



Obama Praises Top Students at White House Science Fair

The president used the fair to announce new initiatives for STEM education

By [JASON KOEBLER](#)

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While the New York Giants will no doubt be visiting the White House in the coming weeks to celebrate their Super Bowl win, President Obama was honoring a different group of champions Tuesday—more than 100 science fair and competition winners from around the country.

"I'm looking forward to having the Giants here at the White House," he said. "But if we are recognizing athletic achievement, we should also be recognizing academic achievement."

To mark the occasion, Obama announced a host of new government STEM initiatives, including a request for \$80 million in funding to spend on training new STEM teachers, which will be supplemented with \$22 million in private sector funds from companies and organizations such as Google, Carnegie and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The National Science Foundation said it would spend more than \$100 million to improve STEM education at the undergraduate level.

During his 2011 State of the Union address, Obama said he wanted to train 100,000 science and [math teachers](#) over the next 10 years. Tuesday, he focused a new goal: graduating more students with STEM degrees.

[\[Obama Pushes STEM in State of the Union.\]](#)

"One million more American graduates in science, technology, engineering and math over the next 10 years," he said. "That is a goal we can achieve."

Obama also announced that a portion of the Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund will be allocated to recruiting and retaining science and math teachers, who often leave the profession for more lucrative work in the private sector.

The science fair was Obama's latest push to make math and science more important to Americans.

"What these young people are doing is going to make a bigger difference to our country over the long term than anything," he said.

Obama said it was an honor to meet so many bright students.

"This is fun. It's not everyday you have robots running all over your house," he said. "I'm trying to figure out how they got through the metal detectors. "

[\[Congressman Proposes STEM Education Office.\]](#)

For the students invited, it was a once in a lifetime experience, and a big signal from the President that their work was appreciated.

Other students were just happy to show the President their projects. Because students were informed just a week ago that they'd be visiting the White House, it came as a shock to many.

"It's a great honor to be welcomed by the president, to be able to meet him and show him what we've done," says Kevin Sun, a sophomore at Solon High School in Solon, Ohio. His classmate, Katrina Mikofalvy, says high-profile events like this might push other students to study science.

"It encourages a lot of people to participate and shows you might get honored," Mikofalvy says. "These fairs and competitions kind of add an element of fun to science."

Other students were already focusing on their next move. A group of FIRST Robotics champions are hard at work on this year's competition—submission deadlines are just a couple of weeks away.

"There's always another award to win, more community outreach to do," says Erik Bakan, of San Jose, Calif. His rival, Sean Murphy, agreed: "We're here and we're thinking like, 'We've got to keep working,'" he says.

- [U.S. News' STEM Education Center](#)
- [Students Are Taking Harder Math, Science Courses](#)