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Robotics competition builds students' science skills

DULUTH, Ga. (AP) — Hundreds of high school students met for a battle of metal and minds this weekend. Teams from 42 high schools across the South came to Duluth in teams of three, putting their robots to the task of running up ramps, knocking down boxes and blocking out other robots. The competition makes the students work every afternoon and Saturday for six weeks while they build their robots and the accompanying Web pages and computer animation.



Robots created by high school students duke it out at a recent competition.

By Lee Marriner, AP

"I got some insight into engineering and how fun it could be," said Jacob Hammer, a junior at Johnson High.

Each team is placed in an alliance with two other teams to work together in timed matches against other alliances. The winners will advance to the national contest in Houston next month for a chance at a \$10,000 prize.

Unlike TV robot battles, the students don't try to destroy their competition's robots because they could be in an alliance tomorrow with today's competitor.

"People you don't normally talk to in school, you find you have a common bond," said Daniel Mathis, a senior at Groves High School.

This is the first year of participation for most of the teams competing in Duluth, although the national contest is in its 14th year.

Inventor Dean Kamen came up with the idea for the robot contest as a way to spark students' interest in science and technology. Kamen is the man who invented the Segway two-wheeled motorized scooter.

The program is called For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST for short.

The different parts of the competition get students to apply both math and science skills along with teamwork abilities, said Tom Maty, a teacher at Robert Groves High.

"They've learned a lot of teamwork," Maty said. "I think their eyes have been opened."