

SSC Students Excel at State SkillsUSA

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

Two South Sioux City Special Olympics basketball teams won gold medals during the Special Olympics State Basketball Games held last weekend in Lincoln. Members of the winning teams include (top photo) Emily Taylor, Joshua Henry, Nicole Levesque, Casey White, Jacob Peterson and coach Randy Anderson. (bottom photo) Nicole Glover, Valarie Marsh, Jennifer Wilmes, Jennifer Anderson, Greg Rider and coach Jean Anderson. Not pictures is coordinator Maria Grier.

SSC Students Excel at State SkillsUSA

South Sioux City Community Schools students showcased their talent, determination, and career-ready skills at the 2026 Nebraska SkillsUSA State Leadership and Skills Championships, with multiple students earning top honors and advancing to the national stage.

SkillsUSA is a student-led organization focused on career and technical education, giving students the opportunity to apply their learning in real-world, industry-aligned competitions. Events range from welding and manufacturing to health science, robotics, baking, and more—each designed to mirror the expectations of today's workforce.

This year, 30 South Sioux City students competed at the state level, representing a wide range of career pathways. Their efforts resulted in six students placing among the top three in their respective competitions.

Leading the way were first-place finishers Josue Rodriguez-Villalobos in Aviation Technology and the Technical Drafting team of John Tramp, Leandro Magana Magana, and Giovanni Alvarado. Additional top performers included Nora Hirsch, who earned third place in Welding Sculpture, and Jacob Warner, who placed third in both Mouse Trap Car Speed and Distance.

"These competitions push students to demonstrate leadership, teamwork, technical expertise, and the ability to perform under pressure," said Nora Hirsch, incoming president of the SSC SkillsUSA chapter. "It's a real-world experience that prepares us for future careers."

For many students, the competition required weeks—or even months—of preparation. While advisors and teachers provide guidance, much of the responsibility falls on students to refine their

skills and master their craft.

Throughout the event, SSC students demonstrated resilience and professionalism. From overcoming equipment challenges in welding competitions to adapting to schedule changes in robotics events, students consistently rose to the occasion.

"Many of our competitors had to adjust in the moment and still perform at a high level," Hirsch noted. "It really showed the determination and work ethic of our group."

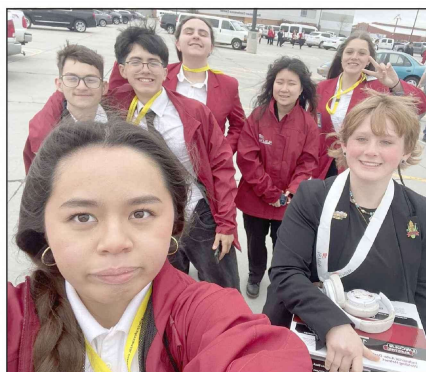
As a result of their success, two SSC students—Rodriguez-Villalobos and Hirsch—will now represent South Sioux City at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference, held June 1–5 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The opportunity to compete nationally

SEE SKILLSUSA, 2A



(COURTESY PHOTOS)
 (Clockwise from top left) Josue Rodriguez-Villalobos was a state champion in Aviation Technology. The Technical Drafting team of Giovanni Alvarado, John Tramp and Leandro Magana Magana also earned state championship honors. Among the SSC students attending the state competition were (front) Hien Le, Nora Hirsch (back) Angel Vazquez Parra, Emanuel Zamago, Madonna Pipkins, Alice Pawchareune and Arlet Gonzalez.



SKILLSUSA: SSC students successful

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provides students with exposure to an even higher level of competition, along with valuable insight into industry expectations and career pathways.

However, attending the national competition comes with significant costs, including travel, lodging, registration, and meals. Unlike some activities, these expenses are not fully funded, requiring students to seek community support.

"Our chapter relies on fundraising to make this opportunity possible," Hirsch said. "Support from our community truly makes a difference and helps ensure we can continue representing South Sioux City at the national level."

To help offset these costs, the SkillsUSA chapter is launching a fundraising campaign, allowing community members and local busi-

nesses to contribute directly to student participation.

Beyond competition results, Hirsch emphasized the broader impact of SkillsUSA.

"It's important to support programs like this," she said. "They give students opportunities to explore careers and develop skills that will carry into adulthood. Not every student's path is the same, and programs like SkillsUSA help prepare a wide range of students for success."

As the chapter looks ahead, leadership is focused on growing participation, strengthening organization and continuing to build connections between students, schools, and the community.

For South Sioux City, the results from SkillsUSA are more than medals—they represent a commitment to preparing students for life beyond the classroom, with the skills, confidence, and experience to succeed.