Students from the Highland Park Middle School competed against Students In Action participants from other middle schools across the state by comparing projects, efforts and outcomes. At the end of the day, Highland Park won by getting the highest combined score with their oral and written reports. (Special to NJ.com)

A group of students at the Highland Park Middle School know the value of hard work and helping others through community service.

The students were among the first of several middle schools to compete in the Jefferson Awards Students In Action program. As members of SIA, the students have spent the past year working on community service projects that saw them collecting a food for those in need, helping women suffering from domestic violence, raising money for children with leukemia, honoring the police and more.

On April 30, the Highland Park Middle School students competed against other Students In Action participants from other middle schools across the state by comparing projects, efforts and outcomes. At the end of the day, Highland Park won by getting the highest combined score with their oral and written reports.
During the past year, the students raised $2,300 for various causes, collected 1,600 pounds of food, served 30 meals, collected and donated 25 pieces of clothing, 25 blankets and touched the lives of about 300 individuals. (Special to NJ.com)

New Jersey was the first state to allow middle schools to compete in the Students In Action program, and is still one of the few states in which they participate. That makes the work of the Highland Park Middle School students all the more impressive, as it clearly made a tangible effort in the community. During the past year, the students raised $2,300 for various causes, collected 1,600 pounds of food, served 30 meals, collected and donated 25 pieces of clothing, 25 blankets and touched the lives of about 300 individuals. In addition, the students plan on collaborating with a school in Delaware for more projects during the summer.

To participate in the program, students attend Students In Action training in the fall and winter and participated in service projects in between, and leading up to the spring competition, where they showcased their work and were scored on key components of their efforts. For this year’s judging, each group was tasked with putting together a six- to eight-minute presentation for a panel. The judges’ scores for the oral reports are averaged and added to the averages from written reports. The written reports ask students to identify how they exemplified the Three Pillars of Students In Action -- leadership, engagement and impact -- while achieving the seven goals of Students In Action: Engage the school community, establish an effective leadership team, expand volunteer capacity, expand financial capacity, tell service stories, grow and expand the mission of SIA and innovate.
But before the project began, students worked together on creating a detailed plan of what they wanted to do and how it would be carried out. Highland Park students met almost weekly and an agenda was set for the year. Throughout the process, SIA students learned that they can, and did, lead effectively, and that with good leadership, there is no limit to what they can accomplish.

Among the organizations helped by the Highland Park Students in Action group are: $1,000 to the Make a Wish Foundation; breakfast for 30 Highland Park Police Department officers; five trunk loads of non-perishable goods for the Highland Park Food Pantry; six, $75 Target gift cards for Highland Park residents; 50 coats and sweaters; $300 for the Union County YWCA; and $525 for Pennies for Patients.

In a report submitted to SIA judges, teacher Cheryl Gloff said the program has helped make students more aware that their actions can have beneficial consequences.
At the end of the day, Highland Park won by getting the highest combined score with their oral and written reports. (Special to NJ.com)

"Hands down, Students in Action has made our students better people," she wrote, "They have become more aware of the many needs of their community and beyond. They have learned how important doing for others is. Most importantly, they have learned that they have the power to help and to persuade others to want to help. They have grown into a very enthusiastic group of students who are very excited about working with other students, coming up with ideas and executing them to benefit others. Every event that they do, brings about more excitement to do more. With what we have learned this year with SIA, next year’s group will have even more knowledge to create more awareness and extend their reach within the community."

The New Jersey State Governor’s Jefferson Awards is a joint program administered by The Community Foundation of New Jersey, NJ Advance Media and The Governor’s Advisory Council on Volunteerism, with support from corporate underwriters. It is a local program of The Jefferson Awards, a national volunteer recognition program established in 1972 by the American Institute for Public Service in cooperation with the U.S. Senate and the White House. Designed to honor volunteers across the country, the Jefferson Awards are the nation’s oldest and most prestigious public service recognition program.
Students at Clearview Regional High School in Mullica Hills are headed to Washington, D.C. to compete in the national Students in Action competition. (Special to NJ.com)

Forty-six students from Clearview Regional High School in Mullica Hills are headed to Washington, D.C. to show the country how they have impacted the area positively as members of Students in Action.

As members of the Jefferson Awards Students in Action, the students had spent much of the previous year working with their fellow high school classmates on community service projects that saw them educating the community about the needs of fellow residents, raising, collecting and distributing food those in need, and volunteering with community service projects.

On April 30, the Clearview students competed against other Students in Action participants from other high schools across the state by comparing projects, efforts and outcomes. At the end of the day, Clearview won by getting the highest combined score with their oral and written reports. Clearview is preparing a second report to use as part of the national competition where it will compete against the top regional schools from around the country.

The top three schools will be honored with bronze, silver and gold medals for third second and first place, respectively. Clearview Regional High school also was the top New Jersey school last year. By winning the region two years in a row, they will join the ranks of Washington Township as an Ambassador School for Students in Action.
Action next year. As an Ambassador School, Students in action will compete with other Ambassador teams from around the country and take on additional responsibilities locally and nationally.

The Clearview team has made a tangible impact over the past year, impact, raising $116,953 in donations; logging 18,357 service hours for the entire school; collecting 2,639 pounds of food; serving 70 meals; collecting 416 items of clothing; donating 120 pints of blood, collecting and donating 2,232 hygiene items; collecting school supplies; recycling; and taking part in a variety of service projects. Their efforts impacted 10,000 individuals.

To participate in the program, students attend Students in Action training in the fall and winter and participate in service projects in between, and leading up to the spring competition, where they showcase their work and are scored on key components of their efforts. At the end of the competition, the top scoring middle and high school from New Jersey is named, with the top high school going to Washington, D.C., to compete for a national bronze, silver or gold medal.

For this year’s judging, each group was tasked with putting together a six- to eight-minute presentation for a panel. The judges’ scores for the oral reports are averaged and added to the averages from written reports. The written reports ask students to identify how they exemplified the Three Pillars of Students in Action -- leadership, engagement and impact -- while achieving the seven goals of Students in Action: Engage the school community, establish an effective leadership team, expand volunteer capacity, expand financial capacity, tell service stories, grow and expand the mission of SIA and innovate.

During the April competition, Clearview received an overall rating of 72.57 out of 75. This year, Clearview’s Students were determined to ensure that the community was impacted in the most beneficial way possible. Working on the previous year’s idea of "Educating Our Community," the group expanded its efforts by "planting the Seed" of education into every individual involved, according Clearview’s written report. The team also worked off the previous year’s success by concentrating on its most important service projects and improving and expanding them.
Those projects included Hoagies for Home, Pack the Bus, and the Halloween Breakfast Hoagies for Hope: Jason Garwood and Jackie Guht led the project this year, mentoring two underclassmen on how to run the event, from planning to execution. The event raises money to help local children pay for their medical expenses. This year four members of the Clearview community were chosen as the beneficiaries of the event. These children suffer from varying medical illnesses. Hoagies were sold for $10 and 1,800 hoagies were sold for a total of $22,000 raised, including $4,720 from sponsorships. In addition, Clearview's Hoagies for Hope partnered with Polar Plunge for the first time and raised an additional $10,000.

Pack the Bus: Worked to educate the community about food insecurity while also collecting food for those food-insecure students in the school and community. The effort has attracted the attention of a local food pantry, which wanted to join in helping those in need. Students in Action donated food to the pantry and teamed with it to serve meals.

Halloween Breakfast: To help spread awareness for AWAKEN Kibera, the humanitarian studies class developed a campaign throughout the school to better educate those on the living conditions in the slums of Kibera, Kenya. By selling cutout pumpkins with different facts about Kibera on them, the Halloween Breakfast was able to not only raise funds for AWAKEN Kibera, but more importantly educate the community about the problems facing these adolescent girls today.

Among the organizations helped by the Clearview Students in Action Group are the 4-H Fairgrounds, the American Cancer Society, Adam Taliaferro Foundation, American Red Cross, Blue Jeans Go Green, Clearview HS Library, Covenant House, Gloucester County Library System Gloucester County, Harrison Township Elementary Schools, Inspira Medical Center, Mantua Township Elementary Schools, Mantua Township Parks, March of Dimes, Ronald McDonald House Southern New Jersey, Soldiers' Angels UNICEF, Urban Promise and the Wiley Christian Retirement Community.

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-- John Saccenti
On April 30, hundreds of Students in Action participants from across the state gathered at iPlay America in Freehold to compare their projects, efforts and outcomes. (Special to NJ.com)

Students celebrate a year of service, compare efforts and outcomes at iPlay America -- Jefferson Awards names NJ student national representatives

In the current school year, 488 Students in Action student leaders involved 5,009 peer students in service teams. Those students raised and donated an amazing $344,460 and logged 202,510 volunteer service hours; donated 42,454 pounds of food; served 15,435 meals; and collected and donated 200,324 non-food items. Their efforts impacted an estimated 123,954 New Jersey individuals.

On April 30, hundreds of Students in Action participants from across the state gathered at iPlay America in Freehold to compare their projects, efforts and outcomes. These students were among the best and brightest of New Jersey, and as members of the Jefferson Awards Students in Action, they’d spent much of the previous year working with their fellow high school classmates on community service projects. On this day, they were about to see the culmination of their work when they were judged by a panel to see which school would move on to represent New Jersey at the national ceremony in Washington, D.C.
The Jefferson Awards has many ways to affect change and public service, particularly in America's students. (Special to NJ.com)

To participate in the program, students attend Students in Action training in the fall and winter and participate in service projects in between, and leading up to the spring competition, where they showcase their work and are scored on key components of their efforts. At the end of the competition, the top scoring middle and high school from New Jersey is named, with the top high school going to Washington, D.C., to compete for a national bronze, silver or gold medal.

This year, Highland Park Middle School was the top-scoring middle school and Clearview Regional High School was the top scoring high school. Students there are already working on their national competition materials.
The Jefferson Awards has many ways to affect change and public service, particularly in America's students. One of those ways is *Students in Action*, which works to develop high school students into community leaders. Active in communities across the U.S., the program encourages teenagers to positively impact their schools, communities and world.

For this year's judging, each group was tasked with putting together a six- to eight-minute presentation for a panel that included Heather Tedesco, New Jersey regional executive director for the Jefferson Awards; Laura Sodono-Beausoleil, of Community Food Bank of New Jersey; Linda Rivera, the Governor's Office on Volunteerism; Sgt. First Class Michael Smith and Sgt. Jelissa Torresrosa of the Freehold Army Career Center; Josh Aronovich, adviser for Ambassador School - Washington Township; and Allison Gracie and Benjamin Curwin, students from Washington Township.

The judges' scores for the oral reports are averaged and added to the averages from written reports. The written reports ask students to identify how they exemplified the Three Pillars of *Students in Action* -- leadership, engagement and impact -- while achieving the seven Goals of *Students in Action*:

1. Engage the school community
2. Establish an effective leadership team
3. Expand volunteer capacity
4. Expand financial capacity
5. Tell service stories
6. Grow and expand the mission of SIA
7. Innovate

The presentation and judging event was sponsored in part by the New Jersey
branch of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. Thanks to their generosity, the event was held at iPlay America in Freehold, where students from northern and southern New Jersey could compete on the same day. It also made it possible for the students to enjoy the amusement park and attractions at iPlay, which they did by playing video games, going on rides and taking advantage of everything else available.

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