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Parkway's 8th grade team took first place at the State Finals of Odyssey of the Mind last weekend, sweeping all three components (long-term, style and spontaneous) of the competition. The team is the first ever from the Watauga County Schools to make it to the World Finals for Odyssey of the Mind and will compete in that event in Ames, Iowa, May 23-26. Parkway's 8th grade teams and two other teams from the Watauga County Schools were able to compete in the State Finals because of their strong performances in the Northern Regionals of Odyssey of the Mind last month. Parkway's 6th grade team and 8th grade teams each won first place in their category and division at the regional competition. The 6th grade team also received the Ranatra Fusca Creativity Award, an honor described in the State Finals program guide as "representing the essence of the Odyssey of the Mind program." The Watauga High School team won second place in their category and division at the Northern Regionals. The Northern Region covers 19 NC counties, including such relatively populous counties as Guilford and Forsyth.

As shown in the above photo, the 8th grade team from Parkway that won first place at both the regional and state levels consisted of Mary Seramur, Max Schlenker, Hannah Dallas, Shelby Reagan, Alex Mancini, and Cole Funk. The members of the 6th grade team from Parkway that won at the Northern Regionals were Maddie Dailey, Anna Katherine Massey, Sarah Paige, Mackenzie Dallas, and Zoe Funk. The members of the team from Watauga High School that placed second in the regionals included Brandy Hicks, Evelyn Webb, Edward Oliver, Brennan Brodt (a student at Valle Crucis), Conner Brodt, Ray Black, and Larissa Lowenberg.

Teams are given scores in three components in Odyssey of the Mind (OM) tournaments: up to 200 points for their performance on the long term component, which is the problem for which they prepare ahead of time; up to 100 points in the spontaneous component, where a solution to a problem must be devised on the spot; and up to 50 "style" points. While the team prepares for the long term part of the event ahead of time, they have only eight minutes to complete their solution in competition. Remarkably, the 8th grade team from Parkway achieved a perfect combined score of 350 points at the State Finals.

Parkway's 8th grade team chose the OM problem entitled "Weird Science," one of five problems used in OM competition this year. Weird Science challenges the team to create and present a performance about a team of scientists out to discover the cause of mysterious events. Before concluding that this doesn't sound so tough, consider that OM guidelines require that the performance must include "a technical representation of the events, the appearance of actually traveling, and a team-created device that the scientists use on the expedition," all with a maximum budget of no more than $145. Hollywood filmmakers obviously need not apply.

Competing in the World Finals is a great honor for Parkway's 8th grade team but it's also an expensive one. They will need about $9,200 to attend and compete in the World Finals and their immediate problem is now about basic economics rather than Weird Science.

"These kids have literally spent hundreds of hours preparing their solution," said team coach Lynn Schlenker. "This talented team will do a great job representing the High Country, but we need community support to get there. We are hoping that local businesses, organizations, and individuals can help us with the expense of the World Finals competition." Persons and organizations interested in helping the team may contact Schlenker at lynn.schlenker@mac.com.

Odyssey of the Mind is a program in which teams compete to design and implement an original

solution to a challenging problem that requires each team to demonstrate a combination of creativity, effective communication, and collaboration. There are separate divisions of competition for grades K-5, 6-8, 9-12, and collegiate teams. Additional information about the program is available online at www.odysseyofthemind.com.