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Robotics are not an official curriculum – but it certainly is fun! IASA’s principal, Danny Steinitz, is always cautious about entering any of these competitions. Often, in a school competition like this, teachers or adults take a major role in the development of the product. Danny believes it is essential that such a competition be entirely student-driven. If expert advice is needed, the students need to find the answers themselves. Secondly, when students get involved in a project there is a tendency to focus on a project and sometimes neglect the regular curriculum.

In order to maximize the benefit of participating in such a competition, IASA’S goals are to assure that the students gain the benefits of teamwork, independent study and self-reliance. For that reason, 100% of the project was student initiated, created, developed and completed by the students. There were no “ringers”. A 12th grade student, Nir Naron, presented the idea of IASA competing in the National Robotics Olympiad in Israel, the winner of which would attend a huge, international finals competition hosted by the First Inspires Organization in Houston, TX. The IASA team and its robot that the students named “Armadillo”, won 1st Place in the Israeli national competition and represent Israel in Houston.

Annually, Houston is the host city and the competition this year takes place April 20-23. There are three separate competitions: one in Legos, the second in large robots and the third for robots built by high school students. This year there are 466 high school robotics teams participating. The event attracts tens of thousands of people and is held at the Houston Convention Center.

Nir Naron led the competition for IASA through all its stages throughout the entire process. IASA’s team includes sixteen boys and girls. The team worked for approximately 6 months developing Armadillo. These 16 students and three IASA teachers (chaperones) are in Houston as this is written. At their own expense, 15 parents have accompanied the team and will provide a cheering section for IASA. While in Houston, the team also had the advantage of visiting the NASA Space Center - one of the most interesting places.

Winning the National Israeli Competition is newsworthy alone. How IASA does against the other 465 teams, remains to be seen!

GOOD LUCK TO IASA AND ITS ARMADILLO!