavior. Prizes are mailed to students during summer vacation.