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Algebra Nation, and pizza, helping students prep for exam

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University of Florida researchers are using pizza parties and tropical cruises as an incentive to get ninth-graders to study for the Algebra I end-of-course test.

For the second time, UF is sponsoring a two-week study challenge through Algebra Nation, a free online teaching tool aimed at helping students pass the required exam.

The Florida Legislature allocated money last year to make Algebra Nation available to students in all 67 school districts in the state.

According to preliminary research, high school students who used Algebra Nation had a 10 percent higher pass rate than those who did not.

Still, about half of Florida's high school freshmen failed the Algebra I test last year, and will have to re-take it in order to graduate.

"We wanted to do this again because teachers told us how helpful it was to motivate their students," Algebra Nation co-director Melody Pak said. "Believe it or not, students like it a lot better than doing problems on paper."

Algebra Nation is accessible by computer, tablet or smartphone, and practice tests for its 12 sections of algebra curriculum are available year-round.

The practice tests closely resemble the actual end-of-course exam, Pak said.

But for the two weeks leading up to the statewide test, students can enter a raffle by earning 80 percent or higher on any of the practice tests.

Students can have as many as 12 entries -- one per section -- but can try for the qualifying score on a practice test as many times as they need to.

The point is to help students learn the material, and to get them comfortable with the test, Pak said.

Each student entry also carries an entry for their teachers.

This year's practice test challenge runs through Sunday, and Algebra I end-of-course testing begins on Monday.

Last year, Pak said there were 55,000 student entries during the two-week period.

More than one week of the current practice test period has ended, and almost 50,000 student entries have already come in, she said.

Algebra Nation posted 50 pizza party winners to its website Tuesday, and the remaining 50 pizza party winners will be posted next week.

Ten students will win an iPad mini, and five teachers will be given a Caribbean cruise for two.

“We like to acknowledge that teachers are really crucial,” Pak said.

To enter the contest, students can log into Algebra Nation at algebranation.com or through the smartphone app and go to the practice test section.

For help or concerns about the contest, email help@algebranation.com.

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