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PRSEF: Bravo!

March 24 was the 82nd annual Fair Day for the Pittsburgh Regional Science & Engineering Fair (PRSEF). I wrote last week about the apparent improvement in student bibliographic skills coincident with implementing Teen Power Library in the runup to Fair Day. Well in advance, as part of the Fair's overall instructions, all student participants had been directed to an informed link on the WLN website for their use (<https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org/about-us/the-magic-library-card-series/>). That alone was something to celebrate, but there was an even bigger and more certain Fair success story that is also worth the telling.

This was the first time ever that the PRSEF was entirely virtual, and despite having COVID-repressed student participation and unavoidable first-time glitches, it was a rousing success! For this writer, both a Category Chair and a judge, there was angst in the days leading up to the Fair, a worry that I could not be both on-line chair to a dozen other judges and judge effectively myself. But, it turned out that by having PRSEF be forced to put and assign everything on-line in advance, and by my having access to do all the homework in advance, I became a much better prepared and discerning chair and judge.

The way this all worked is that we the category judges were assigned to electronic rooms, one/category, in which the chairs could do a half-hour orientation for other judges in the category. We all had access to shared written materials applicable to our category on Google Drive. We could enter and exit that room as needed, and we used it again later in the day for deliberations.

In between, we linked to each student in turn on a regular judging schedule, rather than in the more self-ordered way of the live Fair. Each student shared a PowerPoint presentation with us, rather than pointing us to information on a cardboard poster. We could follow her/his Research Plan in the sequence intended, meaning title, then introduction, followed by hypothesis, then methods, then results, and conclusions with reference back to hypothesis and bibliography. That's the sequence that they are supposed to be learning to master as part of learning the Scientific Method

Nicki Wood, Fair Director at the Carnegie Science Center, had to have all this work in the first Fair Day try, not of course without help from other staff members, including technical support, as well as guidance from folks at the International Science & Engineering Fair, with which the PRSEF is affiliated. This success belongs to them all, and as well the Judge Advisory Committee, the Science Review Committee (of which I am a member), category chairs, and the more than 350 judges, all of whom gave generously of their time and commitments.

Science fairs, like libraries, are very important contributors to the overall learning of kids. I believe that strongly. They matter to the overall learning about science and the Scientific Method, including why bibliographic skills matter. I feel very good about what we did on March 24 and the runup to it, and I know that that must be true for most

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everyone involved. So, even as I felt mentally exhausted by it all that evening, I celebrated, and Nicki saluted the staff, the hundreds of volunteers, and 403 students with her very generous e-mail words. A toast to you all! And what an example for how to turn crisis into opportunity!

Charles B. Greenberg,
WLN Board President