

“LEARNING TO THINK”

For over sixty years, the Science and Engineering Fair of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc. (SEFMD) has provided tens of thousands of young people an incentive to plan, prepare, and present science and engineering projects. The Fair process is lauded by educators as an important “learning to think” experience for the 25,000 to 30,000 third through twelfth grade students from Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Lenawee, Livingston, and Monroe counties who participate in school competitions each year. Over 2,000 of these students then enter the regional fair, with 1,000+ chosen to bring their projects to the Metro Fair at Huntington Place (Detroit), where fairs centering on the physical and life sciences in multiple categories (e.g, chemistry, physics, biology, environmental science, engineering,...) are held under one roof. Throughout the years, 628 senior division students have won Grand Awards, enabling them to compete in the International Science and Engineering Fair. Southeast Michigan students have distinguished themselves at the ISEF by winning major awards among their peers from 49 states and 63 nations. Many Fair participants have pursued careers in science and engineering and have distinguished themselves in their respective professions.

Another equally important benefit of the fairs is the increased interest of students in the Detroit Public Schools Community District in areas of science and engineering. This welcome renewal is strengthened by a strong commitment to the Fair from Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Detroit Public Schools Foundation, and DAPCEP (Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program). Organizers and educators were thrilled to see more than 79% of the entries in 2025 coming from Detroit Public Schools.

The SEFMD should be a source of great pride for Southeast Michigan -- as it is for those who staff it and those who fund it. SEFMD remains one of the largest such Fairs in the country, and, judging by the results, one of the best!

HOW IT BEGAN

The Special Activities Committee of the Engineering Society of Detroit (ESD) proposed to the ESD Board of Directors in September 1956 that the society sponsor a Metro Science Fair to encourage and support education and the future of the related professions, in conjunction with the Detroit Board of Education and the Detroit Science Teachers Clubs. The Board granted approval, the cooperation of The Detroit News was obtained, and the first Fair was held in 1958. There were 2,550 entries which produced 1,097 exhibits in the fair held at the State Fair Grounds. A fund drive netted \$46,000, the fair cost \$35,000, and attendance was estimated at 45,000 people. To quote a report to the ESD Board, it was a “smashing” success. The Board agreed to continue sponsorship.

INCORPORATION

The Fair operated under the direct auspices of ESD until 1962 when it became evident it should become a separate entity to ensure non-profit status for tax purposes. The Metro Detroit Science Fair, Inc. was incorporated on October 23, 1962 to “stimulate an active interest among young people in the several fields of scientific study and to give recognition to talented science students.” In 1970 the name was changed to The Science and Engineering Fair of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc., to accurately reflect its educational scope. ESD and The Detroit News continued to cooperate in sponsorship of the Fairs through 2001. In September of 2001, the inauguration of the renovated and expanded Detroit Science Center and a refocus of the engineering society on other programs resulted in a new home at the spectacular museum and an independent stature for the Fairs. The Detroit Science Center and the Detroit News continued support of the Fair until 2003.

STAFFING

The SEFMD is:

- governed by a Board of Directors (made up of representatives from top corporations and educational institutions);
- operated by an Operating Council;

- judged by over 520 volunteers who are experts in their fields; and
- funded with monies raised by an Executive Council.

The Fair Directors serve as liaison between the Board and Operating Council and oversee day-to-day operations. All other functions are staffed by the nearly 700 volunteers who participate each year.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

In 1995, SEFMD launched the first Michigan Science Fair. The top forty to fifty students from the tri-county area compete annually with a similar number of students from other regional fairs throughout the state for additional recognition and awards. In May 2000 the preeminence of Detroit’s Fair was recognized when Detroit was chosen to host the International Science and Engineering Fair. Over 1,100 students and 1,500 teachers and mentors from 46 countries were in Detroit for the weeklong event. In excess of 1,000 judges, mostly Ph.D. or equivalent, were used to judge the entries. Over \$2,000,000 in awards and scholarships were distributed to the top winners of this prestigious competition. This event highlighted Detroit while showcasing the SEFMD to the global community as a world-class organization.

FUNDING

Funding for the Fair is provided by corporations, industries, utilities, technical societies, health and medical groups, financial institutions and individual contributions. SEFMD is recognized by the IRS as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and is licensed to solicit Charitable Contributions from the State of Michigan – MICS 5290.

To date, SEFMD has a restricted endowment to ensure the long-term financial stability of the fair. The dividends and interest from this endowment provide an annual income of \$40,000 (at 5% interest) to support the annual \$181,000 operating budget. The balance is made up of individual, corporate, and foundation support.

THE 2025-2026 FAIR

The 2026 Fair will be an in-person Fair with optional online components that may be submitted. The complete calendar is available at the science fair website.

SEFMD regional fair	March 17-20, 2026
Huntington Place (lower level), Detroit	
Project setup	Tues., March 17
Judging (final round)	Wed., March 18
Public Viewing	Thur.-Fri., March 19, 20
“STEAM SLAM” activities for 6 th -8 th graders	
Tear down	Fri., March 20 (5-7 PM)
	Sat., March 21 (9-11 AM)
Michigan Science Fair	Sat., April 11 (all day)
Lawrence Technological University, Southfield	
International Fair	May, 2026
Phoenix, Arizona	

Senior Division Grand Award winners will participate in the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) where their projects will be evaluated, providing these students an opportunity to compete for additional awards, scholarships and increased recognition. Up to six individual awardees, plus a two or three-person team project, and two winners of the Michigan Science Fair will represent metro Detroit and the State of Michigan in the International Fair.

Each Grand Award Winner will be given preferential status on receiving a four-year paid merit scholarship from one of the following universities: Lawrence Technological University, Oakland University, and University of Detroit Mercy. The scholarship and amounts are subject to the rules of the individual universities. The Grand Award winners also compete for the Detroit Science Award, an all-expense paid study trip to the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Israel.

2021 FAIR HIGHLIGHT: Cranbrook Kingswood sophomore Michelle Hua won first place in Robotics (\$5000) and overall best project in the world at the 2021 Regeneron ISEF (\$75,000)! Congratulations, Michelle!

2025 FAIR HIGHLIGHT: SEFMD/MSEF sent the first three-member team from three different states to compete at the 2025 ISEF! Arnav Sharma (Michigan),

Aryav Das (Indiana), and Samarth Dunakhe (Arizona) won a 1st Award in Computational Biology and Bioinformatics.

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The 2026 Fund Drive has a goal of \$300,000

Gifts are Tax Deductible- IRS 501 (c)(3) & MICS 5290
Checks may be made payable to:
Science Fair - SEFMD
P.O. Box 158 – Farmington, MI 48332-0158
Donations also accepted online at <http://www.sefmd.org>



Facts about the 69th Science and Engineering Fair of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc. (SEFMD)



2025-2026

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