

**Update, James Marran (April 15, 2004)**

### **National Geography Challenge (Olympiad)**

Although the name is different, the product is still the same. You will recall that several years ago, the IOC notified the publisher of the test that NCGE could no longer use the term Olympiad to identify the test because Congress had given the Committee exclusive rights on the name. Consultation with a copyright attorney confirmed the obvious: litigate and lose or change the name and save a lot of time, money, and gnashing of teeth. Hence, since 1993, the National Geography Olympiad has been identified as the National Geography Challenge.

Begun in 1986, the Challenge offers schools five tests each year (grade 2 - 25 questions, grades 3-4 - 35 questions, grades 5-6 - 40 questions, grades 7-9 - 50 questions, grades 10-12 - 50 questions). The entrance fee is \$65 per team per school which means that a school gets one test for the grade level for which it registers and can photocopy as many tests as it needs. The best scoring student wins a Challenge medal and the next 10 highest scores earn Certificated of Achievement issued by the NCGE.

The publisher is Joe Quartarro of St. James, NY. NCGE contracts with him to publish, distribute, monitor, and generally oversee the tests. NCGE provides the item writer (which happens to be me) but Joe provides and pays for the review of the tests. Ruth Shirey is the geographer who screens the questions for content validity, and Joe has grade level teachers proof the tests. I also have students in my area take the test at their grade levels and comment on the quality and appropriateness of the questions.

The greatest number of test takers are at grades 7-9 followed by grades 5-6, then grades 3-4, then grade 2, and grades 10-12 with the fewest. Since 1995, all the questions have been designed to reflect the National Geography Standards. grade 2 is the most challenging for me to write; grades 10-12 takes the longest and is personally the most satisfying. As best I can, I write original questions for each test each year. That keeps the tests fresh and original. I also include an insert for each teacher each year with teaching suggestions on how to deliver the Standards. The tests are given the last week of April. In early June, each school receives a histogram showing how it did in relation to all the other schools taking the test at its grade level. The best performing students per grade are also reported. That information is published in *Perspective*

Recently, Joe called to tell me that the 2004 registrations had fallen off fairly significantly. He has other tests in his stable (math, general social studies, world and US history) and they also had lost registrations, but geography took the biggest hit.

I notified Michal and asked her to share this information with the Executive Committee. I offered a three point recovery program:

- 1) provide questions samples on the NCGE website;
- 2) promote the tests more vigorously in Perspective; and
- 3) offer sessions at NCGE and other conferences on the Challenge to raise teacher awareness. (All three are in the works.)

Chances are the over testing of NCLB has minimized the interest in such competitions as the Challenge