



Talented CSP Junior Benjamin Kelm: An Incredible Lesson in Political Science

March 2016

Chesapeake Science Point 11th grade student, Benjamin Kelm, learns some incredible lessons into the inside workings of a very important political issue: the gerrymandering of Maryland Congressional districts. These workings include Ben having the opportunity to discuss his work in depth with the Maryland House of Delegates Minority Leader, Delegate Nicholas Kipke, being honored by Delegate Kipke in the Maryland House of Delegates, the opportunity to provide testimony in the Maryland Senate and the ability to meet and discuss the issue with state leaders.

Last summer, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan formed a commission to study potentially reforming the creation of Maryland's Congressional districts. **Gerrymandering is the act of one political party drawing extremely biased and convoluted district borders to maximize their political advantage.** When Benjamin Kelm learned about the Governor's initiative, he selected it for his 11th grade science fair project; to research mathematical algorithmic approaches to creating unbiased districts. Ben successfully developed a C++ program implementing his algorithm that could create unbiased Congressional districts, using 2010 Census data as its input. Even though he completed his science fair research at nearly the same time that the Maryland Redistricting Reform Commission published their final results, Ben was very pleased to see that his findings were well aligned with the Governor's Commission. After presenting his project to judges at the Chesapeake Science Point and earning a spot in the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation Science Fair Finals in December 2015, Ben was thrilled to learn that he won the First Place Grand Award for his project at the February 2016 CLF STEM Fair Dinner & Awards Ceremony.



Governor Hogan recently introduced legislation in the Maryland General Assembly to

enact redistricting reform (Jan '16). Maryland House of Delegates' Minority Leader, Delegate Nicholas Kipke, learned about Benjamin's research & invited Ben to visit him in Annapolis. Delegate Kipke met with Ben in late February and discussed the topic at depth with Ben and also presented Ben with a Maryland General Assembly Citation:

Be it hereby known to all that sincerest congratulations are offered to Benjamin Kelm. In recognition of your tremendous accomplishment of winning the 2015 Chesapeake Science Point Science Fair for your unbiased solution to Congressional Gerrymandering in Maryland. –Delegate Nicholas Kipke

Life experience lessons didn't stop there—Delegate Kipke then honored Ben by introducing him to the assembled delegates in the Maryland House. The delegates applauded Benjamin as they learned that he was there being honored for winning his school Science Fair. Many cheered wildly learning what his research topic was. We cannot thank Delegate Kipke enough for his enthusiasm & support!



While meeting in the Minority Whips' office, Ben discusses Maryland's Gerrymandering with Delegate Kipke and learns about an upcoming hearing on the Maryland Senate

redistricting reform bill and is encouraged to attend the hearing to present on his work. Ben then attends the Senate hearing in the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee on March 3, 2016 and before the hearing, Ben enjoys the privilege of discussing the topic with the two co-chairmen of Governor Hogan's commission: the Honorable Alexander Williams Jr. and Mr. Walter Olson. In being able to discuss this with true subject matter experts, Ben gained an even deeper understanding of the topic. After listening to the testimony by these experts and the questioning by the assembled Senators, Ben learned even more about both sides of the issue.

At this hearing, Ben has the opportunity to contribute his own viewpoint into the political debate. Ben was called to testify, presenting on what he had discovered through his science fair project: *it is easily possible to create sensible districts that don't subdivide communities*. After Ben completed his testimony, the committee expressed its' gratitude at having young people involved in the political process. Senator Stephen Waugh invites Ben to have a side discussion and asks Ben for the "geeky" details of his research project and shares his own experiences as a Maryland Senator elected to represent the citizens of Maryland in a geographically distributed district.



Through all of this Benjamin has earned himself a deeper education on a complex and important topic effecting voters both in Maryland and nationally. The CSP and CLF family would like to congratulate Benjamin for his outstanding research project. Ben represents himself & his school well by following through with his work into real life experiences, contributing to Maryland's political debate, and continuing to learn! Our sincerest gratitude goes to Delegate Nic Kipke for his time, encouragement, and as gracious host for the meeting with Benjamin, family, CLF and CSP at his office, in honoring Ben with the Maryland General Assembly citation and introducing him in the Maryland House of Delegates. Special thanks to Senator Stephen Waugh, Judge Williams and Mr. Olson: we are so very appreciative of their time and experience.

"I feel very passionately about this project and understand that implementation of anti-gerrymandering legislation and algorithmic approaches are important to fair partisan politics for future generations throughout the United States." – Benjamin Kelm

