

NORTHSIDE NEIGHBOR

FEATURED

Brookhaven, Buckhead, Sandy Springs, Vinings STAR students, teachers honored by foundation

- Bill Baldowski
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The importance of education and the need for students to strive to reach a plateau of excellence in the classroom has been a building block of America since it was founded in 1776.

One of the country's founding fathers and the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, knew the importance and value of education when he said, "Let us, in education, dream of an aristocracy of achievement arising in a democracy of opportunity."

It is that same philosophy the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE) has embraced when it honors, during each academic year, each participating school with the foundation's Student Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) awards.

This award is presented to students whose standardized test scores elevate them to the highest 10 percent of their senior class.

According to Lynn Varner of the STAR program lead support team, which guides the program, its mission is to recognize Georgia's highest-achieving high school seniors, as well as the teachers who have been most instrumental, in that student's eyes, in helping that student achieve academic notoriety.

According to the [STAR program website](#), this recognition program was launched almost 60 years ago by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. In 1994, the PAGE Foundation was invited to coordinate the program in association with the chamber and the Georgia Department of Education.

"The 86,000-plus members of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators are honored to recognize Georgia's future leaders and the professional educators who have nurtured these students," Varner said in a news release. "Since the inception of the program, more than 24,000 STAR students and teachers have been honored."

The state's overall STAR teacher receives \$2,500 and the state's first runner-up STAR teacher receives \$1,000.

However, the focal point of the STAR students and teachers at each school is that member of the senior class who has excelled in the classroom while also taking part in school extracurricular activities, and the teacher they choose.

This year's STAR students are: Julia Platt, Atlanta Girls' School; Yourong Gene, Brandon Hall; Parrish Studebaker, Campbell High School; Maxwell Palisoc, Galloway School; Nina Plotko, Ben Franklin Academy; Jack Patterson, Holy Innocents' Episcopal School; David Sullivan, Holy Spirit Preparatory School; Abby Shlesinger, The Lovett School; Jack Maley, Marist School; Ariel Strode, Mount Vernon Presbyterian School; Richard Hill III, North Atlanta High School; Jarred Coffsky and Eric Miller, North Springs Charter High School; Harrison Lewis, Pace Academy; Nick Poulos, Saya Abney, Riverwood International Charter School; St. Pius X Catholic High School; Rosa Brown, The Weber School; Kelsey Rappe and Daniel Baisier, Wesleyan School; Phoebe Liu and Alan Xu, Westminster Schools; Evan Gossett, Whitefield Academy; and Arjun Srinivasan, Woodward Academy.

***Editor's note:** Three schools in the area—Atlanta Country Day School, Cumberland Academy of Georgia and the Howard School—are not participating in the STAR student and teacher program. Information on the STAR students and teachers at Atlanta International School, Chamblee High and Cross Keys High was not available at press time. Those students and teachers will be featured at a later date.*

Here's a closer look at this year's STAR students and teachers:

Atlanta Girls' School

STAR student: Julia Platt, daughter of Stuart and Kathryn Platt

STAR teacher: Jennifer Cockrill, English

Student GPA: 101 on 100-point scale

Student highest SAT score: 1450

Extracurricular activities: varsity volleyball, varsity track, varsity swimming

Awards and honors: National Merit Scholar, AP scholar with honors, Smith College Book Award and Atlanta Girls' Schools' Level Math Award

College choices: University of Georgia, Tulane University, University of Miami

Career path: biochemistry, economics or marketing

Brandon Hall

STAR student: Yourong Gene, daughter of Tao Geng and Xian Tang

STAR teacher: Mike Elenbaas

Highest SAT score: 1410

Extracurricular activities: varsity volleyball, varsity tennis

Awards and honors: Sauls Award for English, highest performance in art

College choices: UGA, UCLA

Career path: industrial engineering

Campbell

STAR student: Parrish Studebaker

STAR teacher: Crystal Kidd

Student information: NA

Ben Franklin

STAR student: Nina Plotko, daughter of Marina and Dimitry Plotko

STAR teacher: Nugzar Davitashvili, AP physics and honors pre-calculus

Extracurricular activities: all-region volleyball player

Awards and honors: awards in AP English language, AP physics, AP U.S. history and AP psychology; Georgia Certificate of Merit, (for being in the top 5 percent of her class)

College choices: plans to attend Georgia Tech

Career path: engineering

Galloway

STAR student: Maxwell Palisoc

STAR teacher: MariaPaola Jimenez, design

Highest SAT score: 1570

Extracurricular activities: volunteer tutor, summer camp counselor

Honors and awards: Georgia Certificate of Merit, AP scholar, National Merit Finalist

College choice: undecided

Career path: mechanical engineering

Holy Innocents'

STAR student: Jack Patterson, son of John and Nancy Patterson

STAR teacher: Meredith Many, math

Highest ACT score: 1530

Extracurricular activities: varsity soccer, French Club, student ambassador

Awards and honors: Cum Laude Society, National Honor Society

College choice: University of Virginia

Career path: undecided

Holy Spirit Prep

STAR student: David Sullivan, son of Daniel and Page Sullivan

STAR teacher: Paulina Faraj, classics

Highest SAT/ACT score: NA

Extracurricular activities: Varsity soccer, altar service, Classics club

Student awards, honors: National Merit finalist, academic gold medal, Furman scholar

College choice: Notre Dame. Harvard, Yale

Career path: undecided

Lovett

STAR student: Abby Shlesinger, daughter of John and Sara Shlesinger

STAR teacher: Heidi Gray, history

Highest SAT score: NA

Extracurricular activities: speech, debate, photography

Awards, honors: member of the National Honor Society, finalist for Governor's Honors Program

College choices: will attend Duke University.

Career path: art and international studies teacher

Marist

STAR student: Jack Maley, son of Tom and Carla Maley

STAR teacher: Jerry Aull, theology

Other information: NA

Mount Vernon

STAR student: Arial Strobe

STAR teacher: Sam Baroody, Latin

Highest ACT score: 36

Extracurricular activities: President, National Honor Society, president of Interact club

Awards, honors: Social Science Department Award, English Department Award

College choice: UGA or Georgia Tech

Career path: analytics and communications

North Atlanta

STAR student: Richard Hill III, son of Richard and Paige Hill

STAR teacher: David Ehrman, math

Student GPA: 103.1

Highest ACT score: 36

Extracurricular activities: robotics team, Parkour (multi-exercise regimen), Mu Alpha Theta math club, Habitat for Humanity

Awards and honors: one of six students in the world to earn a perfect score on the 2017 AP Calculus AB exam; valedictorian; Governor's Honors Program participant in mathematics, National Merit Scholar finalist

College choices: accepted to Georgia Tech and UGA; applied to several schools in California and in the Northeast

Career path: currently exploring career paths in mathematics and physics

North Springs

STAR student (tie): Jarred Coffsky, son of Adam and Amy Coffsky, and Eric Miller, son of Drs. Scott and Mindi Miller

STAR teachers: Coffsky–Rahim Ghassemian, calculus and Miller–Thomas Henderson, Latin

Highest SAT scores: NA

Extracurricular activities: Coffsky–tennis team captain, math tutor; Miller–Latin Club, computer science club

Honors, awards: Coffsky is the school’s valedictorian and Miller its salutatorian.

Pace Academy

STAR student: Harrison Lewis, son of Mark and Kim Lewis

STAR teacher: Jason Smith, math

Highest SAT score: NA

Extracurricular activities: varsity basketball team, math team and missions ambassador

Awards, honors: National Merit finalist, AP Scholar with distinction, food bank volunteer

College choice: undecided

Career path: undecided

Riverwood

STAR student: Saya Abney

STAR teacher: Daniel Gribble, social studies

Highest ACT score: 35

Student extracurricular activities: Raider policy debate team member and founded the Big Questions Debate tournament, AP world history tutor; started a weekly tutoring program for ESOL students and volunteers to coach and judge middle-school debate tournaments through the Atlanta Urban Debate League; member of the National Spanish Honor Society, National Honor Society and National Beta Club

Student awards and honors: National Merit Scholar semifinalist, Georgia Certificate of Merit, AP Scholar, Harvard Prize Book Award winner, selected as a Riverwood VIP by her AP U.S. history teacher; in both 10th and 11th grades, her literature entry in the PTSA Reflections contest won at the school level; her 10th-grade entry was the North Fulton Council level winner.

College choices: University of Virginia, University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University, Columbia University, Emory University, Georgia Tech

Career path: plans to major in physics or aerospace engineering

St. Pius X

STAR student: Nick Poulos, son of Jason and Donna Poulos

STAR teacher: Maria Kepler, Latin

Highest SAT score: 1560

Extracurricular activities: Quiz Bowl, Latin Club, French Club

Honors, awards: NCTE Achievement award for superior writing, Georgia Governor's Honor Program

College choices: University of Virginia, Vanderbilt, UGA, Georgia Tech

Career path: writing, directing, programming

Weber

STAR student: Rosa Brown, daughter of Jeff and Jessica Brown

STAR teacher: Kevin Goldberg, Ph.D., social studies

Highest SAT score: 1580

Extracurricular activities: captain of mock trial and Quiz Bowl teams, co-editor-in-chief of school literary magazine

Honors, awards: National Merit finalist, recipient of the Bernard Ramsey Honors Scholarship at the University of Georgia, Gold Award on National Spanish Exam, finalist for 2017 Georgia Poet Laureate Prize.

College choices: undecided, but considering University of Chicago or University of Georgia

Career path: undecided but has strong interest in law or politics

Wesleyan

STAR students (tie): Kelsey Rappe, daughter of Chip and Megan Rappe, and Daniel Baisier, son of Paul and Suzanne Baisier.

STAR teachers: Rappe–Dawson Zimmerman, world literature; Baisier–Kevin Kadzis, AP U.S. history

SAT, ACT scores: NA

Extracurricular activities: Rappe–president of the student body, stage production acting; Baisier–captain of the History Bowl team

Westminster

STAR students (tie): Phoebe Liu, daughter of Sukai Liu and Jui-Wen Chen, and Alan Xu, son of Jingfeng Xu and Wangui Li

STAR teachers: Liu–Nurfatimah Merchant, math; Xu–Jennifer Dracos-Tice, English

Highest ACT or SAT score: Liu-36 (ACT) and 1570 (SAT); Xu-1570, Superscore: 1580

Student extracurricular activities: Liu-varsity swimming, Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, math team, Mu Alpha Theta, Bi-Line school newspaper, discipline council, music service club; Xu-captain of varsity soccer, club soccer, Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music piano, creative writing (personal publishing/contests), Westminster Science Olympiad, Westminster school publications (Bi-Line, Embryo, Evolutions), Writing Center mentor

Student awards/honors: Liu-Thyrza S. Askew Memorial Award (greatest contribution to all areas of school life), National Merit Finalist, Georgia Certificate of Merit (top 5 percent GPA in class); Xu-National Merit Finalist, National AP Scholar, Bausch and Lomb Science Award

Student college choices: Liu-has been accepted into Yale; Xu-undecided

Student career path: Liu-leaning toward math or computer science as a major; Xu-undecided

Woodward

STAR student: Arjun Srinivasan, son of Muthayyah and Shanthi Srinivasan

STAR teacher: Maggie Berthiaume, debate, intermediate debate and advanced debate

Student highest SAT score: 1570

Student GPA: 4.82 (on 5.0-point scale)

Student extracurricular activities: tutors at the Main Street Academy, honor guard member, STEM Club member.

Student awards and honors: first place in National Spanish Exam, finalist in St. Mark's School of Texas National Debate Tournament.

College choices: Emory University and University of California, Berkeley.

Career path: political science

Whitefield

STAR student: Evan Gossett, son of Robin and Ted Gossett

STAR teacher: Steve Hellier, pre-calculus and calculus

Highest SAT score: 1450

Extracurricular activities: jazz band, marching band, pep band, concert band, per tutoring, Ecuador mission trip, soccer, football

Student awards/honors: Headmasters List, first place in Georgia Tech computer science contest, National Honor Society, Tri-M Music Honor Society

Student college choices: UGA or Georgia Tech

Student career path: engineering