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DeWitt, IHS Win Big at NYS Technology Competition

Around Town Written by Mark Chao



Teams from DeWitt Middle School and Ithaca High School (IHS) brought home a busload of awards from the annual New York State Technology Student Association (NYSTSA) competition. Now they have set their sights on bigger things at the national level.

The NYSTSA competition was held at SUNY Oswego on April 17. It involved 29 events, from extemporaneous speech to video game design. Several events required design and performance competitions for structures and vehicles, including bridges, cranes, catapults, gliders, CO₂-propelled dragsters, and solar cars. Individuals and groups from DeWitt and IHS won first place in 11 events and second in 10.

Earning first place in all four of the events he entered, DeWitt 8th-grader Felix Shi was named NYSTSA Student of the Year for the middle-school division. Shi is gratified but quick to share the credit. "Winning shows that all of my hard work preparing has paid off," Shi says. "But since most of my events were team events, my teammates deserve a lot of the recognition too."

Now DeWitt and IHS TSA members are preparing to go to the national TSA competition, to be held in Dallas from June 28 to July 2. Over 7,000 students from 49 states and several countries are expected. Perennially, both IHS and DeWitt are among the top competitors at TSA nationals. (DeWitt's Francesca Chu, now at IHS, won first place in the Essays on Technology event at the TSA national competition in 2014.)

The national TSA gathering is a transformative opportunity for students. "It's not only a competition, it's also very social," notes Shi. "Students come from around the world. It is very easy to strike up a lengthy conversation with someone from Germany! And when I am surrounded by such creative and dedicated people, it influences me to also think outside the box."

Bob Walters, who heads the DeWitt team with fellow teacher Dave Buchner, agrees that TSA is about much more than traveling, competing, and winning. "The beauty of technology engineering education," says Walters, "is that students really develop 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, engineering process, technology literacy, leadership, and teamwork. Students can easily see the fruits of their labor, which builds their motivation and engagement. And this skill development and engagement are especially strong in TSA."

DeWitt and IHS students will be pulling late nights from now through June to prepare for TSA nationals. Meanwhile, faculty advisors and parents are busy raising funds and managing logistics to make the trip possible. The IHS group, under the direction of faculty advisor Bill Sauve, has prepared a video crowdfunding campaign.

Shi and all TSA members from both schools are grateful for the support. "We love TSA and work hard at it," he says. "But we know it all depends on help from our teachers, parents, and donors. We're going to do our best in Dallas to make everyone proud. And then in the future, hopefully we'll use our skills to give even more back to the community."

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