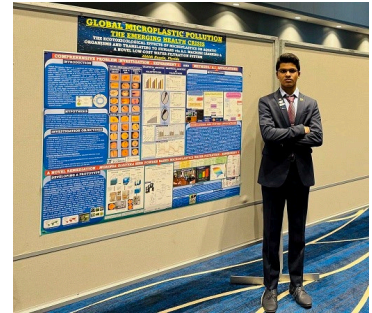


## **Gainesville High student headed to International Science and Engineering Fair**

Gainesville High School student Abhith Kasala will be representing Alachua County in the International Science and Engineering Fair in May after earning top honors in the Alachua Regional Science and Engineering Fair.

Kasala, a sophomore, won first place in the Environmental Science Senior Division and Best in Show for high school students. His project, entitled 'Ecotoxicological Effects of Microplastics on Aquatic Organisms and Novel Extraction Methods of Microplastics in Water Filtration,' is focused on measuring and limiting the harmful impact of plastics and other elements on zebrafish embryos.



Kasala says the results of his study are extremely relevant to humans. Microplastics in the human body can lead to serious health issues, including obesity, diabetes and cancer, among others.

Kasala has been researching the impact of microplastics and other contaminants in water for several years. An earlier version of his work earned him a first place in Florida in the prestigious Stockholm Junior Water Prize competition, which draws tens of thousands of entries from 15- to 20-year-olds from more than 40 nations. He's also won awards in other venues, including the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium and the Health Occupation Students of America competition.

"I've been interested in this since the first time I went to a beach and saw how much plastic pollution there was and how long it took to degrade," he said.

Besides researching the problem of plastic pollution, Kasala has also been developing possible solutions. His latest is a method of using seed powder, a plant extract, which successfully removes 99% of microplastics and other contaminants from water. He's currently collaborating with a non-profit in Africa on how to put his work into practice. He's also continuing his research with the support of a researcher in the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Kasala is currently enrolled in both the Cambridge Program and the Academy of Health Professions at Gainesville High. He's planning a career in medicine in both research and clinical settings.

"Ultimately my goal is to become a surgeon and continue working in the lab," he said. "I can use my research to help patients suffering from the effects of microplastics."

Kasala is one of 20 Alachua County students who will go on to represent the district in the Florida State Science and Engineering Fair in early April. That group will also include Lincoln Middle School 8<sup>th</sup>-grader Maggie Gao, who earned multiple prizes in the Alachua Fair. Her project, 'Removal of Lead from Water by Phosphate Modified Biochar,' won first place in the Environmental Engineering category for middle school students, was named a finalist in the Thermo Fisher Innovative Challenge, and took Best of Show honors in the middle school category. Gao will also be moving on to the state competition.

*(more)*

The other students who have qualified for the State Science and Engineering Fair are:

Junior Division:

Dun'marion Orié, Mebane Middle  
David Cowart, Ft. Clarke Middle  
Gwendolyn Wendling, Westwood Middle  
Ivan Shorter, Ft. Clarke Middle  
Charlize Moghaddam, Lincoln Middle  
David Rong, Lincoln Middle  
Kaayana Sharma, Lincoln Middle  
Aradhya Kasala, Howard Bishop Middle  
Jaganesh Ramkrishnan, Lincoln Middle  
Pranav Mannam, Lincoln Middle  
Gavin Xie, Lincoln Middle

Senior Division:

Nathan Wei, Buchholz High  
Gyanna Gao, Eastside High  
Shiven Sharma, Eastside High  
James Jiang, Buchholz High  
Luke Xue, Buchholz High  
Sophia Rong, Buchholz High  
Hamza Khan, Gainesville High

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