



Science Champions

Fairfield Jr. High has dominated the state-level Science Olympiad for 24 consecutive years



(All photos courtesy of Fairfield Jr. High)

Above » The Fairfield Jr. High Science Olympiad program has dominated the state championships since 1995/1996, the school's second operating year.

STEM STANDOUTS » It's reasonable to say that Fairfield Junior High School ranks well beyond "fair" in the annals of Utah public school competitive science. Having claimed 24 consecutive first place finishes at the state Science Olympiad — one for every year of its existence — the school has earned its stripes as "outstanding."

The secret to its success can largely be credited to Mr. Dennis Erickson, the science teacher who started the program in the school's 1993-94 inaugural year. Not only did his pilot team make it to the state competition — they claimed 3rd place. And every year since then, they've dominated as 1st place contenders.

What's even more astounding is the school's dominance the past two years, following Mr. Erickson's retirement in 2017: Since then, the program has been run solely by parent volunteers.

This year, more than 20 parents dedicated hundreds of hours to help students

Right » Students work on the project that advanced them to the Science Olympiad Finals.



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compete in 23 events, with challenges such as:

- building and racing a battery buggy
- fossil identification
- experiment design
- applying epidemiology to disease outbreaks deemed Public Health risks
- interpreting meteorology
- thermodynamics ... and so much more.

Leilani Merrell served as the head coach this past year, having had four of her children participate in the Science Olympiad. She's volunteered her time to the program for 9 years.

"I am so grateful we've been able to keep this program going," Leilani said. "This year, I [had] 29 students in my care who have a passion for science. If this passion is stoked and they choose to work at it, every single one of them can become a scientist of some kind. Every one."

The reason parents are willing to dedicate countless hours is because Science Olympiad events excite students about learning math and science, which positions them to engage in STEM opportunities down the road.

"Mr. Erickson received an email from a former student who has finished his medical residency and credits his interest in medicine to his participation in the Science Olympiad," said parent volunteer Anna McFadden.

Anna – who will be taking over as head coach for the 2019/2020 school year – was among the group of parent chaperones who accompanied the Fairfield Jr. High Science Olympiad Team to the National Science Olympiad at Cornell University in June.

There, Fairfield's varsity team went up against the top 60 of 7,300 teams from 50 states. They tackled 23 standards-based events in physics, engineering, biology, earth-space science, and chemistry.



The Fairfield Jr. High School Team placed 39th overall at the 2019 National Science Olympiad, held at Cornell University in June. Pictured, left to right, starting at back row: Team members Ethan Ott, Zack Kingston, Jonathon Wait, Joseph Johnson, Carter Hurst, Jacob Johnson, Brandon Burton, Emery Barrus, Warren King, Trienne Merrell, Sean Auger, Brenna Sullivan, Breanna Mertens, Laila Westover and Genevieve McFadden, accompanied by supportive sister Lilly Hurst (not on the team).

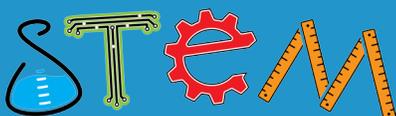
“The future of our country comes down to investing in these kids.”

— DENNIS ERICKSON
FAIRFIELD JR. HIGH SCHOOL
SCIENCE OLYMPIAD PROGRAM FOUNDER

In the end, they came out 39th in the nation. Fairfield's notable placements : 13th place: Crime Busters (Trienne Merrell, Brenna Sullivan); 13th place: Potions and Poisons (Breanna Mertens, Emery Barrus); 17th place: Write It/Do It (Warren King, Genevieve McFadden); and 20th place: Dynamic Planet (Jacob Johnson, Joseph Johnson).

“The future of our country comes down to investing in these kids,” said Mr. Erickson, the man behind the marvel. “They are our inventors, creators, future engineers and doctors. We need to spend time putting emphasis on those kids and making the world a better place.”

Special thanks to Anna McFadden, Leilani Merrell and Dennis Erickson, and congratulations to the Fairfield Jr. High team!



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