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*Mission Statement: We are committed to the success of every student!*

**NEWS RELEASE**

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For Immediate Release

***Two local students take first-place awards at State Science and Engineering Fair; third student headed to international competition***

Nine students who earned recognition at the regional and state Science and Engineering Fairs will be honored at a special ceremony this week at the University of Florida.

Those students include Akash Verma, a junior at Eastside High School who won first place in the senior division of the state science fair, which was held last week in Lakeland. His project, which won the top award in the Biomedical and Health Sciences category, is entitled ‘Evaluating the efficacy of certain high altitude plant extracts in the strategies for potential chemoprevention—a radiochromic film colorimeter guided approach.’ That project also won special recognition from the US Air Force and earned Verma an \$80,000 scholarship from the Florida Institute of Technology.

Abhith Kasala, an 8<sup>th</sup>-grader at Lincoln Middle School, took first place in the state competition’s junior division for an Earth and Environmental Science entry called ‘Global Plastic Pollution.’ Kasala also earned special awards from the Sierra Club of Florida, NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and is now a nominee for the 2022 Broadcom MASTERS competition, which places him among the top 10% of middle school science fair competitors nationwide.

Verma and Kasala will be joined at this week’s ceremony by BHS junior Himel Bamzai-Wokhlu, who will be representing the district at the 2022 Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair in May at Atlanta, GA. Bamzai-Wokhlu earned the trip to the international competition by taking top honors in the Alachua Region fair in February with her project ‘COVID 19 Detection on Chest X-Ray Using an Enhanced Neural Network.’ That project was also recognized at the state competition by the Florida Foundation for Future Scientists.

The other students who will be recognized at this week’s ceremony include:

Junior Division: Audrey Hertel, Westwood Middle School; Maggie Gao, Lincoln Middle School; Surya Vaddiparti-Varma, Lincoln Middle School.

Senior Division: Luke Xu, Buchholz High School; Benjamin Joseph, Eastside High School; Angela Gao, Buchholz High School.

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