

# Homeschoolers Succeed in International Competition

BY PAULA LAWSON-MOORE, FUTURE PROBLEM SOLVING COACH



Eastern Iowa home schooled students and their coach (in orange, second row from the top, in the middle) who participated in the 2020 virtual FPS International Competition



Junior division 10th place team (from left): Will Seele, Ciaran Bentler, Moriah Haveman, Noelle Schnoebelen



Third place international middle division team (from left): Matt Schaeckenbach, Lewis Sutton, Maggie Greer, Brady Diercks

The 2020 Future Problem Solving International Competition was scheduled to take place in early June on the campus of the University of Massachusetts, but the global pandemic prevented the annual gathering. Instead, the competition had to take place from Iowa via electronic submissions. This change of venue, however, did not stop homeschooled students from working hard and earning some top awards.

Future Problem Solving (FPS) is an academically challenging program where student in Grades 4-12 learn a practical problem-solving process that they apply to different topics throughout the school year. The skills learned in Future Problem Solving align with those most desired by employers: critical thinking and problem solving; teamwork and collaboration; oral and written communication skills. The FPS topics for the past school year were International Travel, Sleep Patterns, Gamification, and Living in Poverty. The topic of the FPS International Competition was Terraforming.

Instead of meeting in person weekly to prepare for international competition, students completed eight weeks of online assignments from their coach, including writing their own futuristic stories about terraforming a planet or moon. Since coronavirus restrictions lessened after the first of June, the students were able to meet in person to complete the two-hour written competition and participate in the oral presentations on June 5.

Several Iowa homeschooled students placed among the best in the world. The junior division (Grades 4-6) team of Ciaran Bentler, Moriah Haveman, Noelle Schnoebelen, and Will Seele placed 10th out of the best 59 junior teams.

In the middle division (Grades 7-9), the team of Maggie Greer, Matt Schaeckenbach, Lewis Sutton, and Brady Diercks earned the honor of placing 3rd internationally, outperforming 566 teams from 25 states plus teams from the countries of New Zealand, Singapore, China, Thailand, Australia, and Turkey.

Anna Ramsey, participating in the senior division (Grades 10-12) problem-solving competition for individuals, also placed 3rd

internationally.

Former teacher and homeschool mom, Paula Lawson-Moore, has coached FPS teams in eastern Iowa for over 30 years. For the 2019-2020 FPS season, Paula coached 52 homeschooled students from Iowa City, Kalona, Riverside, Coralville, Marion, Brighton, Washington, Wayland, Cedar Rapids, West Liberty, and Tiffin.

A former Future Problem Solving participant, Ben Berhow, now an engineering student at the University of Iowa, wrote this about FPS: "Future Problem Solving has molded many aspects of who I am. And if I could only repeat one activity from high school, I would unquestionably choose FPS. The skill of problem solving is useful in many different aspects of life, and it is crucial in engineering. Through Future Problem Solving, I have brainstormed solutions to the problems of space junk, ocean pollution, invasive species, and many other pressing issues our planet will face in the near future. Researching each topic, I have amassed insight into diverse topics, such as 3D printing, genetics, and outer space. Teamwork is critical to success in FPS. Working with other Problem Solvers has taught me leadership, patience, and how to collaborate with different kinds of people. These, and many more invaluable traits, are why I am grateful to Future Problem Solving for shaping me into the thinker I am today."

If parents are interested in learning more about Future Problem Solving either with Paula or as a new coach, contact Paula at [fpscoach@hotmail.com](mailto:fpscoach@hotmail.com). The FPS Program also includes a Scenario Writing competition where students write futuristic short stories, and Scenario Performance, a storytelling competition. The international website is [fpspi.org](http://fpspi.org).



Senior division individual FPS Competition 3rd place: Anna Ramsey

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