LOCAL

Waipahu, Hilo students conceive winner apps

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Finding the nearest gas station with the cheapest fuel? There's a hassle-free app for that. Sharing your thoughts with the world with the click of a button? There's an app for that. Choosing a career path? No app for that as of yet, but some Hawaii students hope to create one.

Waipahu High School's myFuture app concept aims to help students shape ideas for future careers by asking them 100 questions about their personality.

That concept, along with another called Math Addicts, drafted by students at Waiakea Intermediate, won this year's "best in state" awards in a national competition dubbed the Verizon App Challenge.

More than 1,000 app concepts were submitted nationwide in the annual competition, through which teams of five to seven students in grades six through 12 brainstorm fresh app ideas, describe their proposals in summaries, write detailed essays and shoot creative videos to illustrate

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Shown flanking teacher Cindy Takara, Waipahu High students John Mycle Guerrero, left, Renz Sagabaen, Cesar Catchin, Marc Dave Ramirez, Jimwell Aguinaldo and Cia Monique Dela Cruz created an app concept that aims to help students gather ideas for careers by asking them 100 questions about their personality. They recently won a "best in state" award in a national competition, the Verizon App Challenge.

their vision. The Verizon challenge tasks student teams with dreaming up a mobile application concept that addresses a need in their school or community in the areas of education, health care or sustainability.

Created in partnership with the Technology Student Association, the Verizon contest aims to inspire student interest in science, technology, engineering and math, known as STEM education.

Waipahu High teacher Cindy Takara said her team of six sophomores came to her with the myFuture idea,

which could help students make well-informed decisions about academic pursuits and extracurricular activities. In addition to compiling personality profiles, the app could provide a list of counselors and teachers available to assist students. The team also

wants to extend the app to display post-secondary options for education and employment.

With the rise of career and technical education programs in Hawaii public schools, many students are making choices about vocational paths before starting high school, Takara said. She added that some of her students feel overwhelmed by the task of selecting career possibilities. "It's intimidating — I mean, I didn't know what I wanted at that age," said Takara, who sees the myFuture app as a tool that has potential to point kids in the right direction.

In Hilo, Waiakea Intermediate teacher Tabitha Booth has worked with "best in state" teams for three years in a row.

"I love this challenge because it is so easy to get students thrilled about STEM," Booth said. "In the prior years, with my eighth-grade science students, all I had to do was print out the rules and consent forms, and student groups worked independently."

This time around, after presenting the challenge to sixth-grade honors math

students, a group of girls formed a team that researched weak areas for children in math and various types of math apps. After determining that many students at Waiakea Intermediate struggle with math word problems, the team developed the Math Addicts concept. It's envisioned as a game through which students develop sharper math skills while having fun solving word problems.

Each "best in nation team," announced in early February, will be trained on coding and app development by a Massachusetts Institute of Technology "app inventor master trainer" to turn their concepts into real apps that will be made available through the Google Play Store.

The two Hawaii schools were told recently that they missed the cut to advance to the next round. Nonetheless, Takara is confident that the myFuture app will one day become a reality.

"I told my kids, 'Contest or not, I'm going to find people so that we can develop this because I really think this is going to work.'"