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Hundreds compete in spelling bee

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WEST NYACK - The words "grievance," "architect," "paranoia," "allegiance," "cemetery," "mediocre," "enunciate," "interfere" and "oscillate" kept two local fourth-graders battling it out for first and second place in the Rockland/Westchester region of the New York Spelling Bee at Felix Festa Middle School yesterday.

But, in the end, Matthew Price, a student at Strawtown Elementary School, pumped his fist in victory. His father, Howard, beamed.

"I can't wait to tell my mom," the 10-year-old New City boy said of his win.

The top three finishers in each group - there were more than 200 spellers grouped according to their school grades of 1 through 5 - will go on to the state spelling finals on April 5 in Port Byron, N.Y.

All contestants received a participation pin, and the three highest-placed spellers in each group were awarded medals.

"I thought it was really hard. I had a lot of really hard words," Matthew, who wore the number 6, said, speaking of the doubt he experienced before spelling the words "interpret" and "alteration" to take the win.

"It was really awesome," he said. "I studied really hard."

Each grade's spelling contest drew hundreds of spectators. The daylong event showed the spellers mostly keeping their cool as they were required to spell words some of them had never heard of before.

There were three judges seated at a table, and a reader announced the words and answered any questions the students had about pronunciation and definition.

Michael Diehl, executive director of the New York Spelling Bee, was on hand to oversee the event. He would periodically explain the rules to the audience.

Angelica Powell, 9, of the Bronx, was confident in her spelling, making inroads into her fourth-grade group until she was tripped up by the word "isthmus."

"It was hard," Angelica, a student at St. Barnabas Elementary School in the Bronx, said of her first foray into the bee.

Her father, Ainsworth, who coached her, said he would encourage his daughter to return to the competition next year.

Ajay Menon, 8, of New City, misspelled "miniature," ending up in second place in the third-grade

spell-off.

"Every day we studied ... and some of the words were confusing. We studied those more," he said of his daily study sessions with his parents, Preetha and Sree Menon.

Sandra Nuta's grandchildren, Alyssa, 9, and Andrei, 6, also participated. Nuta, of West Nyack, praised the program.

"It's just nice when you see the kids working toward something," said Nuta, who coached her grandchildren. "It's just great."

That's the whole point of the bee, said Francis Clement, who came up with the idea for the local competition that's now in its second year.

Clement, the regional bee's director, runs a tutoring service in Nanuet. He said participating in the bee would lead to academic benefits for children.

"I think it's a great way to spend a Saturday, and the best thing is getting the kids motivated to learn the words at a very early age. It's fun," he said.

View a special gallery of photos and a video on this subject at LoHud.com

