



## Winners of 2023 “If I Were Mayor” state essay contest announced

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**Richmond** – The Virginia Municipal League (VML) announced today the statewide winner and seven regional winners of the “If I Were Mayor” Essay Contest. The contest, hosted by VML, drew hundreds of entries from seventh graders throughout the state. The challenge to the students was to identify an issue in their locality, talk to others about possible solutions, and then identify what solution would best address the issue.

The winners are:

- Statewide winner: **Jayden McCaw** of Fries School in Fries
- Region 1: **Billie Hall** of Marion Middle School in Marion
- Region 2: **William Wall** of Martinsville Middle School in Martinsville
- Region 3: **Avery Diette** of Lylburn Downing Middle School in Lexington
- Region 5: **Talia Forster** of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church
- Region 6: **Zohair Zaman** of Walker-Grant Middle School in Fredericksburg
- Region 8: **Viktorija Gobush** of St. Clare Walker Middle School in Locust Hill (resident of Urbanna)

*\*Note – VML did not receive any entries from regions 4 or 7 this year.*

All the winners identified an issue affecting their community and proposed actionable solutions that demonstrated a grasp of what could be accomplished given available resources and public sentiment. In every case, the essayists came to the problem from the perspective of an individual who genuinely wished to make their locality a better place for all.

Of the statewide winning entry, VML’s Executive Director Michelle Gowdy said: “Mr. McCraw’s essay does a fantastic job making the point that localities – both large and small – are stronger when they consider the needs of everyone in the community. It also serves as a reminder that the rhetoric about school funding at the state level has real world consequences for even Virginia’s smallest towns. Congratulations to Mr. McCraw and all the winners!”

In addition to a plaque, each regional winner will receive a gift card for \$150. The statewide winner will receive a plaque and a gift card for \$250. Plans for presentation of the plaques and checks are forthcoming.

All winning essays will be featured in the May issue of VML’s magazine *Virginia Town & City* and will be posted at [www.vml.org/education/essay-contest](http://www.vml.org/education/essay-contest).

### **About VML’s “If I Were Mayor” Essay Contest**

The annual “If I were Mayor Contest” invites seventh graders from throughout Virginia to submit essays describing what they would do if they were mayor of their hometown. The essay contest is a key component of VML’s civic education programming, which seeks to teach school children and adults how local government works and how they can become involved in making their communities better places to live, work and play.

### **About VML**

The Virginia Municipal League is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan association of local governments established in 1905 to improve and assist local governments through legislative advocacy, research, education and other services. For more information visit [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).