

From PMC school to natl science fair

Four students from civic-run schools have been chosen to present their research projects at the Indian Science & Engineering National Fair in Chennai this month

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Their schooling has been simple, their economic background none too extravagant, but a love for science, honed by the Exciting Science Clubs organised in two schools run by the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), has brought four students national recognition.

The clubs, mentored by scientists from the National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) and the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), began in 2012.

Dhanashree Shelke and Pragati Bhakre from Hutatma Balveer Shirishkumar Vidya Niketan and Abhijeet Kallure and Azam Torvi from KC Thackeray School were selected for the national finals of the Intel-CII-DST Science Fair, Bangalore, in October last

year. The girls will now present their research projects at the Indian Science & Engineering National Fair, organised by the Science Society of India in Chennai, from January 10-11. The silent flight of owls inspired the duo to propose wing designs that reduced aircraft noise, while Abhijeet and Azam experimented on fruit fly larvae.

Pragati's family of four lives in a single room in a slum near Shivaji Nagar railway station. "She (Pragati) was responsible about her academics, but not extraordinary. The science club got her interested — she even dismantled the alarm clock at home and used the battery for her work," said Pranali, Pragati's older sister who is in her final year of BCom. Father Dhanraj Bhakre works in a saloon nearby and mother Vanita is a homemaker. "Our older daughter studied in the same school we have faith in



MAHENDRA KOLHE

The Exciting Science Club was a stepping stone for Dhanashree Shelke and Pragati Bhakre (seen inset with their science teacher)

the teachers," Vanita said.

Dhanashree, meanwhile, is known for being bright but moody at home. Her family lives in a small house

inside Shivajinagar's Railway Colony. Dhanashree is the youngest of four siblings. Jayashree Shelke, her older sister, said, "She is mischievous, but

serious when it comes to studies."

For Pragati and Dhanashree however, this is merely a stepping stone. "We are glad this got us recognition, but we are interesting in further work with scientists," said Pragati who is yet to decide on a career path. Dhanashree on the other hand has already decided to take up science.

Neeta Gulawane, science teacher at Hutatma Balveer School, said, "We are happy to know our kids are making use of this opportunity." Principal Sandhya Jadhav said, These achievements are noteworthy and will change the impression people have of PMC schools."

Shradhdha Gargatti, Associate, Exciting Science Group, NCL, said, "This is a project to encourage students towards pure science and research. Junior and senior scientists from NCL and IISER go every Saturday to conduct these sessions."