

Three local students named semifinalists in prestigious national science competition

Alachua County Public School students continue to distinguish themselves at the national level in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.

Three local students have been named semifinalists in the 2018 Broadcom MASTERS competition, considered one of the most prestigious STEM competitions for middle school students. The competition is sponsored annually by the Broadcom Foundation and Society for Science and the Public.



Gainesville High School freshman Janani Kumeran, Buchholz High School freshman Anjana Balachandar and Lincoln Middle School 8th-grader Akash Verma are among the 300 Broadcom finalists from throughout the nation. The three students qualified with projects they submitted during the 2017-18 school year, when they were all enrolled at Lincoln.

Kumaran was recognized for her project 'Integrated Control of the Invasive Aquatic Plant Hydrilla Using Snails and a Plant Growth Regulator.' Balachandar was honored for a project called 'The Behavior of Bent Backbones.' Verma was named semifinalist for a project called 'Boosting Cognitive Skills: An EEG Study.'

Both Kumaran and Balachandar were named Broadcom semifinalists last year as well. In fact, all three of this year's semifinalists have extensive records of high achievement in science. Kumaran, Balachandar and Verma all took first place awards in the Florida Science and Engineering Fair in 2017, and Kumaran and Balachandar followed that up with first place awards at the state fair in 2018, while Verma took fourth place in that event.

Multiple Alachua County Public School students have been named semifinalists in the program every year since its inception in 2011. Altogether 25 ACPS students have been recognized as semifinalists.

To qualify for consideration in the Broadcom MASTERS competition, students must be top performers at science fairs across the country. They must then submit an extensive online application which is reviewed by expert judges. Besides providing information about their projects, the students must also submit information about their other academic achievements, extracurricular and other activities. They must also respond to essay questions that allow them to demonstrate their creativity.

Thirty of the 300 national semifinalists will be selected as finalists later this month. Those selected will travel to Washington, DC in October to compete for more than \$100,000 in prizes.

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