



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2024

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U-46 Students Recognized for State Achievements in Illinois Science Olympiad and eSports Series

Planetarium teacher also honored for award

ELGIN - Twelve U-46 students who earned first place during statewide competitions, the Illinois Science Olympiad and the eSports Series, were recognized by the Board of Education Monday with "Accent on Achievement" certificates.

Also Monday, the Board recognized Peggy Hernandez, who has served for the last 13 years as the teacher at the U-46 Planetarium. She received the Educator of the Year award in the Elementary/Early Childhood category during the Kane County Regional Office of Education's annual Kane County Educator of the Year awards banquet on May 3.

U-46 had teams from Eastview Middle School, Elgin High School, and Ellis Middle School travel to the campus of the University of Illinois in April to compete in the Illinois Science Olympiad's State Tournament. Science Olympiad is an enrichment program offered before- or after-school that covers all areas of STEM. Students work with each other to learn, explore and build in the areas that they choose to study.

This was the 10th year that U-46 had schools compete in the Science Olympiad.

A team from Elgin High School, Ben Hall-Skank and Chloe Horn, both seniors, finished first in the ecology portion, and Chloe Horn paired with

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Emily Lureau, a senior, to take first place in geological mapping. The EHS coach is science teacher LeRoy Reinke.

A team from Eastview Middle School consisting of Aadi Mehta and Reece King, both 8th graders, finished first in the "Write It Do It" category. Their coach is science teacher Heather Flick.

Reece and Aadi said competing in Science Olympiad has been fun, especially because of how many of their friends also participate.

"I can go to each practice, have time with my friends but also be working on Science Olympiad, and then go to the invitational, regional, and state competitions, and see how all that hard work paid off," Aadi said.

Ellis Middle School, coached by science teacher Holly Yee, won the "Spirit Award" for middle schools at the state competition; they were nominated by other teams, coaches and event supervisors for having a positive attitude, exemplifying teamwork, and having respect for the rules and their fellow competitors.

Also honored Monday night were seven Elgin High School students who won the IHSA's eSports state championship competing in the Mario Kart 8 Deluxe game. Also known as electronic sports, eSports is facilitated through computer gaming and usually takes the form of organized, multiplayer online video game competitions.

The winning EHS students are Sebastien Balmeo, a freshman, Luis Ortega and Feliciano Rendon, both sophomores, Jackson Santana and Elena Macias, both juniors, and Dominic Alvarado and Jose Lopez, both seniors. Their coach is James Keathley, a speech-language pathologist at EHS, and assistant coach is Ryan Graff, a school social worker at EHS.

The IHSA hosted the inaugural eSports State Series in 2022, and EHS has sent students to the state finals each year since then.

When arriving at EHS as a freshman, Jackson said he was amazed to learn that there was a competitive eSports team he could join. He's now the team captain, and he said the team's strength is their communication skills.

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“We work really well together, we synergize, we talk about what we can work on, how we can solve these problems,” Jackson said. “We always try to find the answer to all of our questions, and we just really work together as a team.”

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School District U-46 serves families in 11 communities: Bartlett, Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood and Wayne, as well as portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago. In total, the District encompasses 90 square miles within the Fox River Valley, approximately 45 minutes west of downtown Chicago, and includes communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. More than 34,000 preschoolers through 12th graders attend the 55 District schools and programs. To learn more, visit the U-46 [website](#), or like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).