

## **Millions of Math Problems Solved by Española Elementary Students**

On April 16, 2009, Barbara Asteak, First in Math® representative and Vice President of Pennsylvania-based Suntex International, visited Española Public Schools to honor and celebrate individual students and teams of students' mathematics accomplishment. First In Math® is one of a kind mathematics tool that delivers basic skills in numbers and operation online to schools, students and their families. Ms. Asteak recognized Ms Norma Lara's San Juan Elementary 6th Grade Students, Team "vivid44nm," as the number 1 6<sup>th</sup> grade team in New Mexico and Mr. Jimmy Lara's Velarde Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students "aloha91nm," as third in the state in overall standings. Ms. Lara's "vivid44nm" also came in 2<sup>nd</sup> to an Alamogordo Team in overall standings, losing the coveted number 1 spot by only 2 sticker points—one sticker is awarded for every 3 problems solved- in a furious online clash for the lead.

Staying at the top of the First In Math® game is not an easy task. The lead changed hands many times during the competition, in the morning the Alamogordo Team was ahead by a small margin, by that evening Team "vivid44nm" had regained the lead, but by the next morning the Alamogordo Team had responded and were on top once again. The top New Mexico team was determined on April 10, and up to the last minute Team "vivid44nm" was ahead by 100 sticker points, but when the final tally was downloaded by the First In Math® officials, the San Juan Elementary Team "vivid44nm" was just 2 sticker points behind. Ms. Lara's 6<sup>th</sup> grade class (20 students) solved 230,358 problems, and Mr. Lara's 3<sup>rd</sup> place team (36 students) solved 330,747 by the end of the competition.

The first place overall standing eluded Team "vivid44nm," but their newly gained fluency in basic numbers and operations did not. According to Carol Brown Los Alamos National Laboratory Math and Science Academy Master Teacher "this program, which is a national program, is the perfect complement to the concept based mathematics curricula that MSA is using. It encourages the students to practice their computational fluency, problem solving, number sense, critical thinking, and pattern sensing, which is just what they need." Looking back, the upper elementary students from the Española Public Schools have solved a total of 2,712,218 problems; over a billion math problems have been solved nationwide.

New Mexico State University Mathematically Connected Communities' (MC<sup>2</sup>) liaison and Española Public Schools/MSA math coach, Emmanuel Espinoza, introduced the program to Española students and teachers. "Our schools are doing a great job. We have a lot of highly-ranked teams in the state, even though we started several months later than schools in other districts," says Espinoza. Also, according to Mr. Espinoza, E.T. Salazar Elementary School's 6th grade received 2nd place honors and Jordan Vigil, E.T. Salazar, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, currently ranks 2nd in the Average Sticker per Student category.

Robert Sun created the 24® game, a unique mathematics teaching tool that kids love. "I wanted to demonstrate that mathematics can be powerful, engaging and

most of all, fun,” says Sun. “Knowing the answer is always 24 alleviates a classic brand of math anxiety—getting the right answer—and instead puts the emphasis on the process and patterns, what I like to call the method behind the math.” The First in Math® district license was provide to Española Public Schools through its partnership with NMSU Mathematically Connected Communities.