



Statewide/President's Award Winner

Jayden McCraw

Fries School
Fries, VA



If I Were Mayor

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE with a disability? At Fries School we have some kids with mobility issues that make it hard for them to walk up and down stairs. Also, some people have trouble with stairs because of health problems. Our school will benefit from an escalator. Escalators are better transportation than stairs. It will help students a lot.

We can also make a new ramp outside to access the playground area. I suggest we build a mobility ramp to help students get from place to place on the playground.

The ramp that we used to have was damaged by a flood in 2013 and removed in 2019, so some students can't go to the playground now. Depending on the town's budget, we could repair the old ramp, or build a new one. I will ask the state to let us borrow money and some of the money can come from tax revenue.

We need more equipment for people with disabilities, so they won't miss out on fun playground activities. To pay for these things, we could hold a fundraiser for the equipment. My idea would be a video game contest! Many students in our area like video games like Minecraft. We could charge a small fee to enter the contest and the prize could be a video game or game console. We could ask a major retailer to donate the console or games.

In conclusion Fries needs more accessible areas for those with disabilities. I will ask the town council to think about those ideas at their next meeting. The town council can add this expense to the budget for the next year. This can help make Fries a better place for individuals with disabilities and will be better for the whole town as well.



Mayor Cynthia Grant congratulates Jayden.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 1 Winner

Billie Hall

Marion Middle School
Marion, VA



If I Were Mayor

AS MAYOR THERE ARE MANY things that I would like to do but I would start by focusing on the issue of pollution in Marion. We have a lot of nature in our town, with beautiful mountains and parks, but the trash is disturbing this beauty.

It would take a lot of work to fix the situation, but I believe that it would be worth it. A community member suggested hiring cleaning crews, which I think would be a great idea. It could work as a fundraising project and a job at the same time. They could focus on certain areas, such as Hungry Mother State Park. The community member also suggested having more recycling bins in place. I think this idea could work, as well. We can give the plastics to companies in need of it or as part of building or remodeling projects. There are plenty of old, rundown houses and businesses in this town and we could use some of the recycled materials to help those projects. To help prevent litter on the streets and sidewalks, we should put more trash cans in public places like in front of businesses.

There should also be more education on the issue of pollution. For example, billboards and fundraisers would start the educational process. This town likes festivities. There should be festivals and such things yearly to raise funds as part of the effort to clean up our town.

Another issue is that of keeping the wildlife wild. People often try to feed the wild animals such as ducks and birds. While this can be acceptable occasionally, giving them too much food will cause the creatures to come back for more and make them reliant on humans for food. We need to raise awareness about this. We could start by putting up signs in the parks to warn people not to feed the wildlife or to leave their leftover food on benches.

With other community members' ideas and mine combined, I think we could do well for the outdoors in our town. In conclusion, it would take some time and effort to help resolve the issues, but in the end, it would be nice to walk the paths in the park without seeing too many unnatural things.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 2 Winner

William Wall

Martinsville Middle School
Martinsville, VA



If I Were Mayor

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN out shopping, walked past a few stores and then seen a vape and tobacco shop? There are 11 vape and tobacco shops in Martinsville. The laws for vaping and tobacco say you must be 21, but 37.7% of kids 14 to 17 have vaped and 19.9% of kids 14 to 17 have used tobacco according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If I were mayor, I would shut down tobacco stores that sell to minors, turn them into rehab centers, and work to get minors off vape and tobacco.

Multiple websites say that more than 30% of vape and tobacco shops sell to minors. So, with 11 vape and tobacco stores in Martinsville, that means around 3 of them distribute to minors. Unfortunately, there are probably more that sell to minors. If we have the evidence, we can shut them down. But what are we going to do with the buildings? We can turn them into rehab centers. Parents of guardians of minors caught with vape or tobacco could apply to get them into one of these centers. Then we can get them off vape and tobacco in just a few weeks!

If rehab does not work, we can have an extra layer of support using other distractions. Gum will help you focus on what you need to do with your life. Going for walks is a natural stress reliever and mental health aid. Talking to a therapist will work wonders for stress.

If we put this plan into action, we can stop underage vape and tobacco use. We can shut down vape and tobacco shops that distribute to minors, re-use them for rehab centers, and, if we need to, we can have another layer of assistance for underage addiction. Put it out before it puts you out!



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 3 Winner

Avery Diette

Lylburn Downing Middle School
Lexington, VA



If I Were Mayor

IF I WERE MAYOR, I would fix what lies beneath the roads of Lexington. Back in 2018, Lexington's water lines were brought up as a problem, and the fact that they needed to be replaced was apparent when www.lexingtonva.gov stated: "Some of the pipes are over 100 years old!" Unfortunately, since then, nothing has changed. Occasionally pipes break, and companies come to rip up the roads and repair them just to wait for something else to break. Soon, it isn't going to work anymore.

To fix this problem we have to take the time to do a full replacement of the water lines. Even though it will take many years to replace each section of pipe, it will be worth it. The more we let these pipes break, the worse our water quality is going to get. The children of Lexington could be dangerously affected by health problems that could arise in our community. The pipes have a protective coating that has worn down over years exposing the lead in the pipes. This lead will leak into our water and make it harmful to consume and use in our daily lives. Fixing the waterlines of Lexington is the only way to keep our community safe.

The solution will be extremely costly. It will cost millions to do a full replacement of all the pipes, but it will be money well spent to protect the city of Lexington. Funding could come from a variety of places such as the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA), increasing taxes, and reducing the salaries of high-paying jobs. A long-time resident gave an opinion on the issue: "We just need to take that chunk of money and get it over with for the better."

Construction of the new waterlines would affect Lexington for years to come. People's everyday lives would be altered by higher taxes, lowered wages, and road closures. However, it would be amazing to see the people of Lexington agree on this action because so many people would benefit. Hopefully, if we can educate people on this issue and make them see why this is so important, Lexington will be able to afford to build new waterlines for a better and safer future.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 5 Winner

Talia Forster

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA



If I Were Mayor

Falls Church is a thoughtful, and open community when it comes to climate action. But, as I walk around my neighborhood, I rarely see people who are composting. When asked why they are not composting more frequently, or why they have chosen not to compost at all, I often hear that they either don't know how to get started or are afraid they will make a mistake.

Along with a group of my friends in Girl Scouts, we investigated the issue of composting. The main questions that we strived to answer were why people feel that they can't start composting, and what would be the most efficient way for restaurants and the average person to help our environment by composting. We began by calling our city's Compost Crew. In our interview with them, we found that part of the reason that people feel that they can't start composting is that they aren't aware of the available resources. Compost Crew in our city provides composting buckets that make it easy for people to save their compostable items until the buckets are picked-up. This would also help restaurants to start composting.

If I were mayor, I would have more educational flyers, and information given out to the public, especially to restaurants. Restaurants produce extreme amounts of food waste often because they are not properly informed about the alternatives. I learned this personally from going into restaurants and talking to the people there who were genuinely interested in composting, but explained to us how clueless they were on how to approach it, even on a small scale. Because of this, I would try to be sympathetic towards those who are genuinely confused about how to start. Instead of creating bans or laws around composting, I would try to encourage composting by educating restaurants that even a small amount of composting can really make an impact on the world.

Composting is a crucial piece of the puzzle to help our environment. However, I know that not everyone has the funding or opportunities to help the environment. I believe that as a community it is important to help those who are in need for everyone to succeed. This is why as mayor, I would reach out to those who are struggling, and help them to get the supplies they will need to compost without the price tag that comes along with it.

In conclusion, my research showed that as mayor I would be able to help educate people on the importance and benefits of composting, as well as help members of my community and bring people together regardless of financial status. I believe that these principles could create a real impact in my community.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 6 Winner

Zohair Zaman

Walker-Grant Middle School
Fredericksburg, VA



If I Were Mayor

VIRGINIA'S SCHOOLS HAVE ongoing problems with funding, work conditions, and academic progress. They lack updated technology and tools that students need to do their best work. To help solve these problems, I have heard from a community member that we need to increase the infrastructure quality of schools, install new and updated technology, make qualifications and requirements for teachers clearer, and be more accommodative to students' religious beliefs.

I agree with the community member that these actions will increase student as well as teacher productivity and will make students look forward to schooling. However, there are other actions I have in mind as mayor. For students of different backgrounds to feel

welcome, they need to be accepted. If I were mayor, I'd make sure students feel welcome and accepted in a school environment by accommodating and showing open-mindedness towards them. I would start by improving the quality of school lunches as well as adding more variety and options, such as kosher and halal food choices. In addition, as mayor I would strive to give days off for religious and cultural holidays to students that celebrate them. Such holidays would be Eid al-Adha, Diwali, Yom Kippur, etc. These additions will make every student of a unique background feel recognized and accepted and will increase school spirit and positivity within Virginia.

Also, it's important for students to feel physically safe at school. Lately, there has been a high amount of violence occurring in Virginia's schools. This violence is mainly student-on-student, but sometimes it comes from an external source such as a school shooting. School security officers help protect students and staff from any physical harm. If I were mayor, I would deploy a multitude of security officers in every school of our city. Security officers are the perfect way to keep students and staff safe. If students and teachers feel safe, they will do better work.

Another issue for schools in Virginia is not being able to retain good teachers because they are unable to meet certain qualifications due to financial struggles or time constraints. Greater innovations must be made in schools to keep quality teachers. Some states, such as New Jersey, are very successful in this effort, which corresponds to higher rates of college bound students. As mayor, I will make stronger efforts to retain satisfactory teachers to help increase the success of students in Virginia.

In conclusion, as mayor I would accommodate various religious and cultural beliefs that students follow, increase safety and security in schools, and make eligibility to be a teacher in Virginia more attainable. These steps will help academic progress in Virginia.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 8 Winner

Viktorija Gobush

St. Clare Walker Middle School
Locust Hill, VA (resident of Urbanna)



If I Were Mayor

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what teenagers do for fun in Urbanna, VA? Well, if you ask me, there is not much for them to do here. Currently, teenagers just go to the park to hang out, watch their siblings play, and eat junk food. If that sounds boring, you are correct.

If I were the mayor of Urbanna, I would create a multipurpose teen center. It's important to keep teenagers busy and active in our community. Building a teen center would do both of those things.

This multipurpose teen center should be a large enough space for games and activities such as board games, pool tables, air hockey, computers, sports equipment, etc. Also, it should have cozy furniture, big TVs, music, and cool decor such as posters and LED lights. Local teens should have a place to hang out and have safe fun. While this center is primarily for teens, it could be used for other events in the community, such as local meetings, exercise classes, and parties.

You may be wondering who will pay for this. After speaking with locals about this issue, I came up with some fundraising ideas. Local teens could start a GoFundMe page on social media. We could also reach out to local businesses and corporations to ask for donations such as money, time, furniture, or skills. Also, we could organize fundraisers such as bake sales, car washes, and dog walking.

Where would this multi-purpose teen center be located? Well, Urbanna seems to have a handful of empty buildings. One of these buildings could be converted into a teen center. The building could be purchased or rented with fundraising money and/or donations. Locals could also volunteer their skills, time, furniture, and games.

Our town needs more space and activities for teens. Local teens do not want to hang out at Tabor Park all the time. A teen center would give them freedom and space to do fun things together. Fundraising could be challenging, but not impossible with good planning and help from the community. Local teens could work at the teen center to keep it running, organized, and clean. A multipurpose teen center would be a positive thing for all Urbanna.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT