PQ Concentrates on the Cube

North Salem, NY – Only whispered cheering broke the silence of the Pequenakonck Elementary School library. Fourth-grader Emma Neubauer challenged Natalie Koehler, the library media specialist, and they took their places in front of the giant timer. Neither uttered a word nor made eye contact as the minutes ticked by until suddenly Neubauer dropped her completed Rubik's Cube and raised her hands in victory.

Neubauer first attempted a Rubik’s Cube a month prior as part of the library program. She checked out a cube and an instruction booklet to prepare for the February competition but found online videos the most helpful. Her best time is just over two minutes.

“I started realizing what mistakes I made and understanding how to fix those mistakes,” said Neubauer. “I used to stress out about breaking up the colors but then I realized once you finish a whole step, it all comes together again.”

“This is why we brought the Rubik's Cube program to PQ. We want students to believe that with enough time and concentration on a task they can succeed,” said Koehler. “There’s a great sense of accomplishment from solving even the first stage.”

“My deep dive this year is on developing sustained concentration, which is a skill needed for reading,” said Koehler. “The cube involves struggle and concentration, which helps students practice focusing and ignoring disruptions.”

Koehler believes that anyone can learn to solve the cube by learning algorithms. She assures her students that speed will follow once they memorize the sequences of moves.

While there are many different techniques, Koehler uses the storytelling method to guide her hands. “The story helps visualize which part of the cube you should be moving. Eventually, it gets into your muscle memory, and my hands know what to do.”

On challenge day, fourth-graders discussed their different techniques and strategies while waiting their turn.
“I try to see it in my mind before I make a turn,” said Angel Espinal.

“I solved this side in the lunch line in about two minutes using the ladder technique,” said Julianna Fodor showing off her cube with one solid white side.

Several students competed to solve the first side of the cube. The students had 10 seconds to inspect their cubes before the timer began. Connor Sable finished first in 46 seconds, followed by Julianna Fodor in 1 minute, 26 seconds.

At the fifth-grade competition, Vilem Gnlp solved the whole cube in 2 minutes, 28 seconds, while Andrew Barnett solved the white side in 1 minute, 8 seconds.