

Atlantic Science Links Association (ASLA)'s Third Junior High Science Contest

April 21, 2026 & August 11, 2026

The Atlantic Science Links Association (ASLA) held its third Junior High Science Contest for students in grades 7, 8, and 9 across Nova Scotia on August 11th, 2026. ASLA is a charitable science promotion organization that coordinates free programs and resources for science teachers and students in grades primary to twelve.

ASLA's President, Arunika Gunawardena, and ASLA board members saw a need for science engagement in Nova Scotia junior high students. This is Nova Scotia's first science contest of its kind and was introduced to challenge junior high students and have them engage with science. Multiple choice questions with Nova Scotia science curriculum relevance were submitted by faculty members, graduate students, and research associates in Dalhousie's Faculty of Science. Event organizers Arunika Gunawardena, Rajesh Rajaselvam (ASLA's Executive Director), and Valerie Schagen (ASLA's Administrative Assistant) narrowed down the multiple-choice questions to 40 questions per grade.

A total of 1466 students were registered for the contest, by 27 teachers across 22 schools in Nova Scotia. Schools from all Nova Scotian Regional Centres for Education participated, including 15 public schools and 7 private schools. After registration, 1466 exam booklets and bubble sheets were mailed out to schools. All participating students across the province completed the test on April 21, and teachers mailed the completed tests back to ASLA for grading. Students scoring in the top ten of each grade level were identified and invited to attend an awards ceremony.

The award ceremony took place on August 11th, 2026 at Dalhousie University, in the Chemistry Building, room 125. A reception in the Beaty Centre for Marine Biodiversity followed the award ceremony. Approximately 130 guests attended the award ceremony, including honoured students, and their families, teachers, and principals, ASLA board members, volunteers, and event organizers, as well as several invited guests.

ASLA volunteers Abi Dixon and Sophia Williams welcomed guests as they arrived, and signed them in. The ceremony began with a land acknowledgment from Valerie Schagen, event MC. ASLA's President, Arunika Gunawardena, then welcomed the crowd with an address about her inspiration behind the science contest, and the remarkable achievements of the students. Dalhousie University Chair of the Faculty of Biology, Patrice Côté, then spoke to the audience about the importance of science engagement and outreach in Nova Scotian schools, and encouraged students to continue their pursuit of science. The invited speaker, Anisha Rajaselvam, a medical student in Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine, then shared a powerful presentation about her journey in science, sharing the importance of exploring your options and maintaining your passions in school and beyond.

Next, the certificates of achievement were presented to the top ten scoring students in each grade level. In addition, first and second place students were awarded a cash prize. Awards were presented by Patrice Côté, Angela Crane (Dalhousie University, University Teaching Fellow, Chemistry Department), ASLA Board Members Niel Ross, James Brennan, Patrick Ryall, and Heidi McKnight-Whitford, as well as Rajesh Rajaselvam and Arunika Gunawardena.

ASLA's Executive Director, Rajesh Rajaselvam finished the ceremony by offering his closing remarks and thanks to all who helped to make the contest possible – especially the participating students and their families. The ceremony was followed by a reception which offered a chance for students and their family members to mingle, enjoy light refreshments, and explore the newly opened Beaty Centre for Marine Biodiversity.

We would like to thank our funding partners, the National Research Council of Canada, Dalhousie University's Faculty of Science, and Engineers Nova Scotia, as well as our board members and wonderful volunteers, for ensuring the success of this event.

Award Winning Students

Grade 7

1st place: Solomon Rodriguez, *New Glasgow Academy*

2nd place: Henry Pierce, *Armbrae Academy*; Niko Karountzos, *Armbrae Academy*; Haashicka Nagarajdee, *Park West School*; Chris Jiang, *Rocky Lake Junior High*

6th place: Kenan Reddick, *New Glasgow Academy*; Sophie MacDougall, *New Glasgow Academy*

8th place: Morgan Fang, *Armbrae Academy*; Khian Mills, *New Glasgow Academy*; Liam Usher, *New Glasgow Academy*; Zaxton Bond, *New Glasgow Academy*; Aiden Parsons, *New Glasgow Academy*; Reo Grant, *New Glasgow Academy*; Cullen MacLean, *New Glasgow Academy*; Brian Grason, *Rockingstone Heights School*

Grade 8

1st place: Nathan Crowell, *Bedford Academy*; Flynn Webster, *Dr. W.A. MacLeod Consolidated School*; Ella Weatherby, *New Glasgow Academy*

4th place: Amadeus Massey, *Armbrae Academy*; Olivia Mackie, *New Glasgow Academy*; Vwede Akpogumg, *Rockingstone Heights School*

7th place: Ryan Murray, *Central Kings Rural High School*; Dana Milley, *New Glasgow Academy*; Caroline Spicer, *New Glasgow Academy*

10th place: Osler Ha, *Armbrae Academy*; Travis Karr, *Armbrae Academy*; Sawyer Thistle, *Churchill Academy*; Piper Scott, *Central Kings Rural High School*; Helena Machado, *DEVI International*; Sebastian Smakota, *DEVI International*; Casey Averill, *New Glasgow Academy*; Noah Mackenzie, *New Glasgow Academy*; Mysha Ariffbasha, *Park West School*; Chloe Rogers, *Park West School*

Grade 9

1st place: Ryland Grant, *Highland Park Junior High School*

2nd place: Levi George, *Caledonia Junior High*; Nathaniel Andrew, *Caledonia Junior High*

4th place: Laudy Elamiouni, *Armbrae Academy*; Andrew Nadour, *Bedford Academy*; Jahvias Dealsmith, *Churchill Academy*; Noel Perdhiku, *Highland Park Junior High School*

8th place: James Burke, *Armbrae Academy*; Henry Brown, *Churchill Academy*; Jordan Hendsbee, *Chedabucto Education Center /Guysborough Academy* ; Jaykob Barkhouse, *Hebbville Academy*; Jovan Gbesiagbe, *Rocky Lake Junior High*

Comments from teachers and parents:

"The contest gives students the chance to challenge themselves, apply their scientific knowledge and problem-solving skills, and engage with science beyond our regular classroom activities."

"The event made participants feel valued and recognized for their hard work, further encouraging their interest in science and learning"

"For many students, opportunities such as this can be an important step toward developing confidence and a genuine interest in pursuing further studies in science and engineering."