

Statewide Winner (Region 8) Laila Beck-Covington

**Spratley Gifted Center
Hampton, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Laila Beck-Covington

As a society, we have had to adapt to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. No matter what your role in society may be, you've most likely done something virtual. In an attempt to keep life going while protecting ourselves, most of what we do has had to be done from home. Many adults work from home, and students have had to attend school from home. With this new virtual schooling experience come both pros and cons. If I were mayor, I would implement the positive and improve the negative to better the day-to-day school experience.

During the pandemic, most middle and high schools have given the students time to catch up on work and to have private conferences with their teachers. In my school district, remediation or catch-up day is every Friday. In other school districts, remediation time may be provided on another day. Either way, this remediation time is both helpful and necessary. It provides a time for students to complete assignments and to receive the extra help they need. Remediation also allows students the time to plan and schedule for the upcoming week. I have used these Fridays to complete any unfinished assignments and to meet with my teachers. It has been beneficial to me and others because we can address any missing assignments that are due and use the extra day to get work done ahead of time. For these reasons, the new remediation day is a positive that should be maintained.

While virtual school has its perks, it also has its downsides. As we all know, without the Internet, technical devices are useless. Unfortunately, several students across the state of Virginia don't have access to the Internet or have slow Internet connections. This is an issue because it can cause students to miss classes and miss instruction due to a lost connection. Students with an unreliable connection are often kicked out of Zoom or Google Hangouts, and they often miss important information while trying to reconnect. Not only do Internet complications interfere with classes, but they also prevent students and teachers from completing the necessary work to continue being productive. Due to Covid-19, work is no longer on paper, so we must all rely solely on the Internet to receive and submit assignments. Internet issues interfere with this process. Although I attend school in a Virginia city, I live in a rural area, so my Internet connection is unreliable. I have experienced being kicked out of a Zoom or having to wait for reconnection before I can submit an assignment. These issues with Internet access and reliability are negatives that need to be addressed.

If I were elected mayor, the first thing I would do before making any changes to any school is meet with my district's school board. I would present my ideas and collaborate with the school board members to figure out the best way to implement my suggestion. My suggestion would be to permanently make every Friday a day for making up work, getting help from teachers, and getting work turned in. This change would allow students to continue to get ahead in their studies and be prepared for the up-coming week. In order to improve the Internet for the students in rural areas, which are usually the areas with the Internet complications, I would collaborate with Verizon, the Internet company known for its Fios internet. I would work with Verizon to get better routers and towers in rural areas where the business may not be as lucrative, but the need is great. This would allow students and teachers to have better connections and less interruptions. As mayor, I would make these two changes a priority to address the needs of students.

Covid-19 has changed our way of living, especially the way a normal school day operates. Now that school is virtual, there are both pros and cons. If I were elected mayor, I would use my power to continue the positive remediation Fridays and improve the negative Internet issues in order to improve the school day for all of the students in all of the schools.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT

Region 2 Winner Marjorie Davis

**Martinsville Middle School
Martinsville, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Marjorie Davis

Due to Covid – 19, life has not been the same for people around the world. In Martinsville, for example, children have not been able to go to school in person, the unemployment rate has surged, and public gatherings have been discouraged. As a result, members of the community have developed feelings of hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and self-doubt. In short, they need to be assured that things will improve. If I were mayor of Martinsville after the covid-19 pandemic, I would perform several actions to benefit the community.

To start, I would collaborate with the local school board in the effort to return kids safely to school for face-to-face instruction. For example, while learning in a virtual environment, Martinsville students have struggled with attending classes and completing assignments because of home-based distractions and unreliable technology.

If students were able to go back to school, these issues would not interfere with their education. Besides, children tend to learn better in person; moreover, they are more likely to understand and complete their classwork. In addition, I would work with local employers to make sure that working conditions are appropriate for their employees. For instance, During the pandemic, many workers in Martinsville contracted the virus, in part, because employers did not enforce the use of masks or social distancing.

As mayor, I would hold employees accountable for supplies their employs with the materials to preserve their health and safety. Furthermore, I would put up a fund raiser and donate to people in need. To illustrate, the money would help homeless people, shelters, and hospitals. it would help people that lost their jobs or that are unemployed, the money could also help the city by building more homes.

In conclusion, if I were the mayor of Martinsville after the covid-19 pandemic, I would perform several actions to benefit the community. First, I would let the kids go back to school in person. Second, I would let people that are unemployed go back to work. Lastly, I would put up a fund raiser and donate to people in need.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
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Region 5 Winner Claire Weatherly

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Claire Weatherly

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. As we all know, the 2021 school year has been different than normal due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I have had a lot of experience with virtual learning and have discovered numerous things that have and haven't worked. As mayor, I would implement solutions and ask you to do some simple things that would make it easier for your students and children to thrive during virtual learning. Establishing a routine similar to what I would do in normal times helps improve my focus, organization, and makes me ready for the day. There are also things that I have found don't work well but are easy to find a solution for. One such thing is needing to follow exercise videos in PE.

I have found that having a routine similar to what I did pre-pandemic is helpful. It helps me focus and get more things done. I make sure that I have enough time in the morning to get dressed, eat breakfast, and get ready for school. Getting dressed and not doing school from my bed is beneficial for my focus because it makes me feel more awake and ready for the day. It will help students pay attention because they will feel more like they are in school. If you don't leave your bed, then it is more likely that you aren't able to focus as well. Eating breakfast before class is also important because I can then listen and participate during class.

The final thing kids should be sure to do daily is to write any homework or activities on a calendar or agenda. This will help them stay organized and not fall behind on any work. If I were mayor, I would ask parents to help their kids make time to get ready in the morning by reminding them to set an alarm or having things set up for school ahead of time. Parents or teachers should also make sure that students have a place to record their homework. Schools could solve this by buying agendas or adding them to the school supplies list at the beginning of the year. Finally, the night before class, students could move their laptops and other supplies to where they will do class the next day. This would let them sleep in a little more because they wouldn't have to set up their workspace in the morning.

Something that hasn't worked well for me as a student and athlete is only following exercise videos in PE. Following an exercise video is not very interesting for me because we do one every class and they are all somewhat similar. Always doing the same kind of exercises doesn't work well for me because not all exercises help for different sports. There is also no way to adapt the exercises to my skill level. If I were mayor, I would ask teachers to solve this by planning for one day where there was an exercise video in class and one independent day for exercising. If kids could choose what they want to do for exercise, they would have more fun because they could do something they are interested in. This would also give kids a way to get off screens and go outside to get fresh air. The teachers could ask students to submit a picture of what they did so that they know that kids exercised during the time.

As people begin returning to school in a hybrid schedule, they can still use these tips to help make the transition smoother. Having a normal routine will be beneficial to your students and children because they will not have to change their routine as much when they return to school. Having a varied PE would also be beneficial because they will not struggle when they go back to normal PE exercises.

If I were elected mayor, I would look forward to serving the Falls Church community and using my experience to make virtual learning go as smoothly as possible for students in Falls Church



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
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Region 6 Winner

Matthew Ezrre

Culpeper Middle School
Culpeper, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Matthew Ezrre

COVID-19 has caused schools to make virtual learning so that students could learn without needing to come into the building. This has had some good and bad things that have come with it. The good thing is that when you are at home, you can work at your own pace and manage your own time. The bad thing is that some students cannot work well from home and need teachers with them because of a disability or maybe they just learn better that way. If I were mayor, I would make the experience for students as much better as I can.

Virtual learning has come with some benefits. One of these benefits is that students can work at their own pace which allows them to learn faster or take more time on something they do not fully understand. Virtual learning has allowed me to turn a seven-hour school day where I get up at five in the morning into a two-to-three-hour school day where I get up whenever I want. This may also allow students who struggle with a topic to take more time on it which allows them to learn it better. This is one of the good things about virtual learning but there are also some bad things.

There have been many negative things about virtual learning. For example, some students may work better in the classroom as opposed to at home because they need more help from teachers. Students with learning disabilities need more help in the classroom and parents may not be prepared to deal with the stress and work to help their students for hours at a time to make sure that they are learning. Also, some students who can work from home may just work better at school.

If I were mayor, I would try to make these things better so that more students can learn and be successful. With the first thing, virtual learning being helpful, I would make it so that teachers use slideshows instead of videos so that students can go through them at their own pace. I would also make it so that students with disabilities can come to the building all week which will have a dedicated room in the school that is thoroughly cleaned to prevent spread of COVID-19.

If I were mayor, I would try to make everyone at school do better in life.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
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Region 7 Winner

Erin Moore

Liberty Middle School
Ashland, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Erin Moore

My name is Erin Moore, and I go to Liberty Middle School in Ashland Virginia. I do not envy the job of mayor right now in this hectic world. If I were, I would probably do a horrendous job of it, but if I were, I may be able to help with a few suggestions because of my experience with Covid-19 and in-person school.

I believe that in-person school is incredibly important for people who need to be social or have a normal experience in their life for their mental health with everything going on in the world. I also believe that online is also important since some people need to be more careful because they are at higher risk than others or if they live with another family member at higher risk. Liberty Middle School is also making sure that everyone is keeping safe in this difficult time by cleaning regularly and enforcing social distancing.

Something I believe could be improved is working harder to stay positive. Something that has got me through this tough time is remembering that many people are currently dealing with or have dealt with having Covid-19. It is tough to stay positive through everything going on in the world, but we need to remember that everyone else is going through the same thing as us, and if we need help someone will be there to give it.

If I were mayor, I would remind everyone that we are all going through this experience, because it can feel like we are all alone sometimes. I would also tell them about my experience with my mental health and how I discovered things about me I never would have known otherwise. Instead of looking at all the negative things that can be all consuming at times, you should look for that light, the one thing that keeps you moving forward and together we will get through this stronger than we were before.

If we can make these little changes in our actions or mindset it will make a big difference in the community and maybe persuade others to take action as well. It may be hard not to hug a friend or go to the new restaurant down the street, but when this is all over these things will still be there and you can do them safely. If you need motivation to do these things, think about your grandparents that you haven't seen since March last year, or that trip to Greece you were supposed to take in June that got cancelled due to Covid-19. Whatever that motivation may be, keep it in the front of your mind as you go about your day and, together, we will get to the light at the end of the tunnel.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT

Region 8 Winner Dallas Barringer

**Montross Middle School
Montross, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Dallas Barringer

Hello, my name is Dallas Barringer. I am a 7th grader at Montross Middle School in Montross, Virginia. I want to tell you what I would do as mayor. The major issue facing people right now is COVID-19. Lots of people are getting sick and passing away. Other people are losing their jobs. As mayor I would like to get people to wear a mask and social distance. Overall, I want to make our city better.

2020 has been hard for many people; loved ones have passed on, schools shut down, the list could go on. Although this year has had its ups and downs, there were some positive experiences. When people were socially distancing there were fewer people getting COVID-19, which was great for everyone. Another thing I thought worked well was when people wore masks. There also has been less pollution because fewer people have been getting out. Even though there were lots of issues, there were lots of benefits, too.

There were lots of responses that worked, but there were also ideas that didn't. Some people might have worn masks, but many people didn't. When people don't wear a mask, it causes a chain reaction, making COVID go from one person to another. Then everyone will end up getting it. The other big downfall is opening buildings too soon; it might be fun, but is it safe? The answer is NO!

Places that should not open yet are arcades, schools, fast food places, and other locations where people are in large groups. People take off their masks and eat or play outside and touch the same toys on the playground. People may wear masks, but they do not help a hundred percent, unless they are wearing n95 masks and they are tight to the face. Everyone should wear masks and social distance.

If I were mayor, I would ask for people to wear masks if they did not have a medical problem. I would ask people to social distance and ask that there be no more than ten extra people during social gatherings. I would make these rules to protect the people in my city. I would hope that the cases of COVID-19 would decrease. As mayor, I would listen to what the people want and need and take votes for what they hope to make happen.

I will do what needs to be done. Which is why I should be mayor.



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