

Local student named U.S. Presidential Scholar semifinalist

For the ninth time in ten years, an Alachua County Public School student has been named a semifinalist in the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, one of the most selective and prestigious recognition programs for high school students.

Aarti Kalamangalam, a senior at Eastside High School, is one of just 625 semifinalists in the nation. She was invited to apply for the program based on her high college entrance exam scores. She then had to go through a rigorous application process, submitting essays, self-assessments, details of her extra-curricular activities and her transcripts.



“My first reaction was that they must have made a mistake,” said Kalamangalam. “But I also feel honored to represent both my school and my city.”

Kalamangalam has an extensive and impressive resume. In addition to her success in Eastside’s International Baccalaureate program, she’s also involved in a wide range of extracurriculars, often in a leadership role. For example, she has organized community projects through the Key Club, a service organization, and is one of the leaders of the school’s Coding Club. She’s also co-director of a statewide non-profit organization called SciTeens, which aims to help underrepresented succeed in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, math). She’s currently developing a course on physics and data science.

But one of Kalamangalam’s favorite activities is working with Teen Trendsetters, a districtwide program that pairs high school students with elementary-age children who need help in school. This year she’s mentoring a Shell Elementary School online. She’s also tutored students at Eastside.

“I’ve always been really big into teaching,” said “I come from a long line of teachers so I feel it’s in my blood. I really like the idea of uplifting people through education.”

Kalamangalam credits teachers at Eastside for helping her and her fellow students consider broader community and social issues.

“We’re taught to think beyond ourselves,” she said. “I think that’s a huge part of growing up, just being a better person.”

Kalamangalam is now eligible to be named a U.S. Presidential Scholar, one of just 161 in the country. Three Alachua County Public School students have been recognized as Presidential Scholars in the last ten years, including 2020 Scholar Helena Jiang from Buchholz High School.

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