

August 8, 2012

Students' anti-bullying video game finalist for award

By Alison Matas

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Caitlin Moore was sick of seeing her friends get bullied at school, so she and a classmate created a video game that teaches people about the causes and effects of bullying.

Moore, a 16-year-old who just completed 10th grade at George Washington High School, teamed up with 16-year-old Austin Susman and spent a year learning how to code and design a three-level game.

On Friday, the pair will get to see whether they win one of two grand prizes for their game at the 2012 West Virginia Globey Award Ceremonies. The event will be held from 10 to 11 a.m. at the West Virginia Center for Professional Development in Charleston. The awards and the video game designing are part of the Globaloria curriculum -- a social-network learning program developed by Idit Caperton, wife of former Gov. Gaston Caperton.

Moore and Susman's game is one of nine finalists statewide, narrowed down from a pool of 118 entries in the Civics and News Literacy category and 211 entries in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics category.

On Friday, a grand-prize winner will be announced for each category, and the team members who designed the top games will receive design kits that include a laptop, a drawing tablet, Adobe Flash and a subscription to the website BrainPOP, said Deborah Super, who handles national implementation of Globaloria curriculum.

The games were judged based on their creativity, playability, storyline and educational content. To be successful, a team had to submit a game that taught something, rather than assuming the player has prior knowledge, Super said.

Catherine Grim, who teaches Globaloria classes at Hurricane High School, has a finalist in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics category -- Dylan Sturgeon, who recently graduated.

His game, "Power Supply," shows the player how to build a computer.

Grim had 40 students in her classes alone, and she said there were so many students producing games through Globaloria that she didn't expect she'd have a finalist.

"The odds of getting one that close to the top ... " Grim said, trailing off. "I was just thrilled."

Karen Kail, who teaches the Globaloria classes at George Washington High, felt the same way about Moore and Susman.

"I had my fingers crossed," she said.

She described Moore and Susman as bright and motivated and said she proudly watched as they'd work together to debug their video game.

Their three-level game incorporates videos with Susman and the school's principal throughout to teach players about bullying. In the first level, gamers have to retrieve items scattered throughout a school without running into a bully -- because if they do, everything they've collected disappears, and they have to start over.

In the second level, phrases such as "Go home" and "We hate you" drop from the ceiling. The gamer has to get the student to class before the bell rings without running into any of the falling words.

The final level of the game deals with cyberbullying, which Susman said he sees as one of the more serious bullying problems students face, especially because of Facebook and Twitter.

The level opens with a video of Susman sitting down at a computer to do his homework, but he ends up getting bombarded with hurtful instant messages. Susman likened the game in that level to "whack-a-mole," as the player has to click on as many instant messages as possible.

If the player beats the game, the final scene is the bully being put in jail.

"It was just wonderful," Kail said.

Moore said the Globaloria class taught her about coding, of course, but she also learned about bullying. And after spending about five hours each week designing and researching, she said receiving the email that she was a finalist was a nice surprise

"We were floored," Moore said. "We were so excited. We'd worked so hard."

Other West Virginia finalists are:

- Team Thunderhawk of University High School in Morgantown
- Team T.C.G.II of Doddridge County High School
- The Tennis Ninja team of Chapmanville Middle School
- The Wolf Warlock team of Tygarts Valley Middle School
- The Pink Fluffy Monsters team at Tygarts Valley Middle School
- Team Peaches N'Sync of Capital High School
- Team Keebie at Tygarts Valley High School

The video games are available online at www.worldwideworkshop.org.