



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 8, 2020

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Berkmar High School students win video game design contest

Several teams of **Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS)** students may be one-step closer to creating the next big video game hit. **Berkmar High School** students **Jose Garcia, Adam Hassan, and Calvin Tran** earned first place in the **2020 Gwinnett Game Jam**. The contest, sponsored by **State Farm IT**, required contestants to design a video game, creating concept art, conducting research into who would play their game and why, as well as making revenue projections for their game “pitch”. A “pitch” is a short introduction to what a game, movie, or other digital product might be that is presented to investors in hopes of securing funding.

Quinci Saunders, Julissa Morales-Santos, and Jimmy Lin, who also attend **Berkmar High**, placed second, followed by a third-place team from **Paul Duke STEM High School** comprised of students **Dylan Rayfield, Connor Baltich, and Richard Lee**. The first-place team won \$300, second place received \$225 and the third-place team was awarded \$150. Approximately 200 students in the district’s Game Design pathway competed in the contest, which was judged by independent producers and executives from local game development companies.

Jesse Lindsley, CEO and founder of Thrust Interactive a local company that develops video games, kicked-off the contest with a motivational video and mentored all of the teams during the contest. In the video, Lindsley explains how he made a pitch to the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** for a game concept about cells, diseases, and other relevant topics. Based on that pitch, his company received funding to make the game “Hemonauts” (<https://www.hemonauts.com/>).

Michael Reilly, a STEM teacher at **Lanier High School**, is excited about the possibilities the competition provided students. “This contest is so ‘cool’ in so many ways,” Reilly said. “We asked kids to do this as an option where they can win money, network with real game industry executives, and gain the experience of a core business skill—the pitch. This project is not just a grade, it could be an idea that leads to a larger prize if a CEO likes the idea enough. I can’t say enough about our contest sponsor, State Farm IT. It has been a great partner to Lanier High’s CDAT STEM program for 5 years, and we could not do this without them. State Farm IT has inspired us to have coding and IT competitions, and they support them as well with logistics, funding and more.”

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is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.

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