

**For Immediate Release**

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**Academic Athletes Spell S-U-C-C-E-S-S:  
How Home-Schooling Trains Them**

(Hunt Valley, MD) -- Home-schoolers have garnered a disproportionate number of finalist slots in academic competitions for nearly a decade. As with sports, music, and performing arts, academic competitive skills are being honed at young ages. Home-schoolers are emerging as knowledge athletes because academics have been identified as an area for them to realize their full potential.

Consider home-schooler Samir Patel, 11, of Colleyville, Texas, who tied for second place honors in the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday. Samir tied for third place two years ago at the age of nine, and he has several more years of eligibility.

In this year's competition, six home-schoolers reached the sixth of 19 rounds. A total of 34 of the 273 competitors (12 percent) were schooled at home, impressive when one realizes that about 2 percent of the nation's school-age children are home educated.

The success of this year's home-schooled academic athletes is not an anomaly. In 2000, home-schoolers George Thampy of St. Louis, Mo., took top honors at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and Rebecca Sealfon of New York took first prize in the competition in 1997.

Our nation has a fascination with child athletes. We watched a young Tiger Woods master the golf swing and sent our kids out to the back yard excited by the possibilities. Similarly home-schooling parents introduce academic fundamentals to their children and thrill as the child's interest and command of the subject expands exponentially.

The role of academics has shifted for today's young students. Traditional teachers are competing for their mindshare with extracurricular activities and electronic entertainment at ever increasing levels. By contrast, the more time efficient nature of dedicated instruction in the home-school model allows students to focus on academics.

This focus is then complemented by ample time for other pursuits. Jean Halle, President of Calvert Education Service, an arm of Calvert School and the nation's first formal home

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instruction program provider, has observed firsthand what makes home-schoolers successful academic competitors. Calvert's program has been used by nearly 500,000 children in the last 99 years.

“Home-schooled students and success in academic competitions go hand-in-hand because home-schoolers treat these academic competitions like other students treat sports or club activities,” Halle says. “Home-schoolers differ in this respect from traditional school students, who go to school for academics, but then attempt to excel at extra-curricular endeavors like sports and performing arts.”

For home-schoolers, academics are approached more holistically, as the student's home becomes the center of his educational world. The home-schooled student's life involves academics and other pursuits collectively, and his successes within the one-on-one environment afforded through home-schooling propel him to seek greater successes for himself academically.

These junior academic athletes' public journey may begin with spelling bees, but they progress to much more mainstream academic competitions for college placement and scholarships. Home-schooler James Williams of Vancouver, Washington, won the National Geographic Bee in 2003, and home-schooler Calvin McCarter, a fifth grader from Michigan became the youngest winner of the competition in 2002 at the age of 10. Home-schooled students typically score up to 30 points higher than the national average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), according to the Home School Legal Defense Association.

Halle concludes, “A home-schooled student is more self-directed, better able to think quickly on his feet, and exposed to a wide range of topic areas and vocabulary words through a well-rounded education.”