

Top Performing STEM Students Selected as Sunshine State Scholars

Participating School Districts



Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

Patrick L. McDaniel, Executive Director

Calhoun
Franklin
Gadsden
Gulf
Holmes
Jackson
Jefferson
Liberty
Madison
Taylor
Wakulla
Walton
Washington



Heartland Educational Consortium

Tom Conner, Executive Director

DeSoto
Glades
Hardee
Hendry
Highlands
Okeechobee



North East Florida Educational Consortium

James Surrency, Ph.D., Executive Director

Columbia
Flagler
Gilchrist
Lafayette
Levy
P.K. Yonge
Putnam
Union

Florida's top performing STEM students were recently recognized as Sunshine State Scholars and given the opportunity to attend a two-day event in Orlando, February 21 – 22, 2013. It was an event that could possibly change the course of their future as they learned why Florida is the best place to learn and pursue an exciting career.

Each school district throughout Florida selected their top 11th grade student based on their academic achievement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). These students, along with their parents and a teacher chosen by each student, were invited to participate in the annual Sunshine State Scholars program. The Sunshine State Scholars program is sponsored by the Florida Education Foundation, in collaboration with the State University System of Florida, the Florida College System, and the Florida Department of Education.

Among those being honored this year were 17 students from the small and rural school districts participating in the *FloridaLearns Stem Scholars* Initiative for Gifted and Talented Students. The *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project is funded through the Florida Department of Education's Race to the Top award and involves a partnership among Florida's three educational consortia, which provide critical educational support services to Florida's small and rural school districts. The consortia are Panhandle Area Educational Consortium in northwest Florida, Heartland Educational Consortium in south central Florida, and North East Florida Educational Consortium in the northeast part of the state. The project is focused on affording increased access to rigorous STEM courses, providing collaborative problem-solving experiences, and ensuring students are well-informed about STEM career options.

In addition to recognizing their academic success, the Sunshine State Scholars program gave these STEM students the opportunity to meet directly with highly successful professionals from STEM-related industries in Florida, and with recruiters from Florida's finest colleges and universities. During the event, the students heard about special programs of study and industry internship opportunities, learned about some of the latest innovations and discoveries in STEM-related research, were inspired by personal success stories from leaders in Florida's STEM industry, and were actively recruited to become part of Florida's future talented workforce. The scholars also enjoyed meeting with students from around the state who have similar interests in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Jathan Martin, *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* participant representing Franklin County Schools, commented, "Today we have joined other students from around Florida to experience and explore different options for future endeavors. We plan on using these experiences to better our futures." He said his favorite STEM Scholar activity so far had been "the Summer Challenge when we did robotics at FSU."

Meaghan Sapp, the Sunshine State Scholar from Gadsden County, stated, "I love being one of *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars*. I've enjoyed being here [at the Sunshine State Scholars program]. I can't wait to see what else is in store, and I have loved every STEM challenge I have faced. I can't wait for more!"

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Ashlin Morgan, STEM Scholar from Lafayette County, said she plans on going into the medical field, “perhaps specializing in pediatric cardiology.” She shared, “I have really enjoyed the STEM Scholars program. It has allowed me to be in touch with a lot of students who are like me in that they have an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It has made me feel as if there are other people like me who are striving to have only excellence in their future. It has also opened up possible career choices and has allowed me to look at different schools that I might not have considered.”

Exciting futures are ahead for all of the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* participants. Special congratulations go to those who were named as 2013 Sunshine State Scholars!



FloridaLearns STEM Scholars are pictured at the Sunshine State Scholars Program in Orlando with Florida's Commissioner of Education Dr. Tony Bennett.

Back Row (L-R) Patricia Lewis, Holmes; Mattie Bass, Glades; John Hilton, Taylor; Benjamin Jones, Flagler; Seth Goodwin, Gulf; Brandon McKee, Okeechobee; Commissioner Bennett, Luke Bauer, Walton. Front Row (L-R) Ashley Adams, Putnam; Addison Aubry, Hardee; Jathan Martin, Franklin; Ashlei Yates, Liberty; Ashlin Morgan, Lafayette; and Meaghan Sapp, Gadsden.

Not pictured: Caleb Bundy, Columbia; Sergio Villafuerte, DeSoto; Sade Awe, Hendry; Alexandra Patron, Madison.

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Jathan Martin, Franklin County, with Commissioner Bennett



Meaghan Sapp, Gadsden County, with Commissioner Bennett



Ashlin Morgan, Lafayette County, with Commissioner Bennett