

Burton Valley Elementary Odyssey of the Mind team wins State Championship



Photo provided

Front row: David Siu, Raini Chugh, Lauren Brekke, Sophia Moore; back row: Sanika Khamkar, Olivia Parker, Pareesha Chopra

Submitted by Doug Parker

Burton Valley Elementary School's Odyssey of the Mind

Team A took first place in its division for their performance of "Laundry Land" in the Odyssey of the Mind state tournament. Guided by Coaches Maia Siu and Anna

Stubbington, the team won the state competition that was held virtually due to the pandemic.

Beginning in October of 2020, the fifth-grade team met

weekly to select and work on their long-term problem. The team chose problem 5, Super-hero Socks: A Cliffhanger Beginning, a story of a Super-hero in peril that begins with a cliffhanger "ending," but finds a pair of Super Socks that give the hero a special power. The team then continued to design how they would solve the problem and incorporate the predetermined elements into their play. During the winter the team created the parts, wrote the script, and built the set. Finally, because of the pandemic, the team filmed their performance live and added an explanatory video on how the components of the performance were put together.

The team placed fourth in the regional competition in March and, along with all of the other regional competitors, they were invited to compete in the State Tournament. Considering the scores they were given in the regional competition, the team

made modifications for the State Tournament where they triumphantly took first place. The team advanced to the World Finals tournament, the results of which will be released later this month.

Odyssey of the Mind is a kid-directed creative problem-solving program involving students from kindergarten through college. Team members work together at length to solve a predefined long-term problem and present their solution to the problem at a competition. They must also participate in the spontaneous portion of the competition by generating solutions to a problem they have not seen before. While the long-term problem solution often takes many months to complete and involves various elements of the theatrical performance, construction and design, the spontaneous portion occurs on the day of the competition. Burton Valley placed first in both the long-term and spontaneous state competition.

Lafayette student creates digital space to keep fellow students connected



Kaveer Gera Photo provided

When the COVID-19 lockdown occurred for 16-year-old Lafayette sophomore Kaveer Gera, he noticed a problem that had arisen at his school after the sudden transition to virtual school: casual connections had been completely and abruptly broken.

"You could no longer ask your classmate about the homework assignment or even make a casual joke as you were walking out of math class. When online class was over, the experience was suddenly and abruptly over," said Gera, who attends Athenian School in Danville. "One moment you were in a classroom with your peers, and the next moment you were in your room alone."

In an effort to repair the problem, Gera configured a digital communication space, which he titled Athenian Community, to replace that casual conversation. "The growth and usage in my school has been incredible, far surpassing my expectations," he said. In the month of May Athenian Community had over 100 members, with students from all four grades. "We even have a majority of the 10th grade," Gera said. "As the pandemic drew relentlessly on, the platform kept us connected and maintained a degree

of normalcy in the most abnormal times we had ever experienced. Instead of being completely isolated, the project helped us stay hopeful and ensured our mental health."

Students, based on their classes, are able to converse with each other in specific places designed for the class. Students have found it immensely useful for getting help for their classes, and the project has served as the best alternative to talking to classmates in person, in addition to helping reduce isolation and boredom during the pandemic. However, Athenian Community has also grown to be significantly more than just communication for classes. "It features a myriad of useful tools for school-related tasks, support for clubs and extracurricular groups, large and reliable administration and moderation teams, and much more," Gera said.

Fundamentally, Athenian Community was created to replace the lost casual connections and communication as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has done that job very well. Even though Athenian Community was invented as a result of the pandemic, Gera believes its usefulness, versatility, and convenience will enable it to continue to be useful to students even after the pandemic subsides.

"Even as we have transitioned to socially distanced in-person school, Athenian Community has remained helpful because the masks, distancing, and limited exposure still inhibit truly natural social interaction," Gera said. "I'm excited to potentially extend the project to local schools in Lamorinda, because I think it could benefit the students just as it benefits the students at my school."

For information, visit student-community.kaveegera.com
- J. Wake

Justice Murals promote social justice from a student's perspective



Photo provided

Campolindo Vice Principal Laura Lee with Campolindo student Carolyn Considine

Submitted by Carolyn Considine

The Contra Costa County Arts and Culture Commission (ACC5) is sponsoring a Justice Murals project led by youth commissioner and Campolindo student, Carolyn Considine. Campolindo students were asked to submit drawings and words about what social justice means to them. The muralist, Jaz Alexander (as an aside, he is Steph Curry's brother-in-law) took these drawings and helped incorporate them into a mural. Other high schools in the county will be participating in this social justice project in the fall, and these murals will travel from

school to school to highlight what social justice means from our students' perspective, across the county and beyond. Campolindo is the first high school to pilot this Justice Wall program, and the high school students of the county voices will shine through.

"Projects such as this are important because they elevate and empower student voices showing solidarity and support. Our work as a school is to ensure our actions support the message conveyed in this project," said Campolindo Vice Principal Laura Lee. "As a school community, we have come together to create change. The road is long and the journey is ongoing but together we can accomplish greatness."

Gold Award project helps first responders during evacuations



Rising Athenian School senior Maddy Kim is working on her Gold Award, which is the highest award a Girl Scout can earn. Over the past two years, the Lamorinda teen learned that there is often confusion during fire evacuations.

"During the Sanders Ranch fire and evacuation last year, I learned that there was a lot of confusion among the residents and authorities about who had evacuated and who had not," Kim wrote on her website. "I realized that it would be more effective if there was a way to notify first responders as to whether or not households had evacuated."

For her project, Kim is making a

double-sided door hanger that can be used during a fire evacuation to make the process quicker and more efficient. "By looking for the door hangers on peoples' doors, first responders will know whether people have already evacuated from their houses or if they need help. My plan is to print enough signs for all the households in Moraga and then enlist help from volunteers to pass them out to everyone. I will also leave extra signs with the police and fire departments and with realty offices so that new Moraga residents can continue to have access to these signs."

Kim is currently working with the Moraga Police Department and Lt.

Brian South, who is also the president of Moraga Rotary. "Working with the Moraga Police Department, I learned about the ways in which they help residents during active evacuations and that there is not an easy way for residents and police officers to communicate, which is what my project would address. I currently have four student volunteers from my school and we will be working all summer and fall to pass the door hangers out, but I am still soliciting volunteers to help me." For information about the project, visit: <https://maddygold21.wixsite.com/evacnow>.

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