

Hmmm ... is it Belize or British Honduras?

Story by: Laurent Bonczijk

There are all kinds of competitions for a student to participate in. They may compete in football, wrestling or tennis, and if they diligently train and catch a lucky break, they just might go to state. Others choose to compete with their brains, and there are statewide competitions for them as well.

Brendon Ford of C.S. Lewis Academy is the latter. A student in seventh-grade he recently made his fourth consecutive appearance at the state geography bee contest. Schools can only send one student to the contest, which means that Ford has bested older students since the fourth grade.

"In geography I am pretty good," he said, "it's a lot more interesting than other subjects." He said he likes the subject better than mathematics because it allows for more different questions. In math there is typically one way to solve a problem; in geography the possibilities are endless.

State competitions are different from school competitions because there are more rounds but they also share similarities, he said. At the school level, Ford and fellow competitors answer questions about a geography map of the United States, then they move on to a round of multiple choice questions and finish with open-ended ones. Whoever racks up the most points, wins. The winning student is then eligible to take a written test. The top 100 students in the state are then selected for the state tournament.

The state tournament starts with a multiple choice, moves on to a word association phase, then the students have to find the word that does not belong in a list, before finishing with open ended questions. Once again the student who racks up the most points wins.

"I've never made it to the state final," Ford said. "I'd like to make it to the finals, (but) there are some people who are a lot better than me."

To prepare, Ford visited the National Geographic Web site and took online geography bee contests. "I learn more from the questions I don't know, but I don't like it when I got those questions I don't know."

He said his weaknesses are the regions of Europe and South America as well as current events. He's confident about Africa and Asia as those areas were covered in this year's geography class, he said.

Ford didn't make it to the finals this year, but he's already looking to the future. "Next year is do or die," he said. "It's my last chance."