

## Gainesville High student named Sunshine State Scholar, to be honored at state ceremony

Gainesville High School junior Alex Maruniak remembers that as a first-grader, he would listen to his 4<sup>th</sup>-grade sister repeat the multiplication tables and ended up memorizing them himself that way. He's loved math—and other subjects--ever since.

“Learning new things and making new connections still excites me, especially in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields,” he said.

Maruniak's passion for all things STEM has helped him earn a number of honors in those fields. Most recently he was named a Sunshine State Scholar, and will be recognized along with other Scholars from around the state at a ceremony in Orlando next week.



The Sunshine State Scholar Program, established twenty years ago, honors the state's top 11<sup>th</sup>-graders in STEM subjects. During a two-day conference, Scholars also have the opportunity to meet with representatives of Florida's universities, and learn about post-secondary opportunities in STEM-related fields.

“Being chosen is a testament of your commitment to academic excellence,” wrote Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart in a letter to the 2017 Scholars. “You should take great pride in being among this elite group.”

Maruniak has a lengthy resume of academic achievement. In 2015 he made the world's highest score on the rigorous Cambridge Math exam, and that same year made the nation's highest score on the Cambridge Physics exam. He earned the highest possible score of 36 on the ACT and an impressive 1510 on the PSAT.

He was a member of the highly-successful math team and Lincoln Middle and has been on the GHS math team since he was a freshman, including stints as the team's Algebra II and Calculus coach, subjects in which he has also tutored fellow students. He's won a number of both team and individual math competition awards. He's also taken advanced math courses at the University of Florida.

Maruniak says the skills he uses to solve math problem have real-life applications.

“You have to look at the problem, manipulate it, find patterns,” he said. “I think that's really valuable because that's the way problem are going to come to you in the real world. You have to see things in ways other people can't see them.”

While he loves his STEM studies, Maruniak has also found time for other interests, including swimming, theater and public service. And while he hasn't yet finalized his college plans, he wants to major in architectural engineering to make life better for others. That includes the close relatives he has in Bolivia, a country that struggles with poor water quality and inconsistent electricity, among other issues.

“These are things most Americans take for granted,” he wrote in his essay for the Sunshine State Scholar Program. “Being able to help change lives that are so close to mine while applying STEM-related information would truly be an incredible career.

Maruniak says he'd also like to put his education to work to address climate change.

“It is critical that my generation take action to solve this crisis,” he wrote. “I hope to be one of those who does.”

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