



'Iolani School (left) and Highlands Intermediate (right) students took first place in their respective divisions at Hawai'i State Science Olympiad's state finals last month. PHOTOS COURTESY THOMAS MILLARD



# FULL STEM Ahead

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*Hawai'i State Science Olympiad wrapped up its season last month, but 'Iolani and Highlands Intermediate students are pressing on in preparation for nationals next month in Colorado.*

Science-savvy students from two O'ahu schools will make their way to the Mainland next month for the 2018 Science Olympiad National Tournament, slated for May 18-19 at Colorado State University. It's the culmination of a whole season of hard work, but the teens from 'Iolani and Highlands Intermediate schools have proven themselves up to the task.

Both placed in their respective divisions at the recent Hawai'i State Science Olympiad finals in March, and now are in the midst of preparing to up their games for the national tournament.

The pressure is on for these local students, who will have to master a myriad of activities ranging from biology and chemistry to unmanned vehicles, alternative energy, basic engineering, architecture and more. Events span an expansive array of expertise, which means the students must be well-rounded in their scientific knowledge and execution.

'Iolani coach Narayan Raja, who leads the winning high school team along with co-coach Jason Tanaka, says there's only one way to prepare for nationals — hard work.

"Kids from Hawai'i can do really well at nationals," Raja adds. "We should have a mindset that people from California and Texas should be scared of us, rather than vice versa."

Raja has been heading up the 'Iolani program for a number of years, and under his guidance, students have placed first in the HSSO high school division seven out of eight years. Also jetting off to Colorado next

month are Kathy Lin and her Highlands Intermediate students, who also have a stellar track record at the state finals. Lin's students have taken the middle school state title for seven years — only twice has another middle school team won.

"They work so hard, and competition was quite stiff this year," says Lin. "I've been doing this for a long time, and I've seen a lot of STEM programs, but the kids have worked the hardest. They're in class every day, after school, studying at night and on weekends. It's nice to have validation that hard work pays off."

While 'Iolani and Highlands Intermediate are two of the more seasoned schools who take part in HSSO every year, there are new schools joining in the fun with every season that passes. Add in the elementary program, and it takes a lot of manpower to ensure the event remains successful. (The O'ahu Elementary Science Olympiad takes

place May 12 at Mililani High.)

HSSO relies solely on the efforts of its volunteers from the board of directors to coaches, event judges and day-of helpers.

"It's really a good community of people who are looking to foster STEM education for our keiki," says HSSO president Thomas Millard. "We have this large and growing base of volunteers, including students who have gone through the HSSO program, gone to college, and now are in their own careers and want to be involved."

It's a testament to the impact HSSO has with everyone involved.

HSSO has grown since its inception about 15 years ago, and now

boasts upward of 2,500 students that participate every year.

"The whole idea of the program is to give our students as broad a spectrum outside of their normal school curriculum to the STEM disciplines," says Millard. "There are many programs in Hawai'i that focus on a single topic like engineering, mathematics or robotics, and they're great programs, but unless a child really has a strong focus or desire and aptitude for that one area, we think having a broader-based program serves the greater community."

*For more information and to find out how to get involved with Hawai'i State Science Olympiad, visit [hssso.org](http://hssso.org). For more information on Science Olympiad, visit [soinc.org](http://soinc.org).*

## COMMENDABLE COACHES

Hawai'i State Science Olympiad could not succeed without the volunteers who donate their time and resources, and it's especially true of the coaches who dedicate countless hours to their teams. This year, Kim Strong (top) of La Pietra and Tina Chan of King Intermediate took home the titles of high school and middle school coaches of the year, respectively. Strong was instrumental in getting the girls school involved in Science Olympiad when she transferred to the



institution in 2013. While she's honored to be recognized as high school coach of the year, Strong's focus is on her students. She's

proud of her girls, to say the least, and is happy that La Pietra takes STEM seriously.

"They're allowing me to have applied STEM during the day as an elective," she says. "We're going to be big competition next year."

Chan is relatively new to HSSO, but her dedication hasn't gone unnoticed. Her recognition as middle school coach of the year comes in her second season heading up a team at King Intermediate. Chan coached her first team in 2015, but the interest started when her son was enrolled at Highlands Intermediate. (Fun fact: Highlands Intermediate won the middle school division this year.)

King Intermediate's program is one of the newer competitors within HSSO, and Chan is hoping that it continues to thrive.

"The best part about kids being involved in Science Olympiad is that they develop great critical thinking skills, which they can use anywhere," she says. "They also develop confidence."