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Hundreds of District of Columbia Students in Grade 6-12 Showcase Innovation, Ingenuity at 2016 DC STEM Fair

Daylong celebration of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math features hundreds of student projects and a STEM Expo for students, parents and teachers

Langley Grace Wallace, a high school student at Sidwell Friends School, took top honors Saturday at the 2016 DC STEM Fair with her project titled, "The Effect of Targeted Inhibitors on Melanoma Tumor Immunity."

Wallace's project was among hundreds of others on display at the annual celebration of Science, Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) held at Dunbar High School in Northwest DC. Two students from School Without Walls, Sylvia Gisler and Sam Lossef, took second and third place, respectively.

All three earned trips to the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair held this May in Phoenix, where they will compete against STEM peers from around the world for cash prizes and the opportunity to showcase their projects for an international audience.

"Events like the DC STEM Fair let students demonstrate their knowledge and skill in a range of creative and rigorous projects that involve research and analysis, and engage our students' curiosity and passion," said DC State Superintendent of Education Hanseul Kang as she toured projects on display in Dunbar High School's gymnasium. "Congratulations to the winners of the 2016 DC STEM Fair and thank you, students, parents, educators, partners and volunteers for your talent and dedication, and for making this an outstanding celebration of DC STEM education."

The DC STEM Fair gives District of Columbia public, public charter, parochial, private and homeschool students in grades 6-12 the opportunity to showcase their knowledge of STEM in a diverse array of projects. More than 100 volunteers from local universities, STEM professional organizations, research groups and STEM employers served as judges at the event.

"What I love about STEM is, if you look around the room, not many of the projects are the same," said Katherine Estrada, a senior at Banneker Academic High School. Estrada's project, titled "Radish Shock," studied the effects of electricity on the growth of plants like radishes. "Endless curiosity and endless possibilities."

Volunteer judge Andrea Heithoff, of Octo Consulting Group, reviewed junior-level projects at the DC STEM Fair and said it was "exciting to see these kids get excited about engineering projects."

"A lot of curiosity went into the questions that they have been trying to solve," said Heithoff, who serves as a teachers' coach at Bancroft Elementary School.

"This is a great opportunity for students throughout the city to demonstrate independent research and independent thinking in STEM projects," said Maya Garcia, director of Science, Technology, Engineering and



Math, for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). “The DC STEM Fair is a rich experience for our kids.”

The DC STEM Fair is presented by the DC STEM Network, a collaboration between the Carnegie Academy for Science Education (CASE) and OSSE. The Network’s mission is to unite community partners in a sustainable collective effort to design, guide and advocate for transformative STEM learning opportunities for all DC students. The DC STEM Fair is sponsored by CASE, OSSE, the Battelle Memorial Institute and Northrup Grumman.

“The DC STEM Fair really showed how the community can come together to provide rich STEM experiences for our students,” said Julie Edmonds, director of the Carnegie Academy for Science Education. “Over 200 students, 100 judges, 40 volunteers and 30 STEM organizations ensured that the day was a huge success. The energy in the judging area was palpable. Judges were very impressed with the scope and quality of student projects. Students left feeling excited to do even more STEM research. It was a great experience for all!”

The daylong 2016 DC STEM Fair included a STEM Expo where students, parents and teachers participated in hands-on STEM activities. For the first time, the event featured a mini-maker fair where participants engaged in a variety of do-it-yourself projects, such as making personalized, flavored lip balm from scratch. The STEM fair also featured a professional development opportunity for about 100 District teachers, co-sponsored by the Tiger Woods Foundation.

In a professional development session run by Matt Barinholtz of FutureMakers, Grady McClinton, a science teacher at Coolidge High School, put the finishing touches on a mini robot constructed of simple materials that flittered about the table when the wires were connected to the small machines power source.

McClinton said he’s considering the project for his classroom as a way to demonstrate physics, engineering and electronics. “It allows students to be problem-solvers,” he said. “They learn more and remember more with evidence-based learning.”

Barinholtz of FutureMakers said he hoped the “educators with us today will take back some really engaging, low-tech, high-engagement motorized projects to get their kids to think about engineering and I hope it is something they come to like.”

Janika Webb, a student at Washington Latin School, who studied the shelf-life of organic vs. nonorganic tomatoes, said the DC STEM Fair not only gave her an opportunity to display her knowledge and research, but also a chance to learn from judges and peers.

“It is good to interact with people and share ideas about your project,” she said.

Iftakhar Alam, an eighth-grader from Hardy Middle School, studied the effectiveness of four brand-name disinfectants at killing bacteria. He’s fascinated by all aspects of STEM, calling it “a well-rounded thing to be studying,” he said. “I love science and learning the way of life.”

For Washington Math Science Technology Public Charter High School 10th-grader Ruth Kone, the event gave her an opportunity to pursue her passion for biology and agriculture. For Ramella Suber, a senior at School Without Walls, the STEM fair gave her the opportunity to talk about a data collection deficiency she discovered while studying EBT use among low-income residents of Maine.



And for students like Ryan Battle, a sixth-grader at Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science and a spokesperson with the National Junior Honor Society, the event gave him a chance to explore two interests – music and cardiology – in a project that explored what kinds of music raise and lower heart rate.

“I like music and I’m interested in how the heart works,” he said, recommending rap for a fast heart rate, classical for a slow heart rate, and jazz to improve your memory. “I could share this and work with people who have had heart problems or stroke.”

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