



Catholic schools shine at University of Utah Science & Engineering Fair



March 27, 2026

Utah Catholic Schools students swept the top three podium spots in the Physics, Astronomy & Math category at the 2026 University of Utah Science and Engineering Fair, held March 10-13.

Abigail VanDongen of St. Olaf Catholic School took first place in the category for her forensic study on the physics of blood stain patterns at crime scenes.

Isabella Martinez, also a St. Olaf student, secured second place with an in-depth investigation into electromagnetic induction – the physics behind how modern

electricity is generated. Taking third place was Michael McLachlan from St. John the Baptist Middle School, who designed and tested a system for magnetic braking.

Students from Utah Catholic Schools were particularly well-represented in the top rankings at this year's University of Utah Science & Engineering Fair. The event, held March 10-13, drew 793 students from across the state. Students from Utah Catholic Schools garnered a total of 44 awards, with several winners receiving more than one award.

Taking top honors was Judge Memorial Catholic High School senior Ethan Bo, who received the USEF Director's Award. He was also named a Grand Prize winner and will be the sole representative from Utah Catholic Schools among the six students selected to represent the Salt Lake region at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair.

Other Catholic school prize recipients came from St. John the Baptist Middle School, which had 16 winners; Juan Diego CHS, with seven; J.E. Cosgriff Memorial, with six; St. Olaf, with four; St. Vincent de Paul, Our Lady of Lourdes and Judge Memorial, with three each; and Blessed Sacrament, with two.

The list of winners from Utah Catholic Schools follows.

Elementary Division

Mackenzie Doveton, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Behavioral & Social Sciences, Scientific Merit

Mya Gill, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Chemistry & Biochemistry, Scientific Merit

Diarmuid Arndt, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Civil & Energy Engineering, First Place

Naya Alharethi, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Scientific Merit

Maddox Peirce, Blessed Sacrament: Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Scientific Merit

Sienna Andersen, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Mechanical & Materials Engineering, Fourth Place

Lincoln Enright, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Medicine & Health Sciences, Scientific Merit

Emma Ashby, Blessed Sacrament: Physics, Astronomy & Math, Scientific Merit

Junior Division

Haylin Chong, St. Vincent de Paul: Behavioral & Social Sciences, Scientific Merit

Bella Newton, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Biology, Microbiology, & Genetics, Third Place

Ella Lanspa, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Biology, Microbiology, & Genetics, Fourth Place

Aviran Rahman, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Biology, Microbiology, & Genetics, Scientific Merit

Aidan Joe, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Biology, Microbiology, & Genetics, Scientific Merit

Madison Fairchild, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Chemistry & Biochemistry, Scientific Merit

Smera Nair, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Civil & Energy Engineering, Scientific Merit

Ashley Taylor, St. Vincent de Paul: Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Second Place

Molly Smith, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Scientific Merit

Lev Burtsev, Our Lady of Lourdes: Environmental Sciences & Engineering, Scientific Merit

Catherine Fuller, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Medicine & Health Sciences, Second Place

Haven Harding, Our Lady of Lourdes: Medicine & Health Sciences, Scientific Merit

Emmaline Sloan, Our Lady of Lourdes: Medicine & Health Sciences, Scientific Merit

Ruby Newlin, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Medicine & Health Sciences, Scientific Merit

Abigail VanDongen, St. Olaf: Physics, Astronomy & Math, First Place

Isabella Martinez, St. Olaf: Physics, Astronomy & Math, Second Place

Michael McLachlan, St. John the Baptist Middle School: Physics, Astronomy & Math, Third Place

Eva Arellano Zhorova, St. Olaf School: Physics, Astronomy & Math, Scientific Merit

Lauren Hildebrand, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Plant Sciences, Third Place

Kole Shotwell, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Plant Sciences, Fourth Place

Senior Division

Olivia Newton, Juan Diego CHS: Biomedical Engineering & Health Technologies, Fourth Place

Becket Evans, Juan Diego CHS: Chemistry & Biochemistry, Fourth Place

Ethan Bo, Judge Memorial CHS: Mechanical & Materials Engineering, First Place

Maximus Widmaier, Juan Diego CHS: Physics, Astronomy & Math, Fourth Place

Grand Champion and Special Awards

Ethan Bo, Judge Memorial CHS: Regeneron ISEF Grand Champion Winner and USEF Director's Award

Katherine Lanspa, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial: Office of Naval Research Award

Olivia Newton, Juan Diego CHS: Office of Naval Research Award

John Dzieciolowski, Juan Diego CHS: Office of Naval Research Award

Christiana Cortes, Juan Diego CHS: Society for In Vitro Biology Award

Smera Nair, St. John the Baptist Middle School: U.S. Air Force Award

Jaeden Pena, Juan Diego CHS: U.S. Air Force Award

Diarmuid Arndt, St. John the Baptist Middle School: ThermoFisher Junior Innovators Challenge

Ashley Taylor, St. Vincent de Paul: ThermoFisher Junior Innovators Challenge

Abigail VanDongen, St. Olaf: ThermoFisher Junior Innovators Challenge

Catherine Fuller, St. John the Baptist Middle School: ThermoFisher Junior Innovators Challenge