

ATLANTIC SCIENCE LINKS ASSOCIATION



ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

2019

ASLA's First Junior High Science Contest Receives Overwhelming Support

ASLA held its first Junior High Science Contest for students in grades 7, 8, and 9 across Nova Scotia on April 24, 2019. 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, postdoctoral researchers, graduate students, and research associates in Dalhousie's Faculty of Science. The multiple-choice questions were narrowed down to 40 questions per grade.

A total of 1957 students from 29 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 were identified and invited to attend an awards ceremony. Additionally, the top 5% of students at each grade level were added to the Honour Roll.

OUR SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Classroom presentations
Speakers for career fairs
Science fair judges
Science mentors
Workplace visits
Field trips
Science contests
Workshops for teachers



(Nick Pearce photos)



The awards ceremony took place on June 8, 2019 at Dalhousie University's Steele Ocean Science Building Atrium. The top ten-scoring students from each grade level, their parents and families, and teachers were all invited to attend. ASLA's administrative assistant, Clare Snow, served as the MC for the event. The ceremony began with an address from Arunika Gunawardena, in which she noted her inspiration for creating the contest and her amazement at both the number of students who participated and the amazing success of those students. Dalhousie University's Faculty of Science Dean, Chris Moore, addressed the audience next and encouraged the students in attendance to continue engaging with science in many ways and to work towards protecting our natural world. Andy Fillmore, Member of Parliament for Halifax, congratulated the students and shared his excitement about the success of the students and ASLA's work to engage Nova Scotian students with science.

Invited speaker, Jaime Wertman, who is a PhD student from the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine, delivered a talk entitled "How I learned that I have always been a scientist." She inspired the award-winning students by recapping her scientific journey and reflecting on how seizing opportunities as a child and young student helped to mold her into the scientist she is today.

The presentation of awards began with the top-ten students in Grade 7. Chris Moore presented the certificates to these students, along with cash prizes for the top four-scoring students. There was a tie for second between Sasha Fillmore and John Hamil, with the top score at Grade 7 being obtained by both Devin Huang and Ashton McNamara. Paul Bentzen, Dalhousie's Department of Biology Chair, and Patrick Ryall, retired professor from the Faculty of Earth Sciences, presented the awards to the top scoring Grade 8 students. The top three-scoring students in Grade 8 received cash prizes. Rory Clyburne and Eric McClean tied for second place, while Lila Gechtman was the top-scoring student for Grade 8. Arunika Gunawardena and James Brennan, ASLA board member, presented the awards to the top scoring Grade 9 students. The top four-scoring students in Grade 9 received cash prizes. There was a tie for third place between William MacDonald and Kyle Smith. In second place was Will Cooper, and the top-scoring student in Grade 9 was Isabel Casey.

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. 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 as well as our generous volunteers, especially members of the Gunawardena Lab for ensuring the success of this event.

TEACHERS' COMMENTS

"Impressed with this afternoon's award ceremony and delighted to have been there to celebrate. It is great to have such an initiative! I look forward to future such events – well done and thank you to all involved"

"Thanks again for an awesome awards ceremony last Saturday. We were so impressed with the results!"

"Thanks again to you and your team providing this great experience!"

"We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the contest and enjoyed the experience"

"Thanks again for providing such an exciting opportunity for our Middle School students!"

- Junior-high Teacher



Science contest award ceremony: A. Clare Snow (*Admin/ASLA*), B. Arunika Gunawardena (*President/ASLA*), C. Chris Moore (*Science Dean, Dalhousie*), D. Andy Fillmore (*MP/Halifax*), E. Jaime Wertman (*Guest speaker*), F. Rajesh Rajaselvam (*Executive Director/ASLA*)



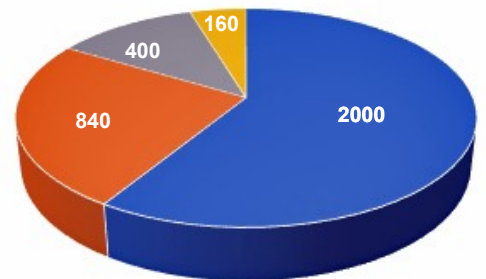
Highschool students' visit to Biology labs at Dalhousie

ACTIVITIES OF ASLA IN 2018/19

ASLA REACHES 3400 STUDENTS

SITS volunteers reached nearly **840** students by 23 classroom presentations (8 biology, 5 geology and earth science, 5 physics, 3 environmental science and 2 health science) throughout the 2018/19 school year. ASLA's judges participated in 10 science fairs including the South shore and Halifax regional fairs and the Nova Scotia Science showcase. **400** students benefited from this. In addition, nearly **160** students (100 high-school and 60 junior-high) were hosted by ASLA's volunteers in three different field trips to Dalhousie's Biology department for hands on cell biology labs, demonstrations of DNA extraction and advanced microscopy, ocean science virtual reality and greenhouse tour. As the highlight of the year, nearly **2000** junior high students from all over the province registered for the science contest conducted by ASLA. All the activities of ASLA reached nearly **3400** students in the 2018/19 school year.

Number of Students Reached



- Science contest
- Science Workshops
- Science Fair Judging
- Field/Lab Visits

ASLA WELCOMES REQUESTS FROM SCHOOLS AND MORE VOLUNTEERS TO JOIN

SITS provides several services (listed on the front page), but our most popular by far is the Speakers' Bureau. Through the Speakers' Bureau, we assist schools in finding volunteer scientists and innovators to speak to students across the province. And the best part is, **it's completely free!** So you can bring exciting, hands-on science learning into your classroom at no charge. To get a Request Form or to find out more about the Speakers' Bureau go to <http://atlanticsciencelinks.dal.ca> or contact us by email.

Strong volunteer commitment helped us to contact nearly two thousand and six hundred students in Nova Scotia. Science outreach initiatives at universities, federal and local government departments, research organizations and industries added some strength to our volunteer base as new groups linked with SITS to strengthen their ability to connect to P-12 teachers. With the increasing demand we still need more volunteers (especially in rural areas of the province) to reach many more students. To register yourself as a volunteer, please go to <http://atlanticsciencelinks.dal.ca> or contact the Executive Director at sits@dal.ca.

Contact Us

Rajesh Rajaselvam, Executive Director

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We are on the web and Facebook
<http://atlanticsciencelinks.dal.ca>

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ASLA

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Clare Snow, Dalhousie University (2018/2019)

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OUR SPONSORS

ASLA continues to receive funds from NSERC's PromoScience grant, Dalhousie University and Engineers NS. We display our funders' logos here to thank them for their generous support and encouragement of science literacy and outreach in Nova Scotia. If you are interested in becoming one of our sponsors, please contact the Executive Director at sits@dal.ca.



"INVEST IN SCIENTIFIC LITERACY OF NS YOUTH"