UF helps develop online algebra tool

Algebra Nation helps students prepare for Florida's Algebra I end-of-course exam.

By Joey Flechas

Staff writer

Shawn Wigg wore a fuzzy green hat as he stood before only a camera suspended in front of him in a balmy room and began his algebra lesson.

"You might be wondering, 'Why is this guy wearing this hat?" he asked. "Well, this is my leprechaun hat, and today is your lucky day. I'm going to show you how to simplify polynomials."

The Florida Virtual School teacher from Jacksonville traveled to Gainesville on Friday to film a video for Algebra Nation, a new project developed by the University of Florida and Study Edge to provide an online resource to help Florida's students prepare for the state-mandated Algebra 1 end-of-course exam.

The UF Lastinger Center for Learning and Study Edge are promoting the free Web application that students, teachers and parents can access for instructional videos and online practice platforms that cover material tested in the Algebra 1 EOC assessment given in late spring.

The state requires high schoolers to pass the exam in order to graduate. This past spring, about half of Florida's ninth-graders passed the exam.

Algebra Nation, which is accessible through www. algebranation.com as a Facebook application, officially launches Jan. 15.

Don Pemberton, director of the Lastinger Center, said those results that came out during the summer spurred the conversation about what to do to help students across the state.

Study Edge was soon asked to collaborate, and the Department of Education agreed to review the material being produced and provide feedback.

Pemberton said teachers in Florida were recruited to contribute to the app.

ALGEBRA *on Page **4B***

Article Continued Below

See ALGEBRA on Page B04

ALGEBRA: Students can post, respond to questions

Continued from IB

'We've also engaged a team of master algebra teachers from around the state,' he said.

Ethan Fieldman, president of Study Edge, said a lot of the feedback from the DOE has been very specific, so the videos have been carefully tailored to match the terminology and methods presented in the EOC exam.

He said teachers and administrators from districts across the state have expressed interest in the application because it is the only one of its kind.

'This is literally the only resource,' he said.

According to Algebra Nation's website, teachers and students can use Facebook profiles to access the application.

Teachers can associate themselves with their students, and they can use the videos and review materials in the classroom or follow their students' work online.

Students can also post and respond to questions through the application.

Teachers from around the state, like Wigg, have been traveling to Gainesville to film videos for Algebra Nation since the summer. For Wigg, even though he is on his winter break, he didn't want to pass up the opportunity to participate. 'I love it,' he said.

Contact Joey Flechas at 338-3166.

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