



Friends of Johnston ELP
Supporting the needs of high ability students
in the Johnston Community School District

2022-2023 FJELP Board Members

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Friends of Johnston ELP Spring 2023 Newsletter

...from the desk of
Mandy Dummermuth
FJELP President



The 2022-2023 academic year has been filled with many great achievements and milestones. We encourage you to peruse this newsletter and our Facebook page to catch some of the highlights. Also, our April 10th *Speed Spotlighting: Extended Learning Opportunities* program recording is now available. Learn more on page 4.

We extend special thanks to our ELP teachers and staff who work so hard to serve our students! Please join me in sharing heartfelt gratitude to Molly McConnell, JMS ELP Teacher and ELP Coordinator, who will be transitioning to a new role. Learn more on page 3.

Congratulations and best wishes to the 604 JHS 2023 Graduates, and have a great summer everyone!

Sincerely,
Mandy Dummermuth
Friends of Johnston Extended Learning Program President
Mom to Emma (18), Audrey (15), & Conner (14)

2022-2023 ELP Staff

Kristen Hartman	Beaver Creek	515-278-6228 kristen.hartman@johnston.k12.ia.us
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General questions for the FJELP board?

Please contact us at admin@friendsofjohnstonelp.org

ELP Teacher Spotlight

Mitzi Hetherton

Wallace Elementary
ELP Teacher



How long have you been a teacher and how many years at JCSD?

I have been a teacher since 1990. I began my career teaching science to 4th - 8th grade students. When I started having children, I stayed home for 7 years and got my gifted and reading endorsement during that time. I have taught gifted education ever since! My family has been in Johnston since 2003.

Why do you enjoy working with ELP students?

My favorite part of teaching ELP students is their humor and their ability to have in-depth conversations around a book. I love working along with math students who see ways to solve problems that I may not have seen. I love that ELP students want to learn and are eager to be in class.

What is one of your favorite ELP activities for students?

STEM engineering activities are some of my favorites to do with students because they like to work in teams to solve problems. I also enjoy long term independent research units that have a specific focus, such as Travel Passport and Careers. Students have had so many great experiences interviewing people in their chosen career, such as a local meteorologist, a marine biologist from Oregon, an Imagineer from Disney World, and even sitting down for doughnuts and a chat with the University of Iowa athletic director. For the Travel Passport unit, several families have chosen to use their child's travel plan for their summer vacation, so students see their work as authentic and meaningful!

What is one of your favorite books/tv shows/podcast?

I cannot pinpoint one book, but I love the historic fiction genre. The historic fiction carries over into my tv shows as well, but I also love to watch, rewatch and watch some more *Friends*, *New Girl*, and *Gilmore Girls*. My favorite podcast would be *Bible in a Year* with Fr. Mike Schmitz.

Share a highlight of your teaching career

A highlight of my teaching career is whenever I receive an email from former students saying things like, "Remember when I did that career unit with you in 5th grade? My goal was realized this week when I graduated as a pharmacist!" Any time a student comes back and shares their successes with me, brings me joy.

What advice do you give to parents of high achieving students?

My best advice to parents is to use summer as a time to let their child explore passions and READ. You do not need to push academics in the summer. Let them try an instrument, try cooking classes, art classes, or an Apple store workshop... anything that piques their interest.

Thank you Mrs. McConnell!



Johnston Middle School and Secondary ELP Coordinator, Molly McConnell has accepted a new role with the State of Iowa. The position, *Education Program Consultant- Talented and Gifted*, will allow her to work with school districts, area education agencies, colleges/universities, and any other stakeholders in gifted education to continue to support and improve programming for gifted and talented in the state.

Molly has been an educator for 11 years, first in Ankeny and then moved to Johnston in 2017.

“When this opportunity at the Department of Education came up, I felt that it was too good to

pass up. While I will no longer be on the front lines of teaching, which I will miss greatly, I am excited to be continuing with gifted education in Iowa and I hope to continue to support, advocate for, and improve gifted education on a more global level.”

Molly said she will definitely miss the students and coaching mock trial, but looks forward to judging the competitions. “And of course, I will miss working with all of my colleagues both in my building and in the ELP department, and the amazing supportive Johnston parents. You parents do so much to support our program, and we wouldn’t be what we are without you!”

Cheryl Smith has been hired to take Molly’s teaching position at JMS. She comes to us from Saydel where she was an ELP teacher/coordinator. Nikki Paradise-Williams, current Lawson ELP Teacher and elementary ELP Coordinator, will take on a new role of Instructional Coach - ELP Specialist for the 2023-2024 school year.

Friends of Johnston ELP wishes Molly the best, and sincerely thanks her for all the time she has given to support our program, our students and gifted education at Johnston schools! We will miss you, and hope to see you often at state-wide gifted and talented programs!



Spring 2023 Program

Friends of Johnston ELP would like to extend a sincere **THANK YOU** to all **parents, students and ELP staff** that presented at our **Speed Spotlighting** program on April 10th.

This was the second year that we used this format to present families and students with a ton of great info about a variety of excellent opportunities students can get involved with.

[CLICK HERE](#) if you were unable to attend and want to access the recorded presentations and provided PowerPoint content.

Presenters provided 4 minute overviews on the following topics, organizations and activities: **First Robotics, JMS and JHS Girls in Tech Club, enrichment opportunities at Summit, Odyssey of the Mind, National History Day, Mock Trial, Drama, Speech and Debate, Technology Student Association, National Merit, Academic Decathlon, game and logic puzzles, and summer enrichment.**



National History Day

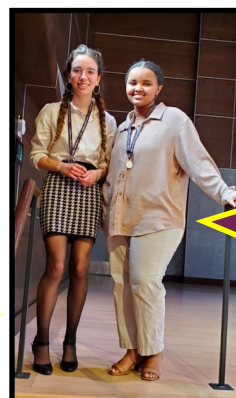
Congratulations to Ahana Devadas and Riona Butler, for their outstanding finish in the State level of National History Day competition. Ahana is one of the two Senior Individual Documentaries that will represent the state of Iowa at the National level competition at the University of Maryland in June. Riona is the alternate in Senior individual Performance, and will attend Nationals if one of the two qualifiers are unable to compete.

National History Day competitors research extensively and prepare an exhibit, performance, documentary, website, or write a historical paper to explain the impact of their chosen subject on history. 2023's theme was **Frontiers in History**. Ahana's project was titled: *Born Under Discrimination: How Jazz Became the Soundtrack of the Civil Rights Movement*. Riona's project was titled: *Figure Skating and Its Impact on American Sports*.

Also competing at the State level were:

- ♦ Junior Group - Abbie Tu and Hannah He - documentary: United Farm Workers
- ♦ Senior Individual - Anna Lu - documentary: Pixar
- ♦ Senior Individual - Akshara Eswar - documentary: Jazz Diplomacy in the Cold War
- ♦ Senior Group - Adonawit Meshesha and Lauren Weber - documentary: New Wave Music
- ♦ Senior Group - Ayden Bejtovic, Andrew Bogues, Shreyas Shrestha, and Kathir Kalyanaraman - website: The Genius of Robert Noyce

Congratulations to all Johnston competitors for a great season of research and learning!



Academic Decathlon

Johnston Academic Decathlon receives 3rd place at State!

Johnston's Academic Decathlon team placed third at this year's state tournament, earning 15 individual medals. In addition to those medals, Hailey DeBruin was honored as the top scoring Scholastic Alternate, and Laura Thangi earned the right to present her speech at the awards banquet, as the top scoring speech in the entire contest.

Academic Decathlon requires each student to experience an interview, speech, and essay, and then take exams over the fields of math, literature, science, economics, art history, music history, and social science. This demanding activity requires significant preparation. These competitors earned the right to represent Johnston at State by being the highest scoring Johnston players at our Regional contest in January. Their strong performance at State led to a berth at online Nationals in April.

Team members and their honors are listed below:

Honors

Peyton Brown: Bronze in Economics, Bronze in Music, 8th overall amongst Honors students

Jackson Liu: Bronze in Economics, Gold in Speech, Gold in Math, 11th overall amongst Honors students

Ben Cramer: Gold in Interview, Bronze in Economics, 10th overall amongst Honors students

Scholastic

Joe Cramer: Bronze in Social Science, Bronze in Music, 4th overall amongst Scholastic students

Emma Jackovin: Bronze in Science, Gold in Math, Gold in Speech, 6th overall amongst Scholastic students

Kaylee Jones (absent 2nd day of competition)

Varsity

Ferren Dickey: 12th overall amongst Varsity students

Laura Thangi: Gold in Interview, Gold in Speech, Performed Speech at Awards, 14th amongst Varsity students

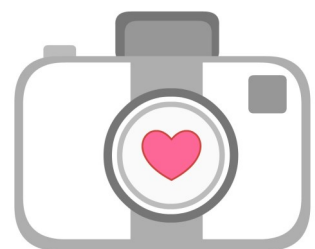
Brooklyn Haller: Bronze in Essay, 8th overall amongst Varsity students

Alternates

Dima Al-Qasi

Hailey DeBruin: 1st overall Scholastic Alternate

Photos next page!



Academic Decathlon



Johnston Middle School ELP News

ELP Class

Projects this semester included: novel writing, learning new languages through Duolingo, virtual art gallery, participating in National History Day and Mock Trial, writing Dungeons and Dragons campaigns, taking online classes, and various art project/portfolios.

New this Semester

As a part of the ELP class, students create the criteria that will be used to grade their projects at the end of the year. To give students and parents a better idea of where a project was in the process, students were asked to grade their projects based on the rubrics they created several times throughout this semester. This evaluation gave a better visual representation of where students were in their project process and how much they had left to do. Each week that students were asked to “grade” their projects, they also gave a reflection explaining why they scored themselves the way that they did.

Now that your rubrics are made, take a look at the areas of your rubric and grade your project as if you had to turn it in today. What grade would you give yourself in each section and why (ignore the last section: self-reflection)?

I think I would get a total of 40/50 right now. In the first category I rated myself an 8 because it requires me to have developed my deductive skills to a certain degree throughout the semester, and I have definitely improved significantly in this area. In the second category I rated myself an 8 because it's about developing my resilience, which I feel I have done to the extent of my expectations, but I can still exceed in this category. In the third category I rated myself an 8 because it asks about how organized my project is, and although I don't have much to organize at the moment the stuff that is organized is organized well. For the reflection journal section I gave myself a 10 because I have filled out all of the reflections so far. For the last category I gave myself a 6 because my project is halfway finished and I still have a bit to go.

I would give myself a beginning in academic learning because I have not completed my website showing my understanding. I would give myself a exceeds in growth because now I can fully understand google sheets and I know how to use it very well. I would give myself a exceeds in student choice because I have completed all of my stats. I would give myself a exceeds in reflection journal because I have completed all of the journals. I would give myself a meeting in rigor/quality of work because I feel like I have met the expectations of a ELP project not exceeded it. The total grade would be 41/50.

Regarding explaining color theory in my project, I'd give myself an 8 at this point, since I can accurately explain it when asked (especially now that I've added all of the colors to my project). As for growth, I'd give myself a 10. This project has definitely had some rocky moments, but I'm not letting that impact me, and making those mistakes into something better. In terms of completion, I'd give myself a 7/7.5. I'm SO close to being done with my project, but I still have touch-ups and one more step. I've completed all of the required reflections, so that's a 10! I'm pretty happy with how the project is at this point in terms of quality, so I'll give myself a 7.5, since there are still a few details left. I think that's all for today!

Johnston Middle School ELP News

Student Spotlights: Law Day

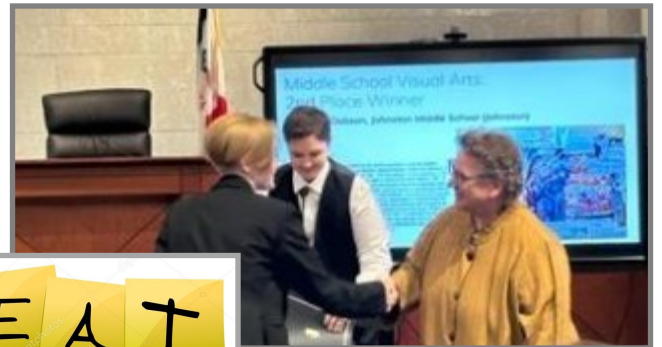
Law Day is a national day of celebration aimed to strengthen the American heritage of liberty, justice, and equality under the law. Law Day is recognized annually on May 1st. Each year, the American Bar Association chooses a theme for Law Day to help foster education and a deeper understanding of the legal system. This year's theme was: "Cornerstones of Democracy: Civics, Civility, and Collaboration."

The Polk County Bar Association holds an annual contest to celebrate Law Day. Students can create projects in visual arts, poetry, essay, performance, or technology to represent the annual theme. Select winners are then recognized at the Law Day Celebration Ceremony.

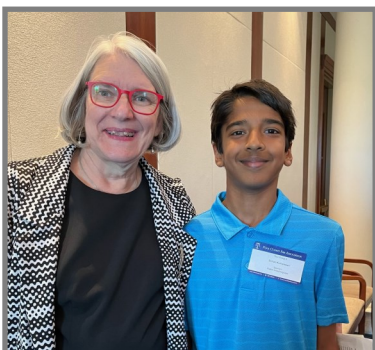
The Law Day Celebration Ceremony was held on May 1st at the Iowa Judicial Branch building in the Supreme Court room. This year 2 JMS students were selected for their visual arts projects. Congratulations to Paige Neighbors (1st place- middle school visual arts) and Adrienne Dobson (2nd place- middle school visual arts)! Summit 7th grader, Srihari Kumaresan, was also awarded for his poem "Don't Pull the Trigger" which will be on display digitally at the [Polk County Bar Association's Law Day webpage](#) for the next year.



Pictured above:
Paige Neighbors and
Adrienne Dobson



Pictured to right:
Magistrate Judge
Celeste Bremer and
Srihari Kumaresan



Summit Middle School ELP

6th Grade STEM

ELP STEM students in sixth grade have learned about the interaction of STEM and art in our studies of Math & Art. Students created their own art using digital fractal creators, drawn fractal applications of math sets, paper origami and kirigami, and virtual reality art interactive programs GoogleBlocks and Tilt-Brush. Students created a portfolio of their learning and their own art creations to summarize and analyze their experiences with Math & Art.

Sixth grade ELP STEM students are also learning about engineering, the scientific method, and physics through creation of Rube Goldberg machines. Students have developed engineering notebooks of their design process, including how to calculate the movement of energy through a system, and recorded their findings onto a group Padlet. This exercise in interactive design allows student groups to design, build, test, take data, and make alterations while they continue to refine their Rube Goldberg creations. Students end the year by applying the tenets of engineering into streamlining a product and learning how patent laws impact this process.



7th Grade STEM

Seventh grade ELP STEM students have researched how using inductive, deductive, and abductive logic can be applied to a variety of forensics fields. Students research forensic argumentation, forensic accounting, genetic forensics, virology, forensic anthropology, and criminal forensics. In small groups students researched a zombie virus simulation and proposed treatment and public health campaigns to slow or stop the disease spread. Students analyze how changes to STEM fields continue to impact the legal ramifications of forensics, especially in criminal forensics. Students chose to research specific aspects of forensic science and share out their learning to the whole class.

ELP STEM students in seventh grade lunar robotics learn about the extreme challenges of building and working in space and on the moon, and use these challenges in their lunar base and robot designs. Small groups of student engineers develop robots for their base and construct them using LEGO and VEX robot kit parts, and practice the iterative design cycle by developing their design, constructing it, testing it and gathering data, make changes for improvement to the design, and begin the cycle again. Final designs are presented whole class for critique before engineer groups would present to their client for a lunar mining base.

All seventh grade ELP STEM students researched the logic and science behind where space satellites, space telescopes, and space observatories are placed in space, why they are in those locations, and how their location benefits their intended job in order to participate in an interactive discussion with Dr. Jason Rhodes, a cosmologist at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, CA. Dr. Rhodes, who grew up in West Des Moines, is the current Chair and a founding member of the Euclid Consortium Board that has developed the Euclid Space Telescope with the European Space Administration (ESA). Euclid is designed to more accurately measure redshift's impact on the acceleration of the universe in order to better understand dark energy and dark matter. We appreciated that Dr. Rhodes gave his time to us, given the Euclid is set to launch from Cape Canaveral in July of this year.

14 Summer Enrichment Opportunities

**this list is not exhaustive of all opportunities, but these did have openings at the time the newsletter was shared*

1. **Johnston Community Ed:** Look for the 2023 Summer Youth Program Guide <https://johnston.ce.eleyo.com/>
2. **Johnston Public Library: Summer Reading Program** A free 8-week long program that encourages children to read & keep their brain active during the summer. <https://www.johnstonlibrary.com/>
3. **Camp Invention: Explore** Camp Invention is a STEM summer camp program held at Summit Middle School. <https://invent-web.ungerboeck.com/programsearch/moreinfo.aspx?event=39311>
4. **West Des Moines Community Schools:** SAIL (Summer Adventures in Learning) will include SEA (Summer Enrichment Adventures) courses. These courses are one-week in length and are for students who will be entering grades 1-8 in the fall. The courses will take place the week of July 19 - July 23, 2023. All courses are 3 hours in length and will be held at Jordan Creek Elementary. <https://wdmcs.ce.eleyo.com/courses/category/62/summer-of-learning/sail>
5. **Science Center of Iowa Camps** <http://www.sciowa.org/learn/camps/directory/>
6. **Zoo Day Camps** <https://www.blankparkzoo.com/education/children--families/safari-camps/summer-safari-camp/>
7. **Living History Farms Camps** <https://www.lhf.org/summer-2023/>
8. **DSM Art Club** <https://www.dsmartclub.com/>
9. **Polk County Conservation Summer Camps** <https://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/conservation/education/summer-camps/> These day camps are designed to encourage hands-on learning through outdoor explorations, activities, games, crafts, and more. Camps will be led by naturalists.
10. **CoderDojo** Is your child interested in coding? Are they wanting to connect with other coders in the area? Students can come with their own projects to work on or they'll have projects for them. Best of all, it appears to be free! <https://www.techjourney.org/coderdojodsm/>
11. **Sapphire Gymnastics Academy**
Discovery Kids Club runs June 6 through August 12 and includes weekly themes such as Animal Fun, Fantasy Land, Symphony of the Sense and DIY just to name a few. Campers can sign up for a week or more. Campers can enjoy gym, indoor, educational, and outdoor activities as well as field trips. <https://www.sapphiregymnasticsacademy.com/summer-camp>
12. **Heartland Youth Choir**
Heartland Youth Choir offers camps for three different age levels, SummerMelodies (K-1), SummerTunes (2-3), and SummerSongs (4-8). SummerSongs is a week-long choir camp for singers who have recently completed grades 4 - 8, with unchanged voices. <http://joinhyc.org/summer>
13. **State Historical Society of Iowa**
<https://iowaculture.gov/history/programs/youth-family-programs/workshops-and-day-camps>
14. **Check out this Summer Enrichment Calendar!**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1A7Dq2ZXdKyzeetMXVI3sgOgFq2AVXVbt/view>

Support Friends of Johnston ELP

3 Great Ways to be a FJELP Supporter

1

Show your financial support through a \$20 donation via Revtrak. These funds are used to provide annual grants to our ELP Teaching Team.

2

Attend our Fall, Winter and Spring programs. Links to previous programs and FJELP resources can be found [HERE](#).

3

Participate in our fundraisers! Watch for info via email and on our Facebook page.



Friends of Johnston ELP
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in the Johnston Community School District



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