



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 23, 2026 CONTACT: Maria Hernandez PHONE: (909) 447-2406

South El Monte High School SeaPerch Team Claims Regional Title, Advances to International Stage

EL MONTE – South El Monte High School’s (SEMHS) SeaPerch robotics team earned a first-place finish at the Los Angeles Regional SeaPerch Competition in March, securing a spot in the International SeaPerch Competition in Maryland and marking the program’s return to global competition for the third time in 15 years.

The student-led team competed against top programs from across the region, demonstrating technical skill, teamwork, and adaptability to emerge as overall champions. Representing Los Angeles County, the group is advancing to an international field that includes teams from across the United States and countries such as China and New Zealand.

“SeaPerch is an underwater robotics program that challenges our students to design, build, and operate remotely operated vehicles (ROVs),” SEMHS SeaPerch instructor Michael LeGaspé said. “Using a standard kit as a foundation, students apply science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) concepts to customize their designs, test performance, and solve real-world engineering challenges.”

SeaPerch is administered by RoboNation, a nonprofit organization that promotes robotics and engineering education through hands-on competitions. The program introduces students to underwater robotics by providing kits that serve as the foundation for building ROVs, which teams then modify and test for performance in competition.

Competitions are composed of three events: an obstacle course requiring precise navigation through submerged hoops; a mission course featuring a series of tasks tied to a themed scenario that tests each team’s engineering and problem-solving abilities; and a technical design report that documents the team’s development process, including buoyancy adjustments, system performance, and troubleshooting.

The winning team included senior and captain Henry Liem, senior Omar Morales, junior Johanna Hernandez, and junior Alexis Mejia. Through months of after-school practices, students worked collaboratively to design, build, and refine their ROV, while also mentoring newer members in technical skills such as soldering, drilling, and waterproofing components.

“I got involved my freshman year after watching competitions on campus and seeing how engaging the program was,” Liem said. “While the work is demanding and requires a year-round commitment, our team’s diverse strengths and shared dedication helped us succeed. We spent countless hours preparing, and that collaboration made the difference.”

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South El Monte High School competed in the “stock” class, where modifications are limited, placing a premium on strategy, efficiency, and piloting ability. During the competition, students overcame difficult outdoor conditions, including poor underwater visibility and an unexpected equipment issue, responding in real time to keep their ROV operational and complete their runs.

“I’ve always been drawn to the medical field and had no experience with robotics, but joining SeaPerch pushed me outside my comfort zone,” Hernandez said. “With support from my teammates, I found my confidence through trial and error, and as the only girl on the team, I felt driven to give it my all. Our teamwork, quick thinking, and problem-solving led us to the win.”

SeaPerch teams typically include four to six students and are open to all grade levels. South El Monte High School participated in the International Competition program in 2015, 2019, and now in 2026, reflecting continued student involvement in STEAM-focused opportunities.

The team will compete in the 2026 International SeaPerch Competition from May 30-31. [Visit the SeaPerch website to learn more.](#)

For a closer look at South El Monte’s SeaPerch robotics team’s journey to a first-place finish, [watch the team’s YouTube video](#), where club member Valeria Torres documents the experience.

“SeaPerch gives students of all grade levels the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning while developing skills in engineering, problem-solving, and teamwork,” El Monte Union Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. “South El Monte High School’s continued participation in regional and international competitions reflects students’ commitment to the program and their ability to apply these skills in competitive, real-world environments.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

EMUHSD SEMHS SEAPERCH 1: South El Monte High School’s SeaPerch team celebrates its first-place finish at the Los Angeles Regional SeaPerch Competition in March. The team advances to the international competition, set for May 30–31 in Maryland.

EMUHSD SEMHS SEAPERCH 2: South El Monte High School’s SeaPerch team competes in the Los Angeles Regional SeaPerch Competition in March, navigating its aquatic remotely operated vehicle through three event courses.

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