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PALO ALTO

Success on ice and online

California Connections Academy expands into Santa Clara County

BY JASON GREEN
Daily News Staff Writer

Like a lot of 11-year-old boys, Vincent Zhou keeps a busy schedule. But that's where the similarities end.

On most days of the week, the ice-skating phenom spends up to three hours perfecting axels and Lutz jumps at IceTown in Riverside, some 400 miles from his home in Palo Alto.

It's not the type of routine that makes getting an education easy. Fortunately, Vincent hasn't had to trade academics for athletics. For the past year, he has attended an Orange County branch of California Connections Academy, an online school chartered through the Ripon Unified School District in San Joaquin County.

"I can do my school work anytime or anywhere," he said by phone last Thursday. "It gives me flexibility."

That flexibility — for instance, not having to get up at 4 a.m. to practice or do homework until 9 p.m. — allows him to train with noted figure-skating coach Tammy Gambill in Southern California.

That in turn has resulted in some impressive finishes on the ice, including a gold medal in the men's novice competition at the 2012 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating championships at HP Pavilion in San Jose.



Courtesy of U.S. Figure Skating Association
Palo Alto native Vincent Zhou, 11, at the men's novice division at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in January.

Vincent said he is also flourishing academically.

He skipped a grade and was placed in an algebra class when he transferred to California Connections Academy from

Hoover Elementary School.

"With California Connections Academy," he said, "I can be a great athlete as well as a great student."

The school is for more than just promising young athletes, added Fei Ge, Vincent's mother. It offers another option for children who are academically gifted or don't fit the typical mold.

"Palo Alto schools are very good, but it's hard to take advanced courses," she said, noting that it would've been difficult for her son to take algebra at his age, let alone train as a competitive ice skater.

The price is right, too.

"This is a public school, so the education is free," Fei Ge said.

Vincent could soon find himself virtually in the company of his peers, with California Connections Academy expanding to the counties of Alameda, Amador, Calaveras, Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Santa Clara and Stanislaus. Spring enrollment began April 3.

An information session will take place today at the Hilton Garden Inn, 340 E. El Camino Real in Mountain View, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For additional information, visit the site www.connectionsacademy.com.

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