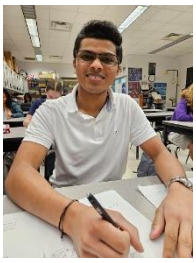
**Two Alachua County students to be honored at state level for STEM achievement**

The two Alachua County students who will be recognized at an upcoming state conference share both a passion for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and a desire to spark that passion in other young people.

Juniors Abhith Kasala from Gainesville High School (GHS) and Shivi Tripathi from Eastside High School (EHS) will be among the top STEM high school students from across Florida who will be honored at the upcoming Sunshine State Scholars program in Orlando on April 10 and 11. The event will include a ceremony honoring the students, opportunities to meet with representatives from Florida's colleges and universities and workshops on college applications and funding.

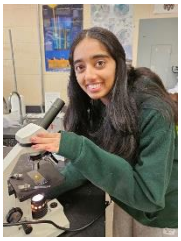


Kasala, a junior, is enrolled in the Cambridge Program at GHS, where he has taken many high- level science and math courses, as well as courses at the University of Florida. He's also been served in a leadership role in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including the STEM Club, Robotics Club, NASA Student Astronaut Challenge Club and the Multicultural Music Performance Club.

Kasala has also conducted research at the University of Florida, primarily on the impact of microplastics. His research has earned him many honors at regional, statewide and international science competitions over the past few years, including a first-place award at this year's Sunshine State Science and Engineering Fair and the Stockholm Junior Water Prize, both for the second year in a row. He was invited to speak at both the United National Science Summit and at the Water Environment Federal Conference last fall.

Kasala organized and hosted a TEDx conference at GHS, bringing scientists to the school to speak to more than 400 students and staff about STEM and its role in innovating and solving global issues. The event was part of his ongoing effort to promote STEM, particularly among young people.

"I believe that science and research can be powerful tools for change, and my goal is to instill that curiosity into young learners," he said. "The next big idea could come from sitting in a classroom right now. The time is now to empower the next generation to dream big and shape the future with STEM."



Tripathi is a junior in the International Baccalaureate program at Eastside High School. She has successfully completed many college-level math and science courses, even earning the highest score on an Advanced Placement Physics exam in 7th grade. She's also earned A grades in three UF courses so far. Her extracurricular activities include leadership roles in EHS' School Advisory Council, National Science Bowl, Mu Alpha Theta Club, Key Club, the EHS Red Cross Chapter, among others. Outside of school she's earned certification in several fields, including coding, data science and cartography.

Tripathi's resume includes an impressive list of awards in various competitions, such as Science Olympiad, Mu Alpha Theta contests, science and engineering fairs, and more. Last year she represented Florida in the National FBI Youth Leadership Program in Quantico, Virginia, and this year she's been accepted into the Duke University STAR program, a highly-selective 8-week summer internship and research program for the nation's top STEM students.

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Tripathi has also been heavily involved in community service projects, including many involving teaching younger students everything from high-level math to basic literacy to self-defense.

Like Kasala, Tripathi is also driven by a desire to promote an interest in STEM among other students, particularly those currently underrepresented in STEM classes. She plans to make teaching others a part of whatever career path she ultimately follows.

“There are so many students who feel they can’t excel even though they have that potential, so it’s important to me to be able to provide those students with the opportunity to explore their potential,” she said. “As a future academician, I am eager to have the opportunity to encourage students of all backgrounds towards the many exciting fields of STEM.”

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