

**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS**



NEWS RELEASE

**Florida High School Student Selected as National Recipient of
NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: John Gillis

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 11, 2014) — **Leia Schwartz**, a student at Miami (Florida) Coral Reef High School, has been selected the 2014 national recipient of the “National High School Heart of the Arts Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The National High School Heart of the Arts Award was created by the NFHS to recognize those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the positive heart of the arts that represent the core mission of education-based activities. This is the first year that the National High School Heart of the Arts Award has been offered.

When Schwartz was six years old, she almost died from a spontaneous pneumothorax – also known as a collapsed lung. She spent the following two weeks on the critical list, and no one thought she would survive.

As a result, Schwartz’ life has been extremely restricted. She now lives with severe, recurrent and life-threatening asthma, has to take five medications a day, and still isn’t allowed to run or to do anything that would be too strenuous on her lungs. In addition, she wouldn’t even be allowed to attend school were it not for the fact that she has her own nurse there.

Despite those challenges, Schwartz has not let her situation stop her from striving for her goals and living life to the fullest.

For starters, Schwartz maintains an extensive involvement in music. Among her musical activities, she is vice president of Coral Reef’s award-winning Chorus Magnet program, was named to the Florida All-State Reading Choir all four years, is currently the No. 1 ranked vocalist in the state after

receiving a perfect score in the audition, and received straight Superiors in Music Performance and Assessments and Solo and Ensemble all four years.

She also manages to perform at a highly competitive level in her three varsity sports of swimming, golf and bowling - all of which she is both a four-year letterwinner and team captain. She helped lead teams to regionals and to the state finals, and was named All-Dade County Second Team in both golf and bowling.

Schwartz is gifted academically as well, maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade-point average (5.6 weighted), is active in five honor societies, is a competitor on the award-winning math team, and is an AP Scholar with Honor. In addition, she was recently named a national Coca Cola Scholars finalist and was junior class treasurer.

However, what really sets Schwartz apart is her unrelenting desire to give back and to help others through various forms of community service.

Her experiences with the connection between music and health inspired her to found an organization called "Healing Harmonies" - a community outreach program composed of 200 music students from various schools throughout South Florida dedicated to "healing through the arts." With an identified mission of "Changing lives ... one note at a time," that group performs at nursing homes and hospitals, and for various health-related charities.

Upon being chosen Junior Orange Bowl Queen on November 7, 2010, Schwartz effectively used that platform to make far greater contributions to her efforts of giving back to those less fortunate.

Drawing from her personal experience of having severe life-threatening asthma her entire life, Schwartz understands all too well the seriousness of influenza, a disease that kills more than 36,000 people annually. For more than 11 years, she has been a poster child for the American Lung Association and for the past four years has along with her father David been a regional representative for its "Faces of Influenza" campaign. Every holiday, she returns to the hospital that treated her, where she visits sick children and delivers gifts to pediatric patients and nurses.

It was therefore a natural fit when Leia and her father David joined former Miami Heat basketball player Jamal Mashburn on December 6, 2010 to attend a special event at Roby George Park in Homestead to raise awareness of the seriousness of influenza. David and Leia played a big role in organizing the event with the help of the Early Development of Global Education Foundation, the Cooney/Waters Group and Walgreens Pharmacy, which supplied the nurses and donated 200 vaccinations to underprivileged children.

In addition to donating her hair for Locks of Love (a non-profit that provides human hair to children who have lost theirs from illness), she attends Camp Boggy Creek in North Florida for chronically and critically ill children. There, she befriended a young girl named Kenzie who had recently undergone brain surgery.

When Kenzie told Schwartz that she wanted to see her in the Junior Orange Bowl's annual parade, Schwartz helped arrange for Kenzie and her siblings to ride on the float. Schwartz recalled looking back and seeing Kenzie waving at her from the float. Tragically, Kenzie passed away shortly thereafter.

About the Award

In addition to the selection of Leia Schwartz as the national award recipient, the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee chose eight individuals for section awards. Following are the 2014 National High School Heart of the Arts section winners:

Section 1 – Derrick A. Hopkins and Jennifer Moore, performing arts directors, Willsboro (New York) Central School

Section 2 – Abigail Leonard, student, Gate City (Virginia) High School

Section 3 – Leia Schwartz, student, Miami (Florida) Coral Reef High School

Section 4 – Lydia Dawley, student, Decorah (Iowa) High School

Section 5 – Justin Speck, theater department director, Rapid City (South Dakota) Central High School

Section 6 – Frank Sferra, speech coach, Denver (Colorado) Mullen High School

Section 7 – Clin Eaton, theater department director, Riverton (Utah) High School

Section 8 – Aubrie Lucas, student, Anchorage (Alaska) Dimond High School

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee composed of state association staff members. While the national winner will be recognized June 29 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, the section winners will be recognized within their respective states and will receive awards before the end of the current school year.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and fine arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 16 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.7 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, speech and debate coaches and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS Web site at www.nfhs.org.

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