

ASLA's Second Junior High Science Contest

December 5th, 2023

The Atlantic Science Links Association (ASLA, <http://atlanticsciencelinks.dal.ca/>) held its second Junior High Science Contest for students in grades 7, 8, and 9 across Nova Scotia on December 5th, 2023. ASLA is a charitable science promotion organization that coordinates outreach programs for students in grades primary to twelve.

ASLA's President, Arunika Gunawardena, and the Board saw a need for science engagement in Nova Scotia junior high students. This is Nova Scotia's first science contest of its kind and was introduced to challenge junior high students and have them engage with science. Questions were submitted by faculty members, graduate students, and research associates in Dalhousie's Faculty of Science as well as by Engineers Nova Scotia. The multiple-choice questions were narrowed down to 40 questions per grade.

A total of 1281 students from 20 schools across the province registered for this exciting challenge. Thousands of exam papers and answer sheets were mailed out to schools and all students completed the test on the same day, at a time during the school day that worked best for their school. All tests were mailed back to ASLA, were organized, and submitted for grading. At each grade level, the top ten scoring students as well as the top scoring student within each participating Regional Centre for Education were identified and invited to attend an awards ceremony.

The awards ceremony took place on May 25th, 2024 at Dalhousie University's Life Science Centre and Steele Ocean Science Building Atrium. The top scoring students, their parents and families, and teachers were all invited to attend. ASLA's administrative assistant, Samantha Beal, served as the MC for the event. The ceremony opened with a Mi'kma'ki land acknowledgement by ASLA's Executive Director, Rajesh Rajaselvam. Arunika Gunawardena then addressed the crowd, explaining her inspiration behind the contest and expressing her astonishment and joy at the participation numbers and the remarkable achievements of the students. She then shared a statement from the Honourable Becky Druhan, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, who congratulated the students on their impressive accomplishment.

Next, Chuck Macdonald, Dean of the Faculty of Science at Dalhousie University, spoke to the audience, urging the students to remain involved in science and to work towards safeguarding our natural environment. Andy Fillmore, the Member of Parliament for Halifax, also congratulated the students and voiced his enthusiasm for their accomplishments and ASLA's efforts to engage Nova Scotian students with scientific pursuits.

The invited speaker, Michaela Kimber, who is a medical student in Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine, delivered a talk entitled "Where Science Can Take You." She inspired the award winning students by sharing her scientific journey to-date. Throughout her presentation, she encouraged the students to seek out and follow scientific opportunities and reflected on the trials, tribulations, and successes she has encountered along her own journey.

The presentation of awards began with the top-ten students in Grade 7. Andy Fillmore and Chuck Macdonald presented the certificates to these students, along with cash prizes for the top three-scoring students. Ellianna Lee achieved the third highest score for Grade 7 students while Senuth Assalaratchy and Sadie MacLachlan tied for first place. Mark Johnson, Dalhousie's Department of Biology Chair as well as ASLA Board members James Brenan and Heidi McKnight-Whiteford presented the awards to the top-scoring Grade 8 students, with the top three-scoring students receiving cash prizes. There was a three-way tie between Benjamin Cameron, Kaishue Du, and Dev Gupta for first place.

Arunika Gunawardena and Rajesh Rajaselvam, presented the awards to the top-scoring Grade 9 students, with the top three-scoring students receiving cash prizes. There was a tie for second place between Bryn Kershaw and Kiran Shortliffe while Harsimrat Chouhan achieved the top score.

ASLA's Executive Director, Rajesh Rajaselvam finished the ceremony by offering his closing remarks and thanks to all who helped to make the contest possible – especially the participating students and their families. The ceremony was followed by a reception which offered a chance for students and their family members to mingle and enjoy some refreshments. We would like to thank our funding partners, Dalhousie University's Faculty of Science, Engineers Nova Scotia, and NSERC's PromoScience as well as our generous volunteers, especially Ben Caron and Clara Hamm from the Gunawardena Lab, for ensuring the success of this event.

We are very pleased with how the contest went overall. Some of the comments we received are:

***“We are truly grateful for this fantastic opportunity you have provided for our children.
Thank you for doing this work”***

“ASLA's work to promote outreach is impressive. Keep up the excellent work”

***“Great work. Keep records to determine how many students who participated in this contest
were inspired to do a science degree after graduating high school”***

***“We really enjoyed the ceremony; it was nicely done. Thanks for all your work and for making
the day special”***

***“Thank you for everything you did and thank you for the chance to give us a chance to know
this great association”***

“ASLA's services to students and science teachers in NS are invaluable”

Award-Winning Students

Grade 7

- 1st place:** Senuth Assalaratchy (Bedford Academy), Sadie MacLachlan (Dartmouth South Academy)
- 3rd place:** Ellianna Lee (Dartmouth South Academy)
- 4th place:** Liam Connolly (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Laina Francis (Dartmouth South Academy), Adelaide Knox (Dartmouth South Academy)
- 7th place:** York Unterhitzenger (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax)
- 8th place:** Lucas Santilli (Madeline Symonds Middle School), Carson Snelgrove (Dartmouth South Academy), Finley Wilson Morris (Dartmouth South Academy)

Top score in Chignecto-Central RCE*: Khadija Bhutta (Dr. W.A. MacLead Academy)

Top score in Independent schools: Senuth Assalaratchy (Bedford Academy)

Top score in Halifax RCE: Sadie MacLachlan (Dartmouth South Academy)

Top score in South Shore RCE: Gabriel Divecha (Devi International Boarding School), Aditi Patel (Devi International Boarding School)

Top score in Strait RCE: Jordan Hensbee (Chedabucto Ed Centre/Guysborough Academy), Angus Scarisbrick (Chedabucto Ed Centre/Guysborough Academy)

Grade 8

- 1st place:** Benjamin Cameron (Dr. W.A. MacLead Academy), Kaishue Du (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Dev Gupta (Park West School)
- 4th place:** Simon Belliveau (Dartmouth South Academy), Noah Godfrey (Chedabucto Ed Centre/Guysborough Academy)
- 6th place:** Haley Hartling (Frank H. MacDonald Academy), Emily Hirtle (Bedford Academy), Micky Liang (Armbrae Academy), Zachary Rainault (Dartmouth South Academy)
- 10th place:** Alexander Billard (Dartmouth South Academy), Alex Bruce (Dartmouth South Academy), Alexis Croft (Dartmouth South Academy), Olivia Gogan (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Ramswarup Gunji (Park West School), Niranjana Kir (Devi International Boarding School), William Mulvihill (Armbrae Academy), Robert Petrie (Armbrae Academy), Eric Saweczko (Park West School), Charlotte Stewart (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Vanier MacLean (Armbrae Academy)

Top score in Independent schools: Kaishue Du (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax)

Top score in Halifax RCE: Dev Gupta (Park West School)

Top score in Chignecto-Central RCE: Benjamin Cameron (Dr. W.A. MacLeod Academy)

Top score in South Shore RCE: Niranjana Kir (Devi International Boarding School)

Top score in Strait RCE: Noah Godfrey (Chedabucto Ed Centre/Guysborough Academy)

Grade 9

- 1st place:** Harsimrat Chouhan (Cobequid Education Centre)
- 2nd place:** Bryn Kershaw (Horton High School), Kiran Shortliffe (Cobequid Education Centre)
- 4th place:** Priya Corthaut (Devi International Boarding School), Asari Crane (Cobequid Education Centre), Gracelyn Lu (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Finn Paster (Horton High School), Ella Squires (Horton High School), Gracie Wentzell (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Vihaan Zalpuri (Park West School)

Top score in Annapolis Valley RCE: Bryn Kershaw (Horton High School)
Top score in Cape Breton-Victoria RCE: Riley Swan (Riverview High School)
Top score in Chignecto-Central RCE: Harsimrat Chouhan (Cobequid Education Centre)
Top score in Halifax RCE: Vihaan Zalpuri (Park West School)
Top score in Independent schools: Gracelyn Lu (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax), Gracie Wentzell (Sacred Hearts School of Halifax)
Top score in South Shore RCE: Priya Corthaut (Devi International Boarding School)
Top score in Strait RCE: Katie Macdonald (Chedabucto Ed Centre/Guysborough Academy)

*RCE = Regional Centre for Education

Pictures















