

Local student is top 40 finalist in prestigious national science and math competition

Nathan Wei, a senior at Buchholz High School, has just been named a 2024 Finalist in the Regeneron Science Talent Search, the nation's oldest and most prestigious science and math competition for high school seniors. The selection puts him among the top 40 STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) students in the nation.

As a Finalist, Wei will receive a \$25,000 award and will go on to participate in the Finals Week competition March 7-13 in Washington, D.C. He was previously recognized as one of 300 Regeneron 2024 Scholars, earning a \$2000 cash award and another \$2000 for Buchholz High's STEM programs.



Scholars and finalists this year were selected out of nearly 2200 applications submitted by students across the U.S. and ten other nations. According to the Talent Search website, they are chosen "based on their outstanding research, leadership skills, community involvement, commitment to academics, creativity in asking scientific questions and exceptional promise as STEM leaders."

Applicants to the Search, previously known as the Intel Science Talent Search, must submit original research projects, essays and recommendations to be considered. Wei's project, 'Novel Elastomeric Polystyrene via Photopolymerization and Post-Functionalization of Durable Ultra-High Molecular Weight Perfluorostyrene Copolymers,' outlines his research on the development of a plastic that is strong, recyclable and made from renewable resources.

"My generation has grown up always hearing about climate change and how the planet is being damaged," said Wei. "We're the ones who are going to be affected by this, so when I got the opportunity to work at a research lab at UF (University of Florida), I wanted to do something that was targeted toward sustainability."

Wei's academic resume includes other recent awards. He's a member of the school's national championship math team. He's a 2024 National Merit Semifinalist and earned the highest possible total score on the PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. He's also carried a very rigorous class load in addition to the research he does outside of school.

"I think I've taken just about every AP science and math class," he said. "All the advanced curriculum Buchholz offers I've tried to get my hands on. Having such early exposure to STEM really sparked my interest and gave me the fundamentals to be able to do this research."

Wei will be attending Princeton University after high school and will be majoring in chemistry. Ultimately, he would like to go into the academic world.

"I like both sides of it," he said. "You're teaching new students and inspiring them to hopefully pursue the same things you're pursuing, but you're also doing groundbreaking research, making discoveries that will have a really big impact in the world."

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