

News

Students head to state science competition

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By Cristina Venditelli
For the Daily Tribune

SOUTHFIELD — Students from two south Oakland communities took top honors at the Oakland County Regional Science Olympiad recently at Lawrence Technological University.

The Birmingham Covington School Middle School Science Olympiad Team came in first place overall at the county competition. From Troy, the Boulan Park Science Olympiad Team won second place and the Larson Middle School Science Club won third place.

The three schools will compete at the State Science Olympiad on Saturday at Michigan State University.

The competition consisted of 23 events covering all areas of science, asking students to demonstrate factual knowledge in many areas, build and test devices that meet specific requirements and conduct experiments using the scientific method.

Chris Emmi, one of two coaches at Covington, said the kids practice all school year for the Olympiad.

“Basically, for us it’s after school, we run a little thing called choice hour, they come in three days a week and the kids are given three events. They study for these throughout the year, then at the county competition they compete and get ribbons and medals for the events.”

The other coach at Covington is science teacher Tammy Brown, who was on a field trip to Mammoth Cave last week.

One type of competition is test taking, “they study the skeleton of humans, and they take a written test,” Emmi said. In another, called processing events — “they have to judge powders, like baking soda, calcium carbonate ... they have to solve a crime. They run tests, solve puzzles, they test fossils and answer questions.”

In a building event, they have to build the most efficient bridge to see which is lightest and holds the most weight before it snaps, Emmi said.

Jennifer Yang, an eighth-grader from Larson who entered the competition for the first time this year, received a medal in all five events she entered.

Boulan Park has two teams of 15 students each — a “Competitive Team” and an “Alternate Team.” Both teams worked together to prepare for the competition by studying astronomy and anatomy, building airplanes and bridges, conducting chemistry and physics experiments and more. Both teams attended the Oakland County Regional Competition in March, but competed in separate divisions. Boulan’s Alternate Team earned first place in its division, earning first place medals in 18 of the 23 events. Boulan’s Competitive Team will advance to the State Science Olympiad.

At Boulan Park, each student will participate in four different events, which they select by ranking the events by their top choices. Each meeting is hosted by a team supervisor that oversees the meeting and offers assistance while students learn about their

event.

"I'm really excited about my pentathlon event," says eighth-grade Boulan Park student Lillian Liang. "I have four members on my team, and we have academic and physical challenges. It's random, so you never know what you're going to get."

Larson students must also attend biweekly meetings, but do more independent study work, with coaches that are available to offer research materials and guidance. Larson science teacher J. Gail Armstrong-Hall is impressed by the self-driven students she has in this year's competition. "We have dynamite independent researchers with a love of learning. These kids have a lot of heart. That's what gives them their edge."

For the most part, the students can select the events they wish to participate in, although some are chosen for events based on their previous year's performance in the same event.

Eighth-grade Boulan Park student Keerthana Palani is eager to compete in the state competition, but also just enjoys the opportunity to be a part of the science team.

"I like that we get to work with other people with similar interests as me."

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