

Science Olympiad at SIUE boasts increased participation, student success

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EDWARDSVILLE - **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville** was abuzz on Saturday, Feb. 13, as more than 450 students from 21 area schools demonstrated their advanced science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills at the annual Science Olympiad regional tournament.

This year's tournament boasted one of the highest levels of participation in the region's history. Participating students traveled from as far north as Mount Pulaski and south as Carbondale to compete in the day's interactive, hands-on events.

Participants have been preparing since October to compete in such events as the Air Trajectory, Disease Detectives, Bridge Building, Elastic Launch Glider and more.

"For the Elastic Launch Glider you build a glider and try to get the longest amount of air time you can possibly get," explained Aiden Toohey, a seventh-grade student from Pontiac Junior High. "It takes a long time to build the glider and get it trimmed, but it's really fun!"

"I want to be an engineer so this gives me some experience in the field," added Aiden's partner, 8th grade student Cameron Jackson.

Parents and coaches agreed this extra-curricular activity gives students an opportunity to expand their knowledge of STEM topics.

"It's not just theoretical," said Chris Levrault, science teacher at Mascoutah High School. "The students get to apply what they do in class. By giving them ways to experiment and tinker, these students can develop their skills and find a love for science, versus simply memorizing things."

"While this event is a tournament or competition between students at different schools, the most important outcome of the day was that it provided students with the opportunity to learn more about STEM topics and affiliated careers through interaction with professionals in these fields," said Mike Avara, regional director of Science Olympiad. "At the same time, students were able to meet peers interested in the same topics and learn how various questions and engineering problems can be approached from different perspectives."

"I love science, and it's really cool to be around people at my same academic level," said Kaitlyn Jennings of Mascoutah High School. "I feel challenged here."

SIUE's event is one of nine regional competitions in the state. Leading teams from each regional tournament will advance to the State Tournament held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on Saturday, April 16.

Those from SIUE's event advancing to the state tournament include:

Division B (Middle School)

Division C (High School)

1st Place – Millstadt Consolidated School 1st Place – Sacred Heart Griffin High School

2nd Place – Mascoutah Middle School 2nd Place – Edwardsville High School

3rd Place – Pontiac Junior High 3rd Place – Collinsville High School

4th Place – Belleville West High School

5th Place - Mascoutah High School

6th Place – Belleville East High School