Region 7 & Statewide Winner
Jalia Hardy

Binford Middle School
Richmond, VA

If I Were Mayor …

A mayor's job is one of the most important jobs in the city. The mayor oversees a city's essential departments, such as police, fire, education, housing, and transportation. If I were mayor, I would focus on Richmond's economy. I would make sure we continue to have good economic growth. I would put funds towards things the city needs, such as fixing roads, renovating old damaged buildings, gentrifying our neighborhoods, and creating more enjoyable things to attract tourism. When new people from different places and all walks of life come to Richmond, they will want to stay.

I would listen to the ideas and suggestions of the citizens of Richmond. I would work with them and do my best to meet their needs. It would not be my city, but our city. Whitney Houston said it best, "I believe the children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way." If I were mayor, I would focus on our city's youth and educational programs. I would make school more interactive and fun by bringing arts integration into more schools. Binford Middle School is a very good example of this. It has dance, choir, art, drama, P.E., etc., and it incorporates these activities into everyday learning. I would bring those ideas and activities or something like them to other schools.

I would create more after school programs. With these activities kids would have something to do that they actually like to do. Kids will be able to do homework, play games, meet new people and acquire new friendships, get tutoring, have a snack, and be able to be themselves and not worry if people will be mean or talk about them. Instead of just sitting at home doing nothing, or out somewhere doing something that is wrong that could either hurt them or other people, they will be helping themselves by being more productive.

If I were mayor I would create a non-profit organization that rides the streets of Richmond with care packages. These care packages would include food, water, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, and other necessities. The care packages would be for the homeless, or people with little or no money. I would also extend the project to volunteers. It would let people of all ages do community service and help out in the community. If I were mayor I would start an annual Kindness Week. During Kindness Week, people just give compliments and help each other, even if they don't know the person they are helping. Kindness Week is a way to spread love. We all have a heart so why not use it? There is way too much hate in the world and if other cities and states see what Richmond is doing they might try something like it.

Being mayor is a big responsibility that comes with many challenges, and obstacles. It requires cooperation from all its citizens, including youth. Everyone can leave a mark on the world.

> *If I were mayor I would start an annual Kindness Week. During Kindness Week, people just give compliments and help each other, even if they don't know the person they are helping.*
>
> **Jalia Hardy**

Region 1 Winner
Bryleigh Middleton

Pennington Middle School
Pennington Gap, VA

If I Were Mayor ...

I live in Pennington Gap, a small, beautiful town in Lee County, Virginia. I truly love Pennington Gap with all my heart, but it could use some changes in a few places.

If I were mayor I would definitely want to open our local hospital again. We do not currently have a nearby hospital we can get to in less than ten minutes. I feel it is important to have a nearby hospital, because if someone has a sudden heart attack, we would have to drive thirty minutes or more to ARH, a hospital in Harlan, Kentucky. People could die in the time it takes to get to Harlan. This would benefit by saving transit time.

I feel another issue we could decrease is, people and families in poverty that are in need of clothing, hygiene products, food and more. Many families and people in general do not have the essentials they need to have healthier and happier lives. We could easily open shelters to help people and families in need of basic necessities. I feel it would be easy to get churches and the community involved in helping the people and families in poverty. This plan could easily help people in need, and the community see a major benefit.

Last but not least, we could definitely open more family friendly places to have fun. In Pennington Gap, we only have places such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell. We could use more family friendly places that are fun for the whole family, such as a Virginia Historical Hands On Museum. Around Pennington Gap, all we do at these local places are eat, talk, and leave; we need more places where families and their children can be more physically active, and have fun together. My idea would benefit families by introducing them to more physical yet fun activities.

In conclusion, these simple ideas could make a major difference. I'm hoping to make as much of a difference as I can; with a little help I fully believe it is possible. Families, and people in general, hopefully benefit from these small adjustments. My ideas are very beneficial, and could help not only me and you, but the citizens of Pennington Gap.

We could easily open shelters to help people and families in need of basic necessities.

Bryleigh Middleton

Region 2 Winner
Kaydence Addison

Dalton Intermediate School
Radford, VA

If I Were Mayor ...

Radford is a beautiful city with many ·loving individuals. It's a small city, and it is very calm and peaceful here. When I moved to Radford, I instantly fell in love, but did notice some things I would like to improve. If l became mayor of Radford City, I would build a mall in West End, make free internet available throughout the city, and hold a food drive each month.

West End is fairly empty business wise. If were I the mayor of Radford, I would propose we put a mall there. In West End, there is a vacant parking lot, an old concrete factory, and an old Wades building. Any of these would be good places for our mall. I would do this by talking with construction companies and seeing how it could be built. Then, have a survey to find stores citizens would like there. At last, I would see which companies would be willing to come. I believe it would be a success and bring jobs to Radford. More jobs would boost our economy, and Radford would get more tax money. If there was more there, West End would start becoming a nicer place to live.

People need internet for school and work; some use it daily. Internet can be expensive, so few people have it. Because of this some children have to come to school early, and don't get all of their work done. Adults have to stay late at work for hours they aren't getting paid for. If I were mayor of Radford, I would propose we make free internet connection available throughout the city. I would get with a local internet company to see if it would be willing to provide the connections for a cheaper price. Then, I would talk to the electric companies and find out how much it would cost to install. We could hold a fundraiser through the schools for the cause, and have an event at the library. The city could hold bake sales, car washes etc. to get the funds. I think this would help our city by increasing the learning of our children, and the satisfaction of our workers.

Some families don't have enough food, and because of this they suffer. If I became mayor of Radford, I would make sure everyone had enough food. I would propose a food drive to be held all over the city every month. Families shouldn't just have food for the holidays. They should have food everyday. I would do this by setting up places to drop off food at public places throughout Radford. The families with food stamps and low pay would receive the donations. This would help Radford by making everyone involved happier and healthier.

Being the mayor is an important job, and you have to do things that are in best interest for the community. It's not an easy task in any way, shape, or form. As mayor of Radford, I would make our city a wonderful place to live, and grow up.

If I were mayor of Radford, I would propose we make free internet connection available throughout the city.

Kaydence Addison

Region 3 Winner
Will Schwantes

Daniel Morgan Middle School
Winchester, VA

If I Were Mayor …

"Congratulations, mayor." Many people patted my back as I walked towards the former mayor. "Congratulations on winning the election, Will," the now-former mayor said to me. The more people congratulated me, the more my smile brightened. I was now mayor of Winchester, Virginia.

DAY ONE AS MAYOR: I started my day like any other. I smacked my alarm clock, and jumped out of bed. I got my clothes on, and went out the door. I would start my day by establishing some new objectives during my time as mayor. The objectives I set for myself were as follows: I would try to reduce pollution throughout the city, along with the endeavor to reduce pollution caused by transportation. I would attempt to decrease the amount of discrimination and bullying in schools towards race, religion, age, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

I would put my investments towards cleaner energy, trying to preserve fossil fuels in the process. I'd also invest in shelter for the homeless, and try to be able to provide more food and water for them.

DAY FOURTEEN AS MAYOR: Today I'm proposing ideas to the city council on ways to improve health throughout the city, and raise money for those less fortunate. We settled on a five-kilometer charity walk to fundraise for less fortunate people … and on that walk, people could also present me with ideas they had benefitting the health and environment of the city.

DAY FIFTY-SIX AS MAYOR: I just finished talking at a school about preventing bullying. The assembly went really well, and many kids told me about their experiences. It was motivating to see kids with the courage to speak up about past problems.

DAY ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO: The five-kilometer charity walk was a week ago. Many people talked to me about their ideas they had for the town. Some were really good, which I took into account and proposed to the city council; only a few of their ideas got through, but I was happy with the selections.

ONE YEAR AS MAYOR: I walked up to the microphone. "So far, my term is going great. As a mayor, I've gotten to participate in many hands on activities to help the community grow, and prosper. I've met so many people, and made so many new friends. It's been great to be able to have my voice be heard, and help people speak up for themselves. Some of my old friends said I would never become mayor, but look where I'm standing now!" The crowd gave a chuckle. "I'd like to thank you all for a successful year, and to hope that we can make the year ahead even better." The audience applauded as I stepped away from the podium.

> *I would attempt to decrease the amount of discrimination and bullying in schools towards race, religion, age, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.*
>
> **Will Schwantes**

Region 4 Winner
Catherine Selfridge

Buckingham Middle School
Buckingham, VA

If I Were Mayor …

Very clearly at the top of my paper, it said "If I were Mayor essay," and that was the only thing written on my paper. I tapped my pencil on my desk, frowning in frustration, trying-to come up with even the tiniest idea on what to write. "Well, what does a mayor do?" I thought. "A mayor tries to make life better for their town, obviously." I stared at the lined paper, brewing something up in my head. "So then, what would you do?"

If I were mayor, I would try to enact ordinances in places that help prevent traffic accidents. There have been a lot of accidents on the roads, mainly on the highway, and while we can't stop them completely, it is something important we should try to prevent. Lowering the speeds and monitoring the speed with radar will help prevent accidents. We can also put in a special red light, which flashes white around the edge to catch your attention. During winter, we will put warning signs up to watch out for ice and snow on the roads.

Then, in the town, I would promote people to come and make businesses in our town. We have a mass of empty buildings in our town, sitting there looking sad and empty, waiting for someone to come shop in them again. When people get off the train, or get out of their car, there is nothing to do here. I want to change that by promoting local businesses and making more local events in our town to influence people to come to our town. Specifically, events like parades and big seasonal events (like a Christmas tree lighting ceremony) can bring us all together as a community and attract more people to our town.

I would also direct my attention to the schools. I see a lot of bullying happening every day in my school. I would try to fix this by starting programs against bullying, something like if a kid reports three incidents of actual bullying, they get a small prize, like a little toy or even school cash they can collect to trade it in for school items. Bullying like death threats, being pushed into lockers, or even being talked about in a negative way repeatedly need to be stopped. They prevent kids from wanting to come to school due to being emotionally and physically hurt on a daily basis, and even the bullies themselves suffer from this, being at a risk of substance abuse, violence and education problems. Both bullied and bullies are at an increased risk of depression, too.

I had been staring at the distance between reality and an idea. An idea that will take lots of hard work and dedication. An idea that could change everything about this town for the better. I picked up my paper and stared at my lined paper, only having "If I were Mayor essay" at the top. I know exactly what to write about.

If I were mayor, I would try to enact ordinances in places that help prevent traffic accidents.

Catherine Selfridge

Region 5 Winner
Gideon DeMarco

Lanier Middle School
Fairfax, VA

If I Were Mayor …

Being a mayor is strenuous. The role of mayor has helped Fairfax city function properly since 1805 (formerly known as the Town of Providence). If I were mayor, I would lead by example. Working hard to keep my community working together is my goal. I would respect everyone, and hear everyone. One of my first acts as mayor would be to hold a city council meeting to discuss goals and challenges related to making our community a better place and how to raise funds for the city's needs. I would act with care for citizens, acting with honesty and responsibility and working to make every citizen feel welcome, happy and safe. If I were elected, I would make sure every branch of service is doing its job in our community. These branches include the fire and police departments and city maintenance. I would go to the stations and centers of each of these branches to see if each had the necessary resources to function well. If one of these branches was not adequately prepared for its role in the community, I would make it a priority to attend to its needs.
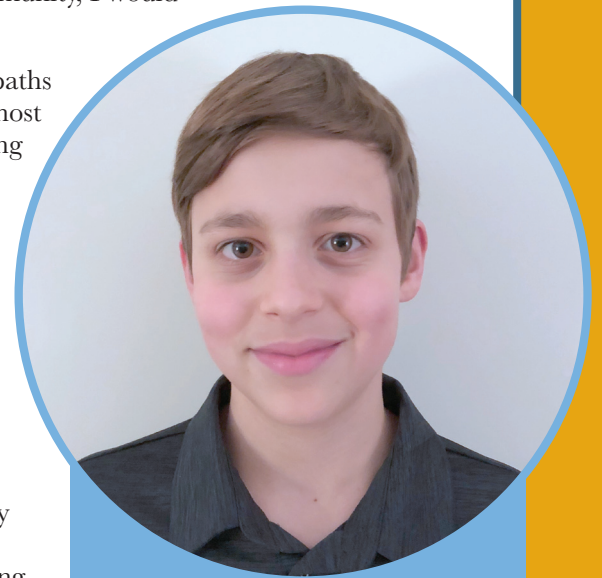
To make sure every community member is happy, trails and bike paths would be added for entertainment, including installing bike lanes to most roads, promoting biking, and walking to help the environment. Starting a campaign to get volunteers to assist with cleaning up our city would be a goal.

Endorsing the establishment of jobs in our community would be one of my main goals. If a business moved in, I would make sure they have everything needed to thrive in our city to promote industry and small businesses to help our community grow.

If I get elected, I would address crime and bullying. I want all citizens to feel safe here. I especially want students to feel safe at school, inviting presenters to go to public schools to provide healthy presentations to discourage bullying. To make sure we live in a healthy community with extremely low crime rates, I would strengthen our police force. I would talk to each station to meet equipment and staffing requirements. As part of meeting these requirements, a city council meeting would be executed to discuss funding methods. To help the fire department I would build local fire stations not more than one mile from each other.

The survival of our city depends on having good education, and thriving economics. If we are lacking resources, I will invite businesses who provide those resources to our community. I would support the education system the most, though, because without an educated future generation, our hard work to keep this community healthy and prospering will dissolve. To further help education, libraries will be built to give students enhanced studying opportunities.

If I were mayor, I would lead by example. Working hard to keep my community working together is my goal. I would respect everyone, and hear everyone.

Gideon DeMarco

If I were mayor, promoting the wellbeing of each individual citizen in our city will be my biggest goal. I would make this city a pleasant environment for everyone.

Region 6 Winner
Maeve Myers

Louisa County Middle School
Mineral, VA

If I Were Mayor …

The mayor of a city has the difficult job of balancing the budget, local needs, and available resources. I would work to make all of these things happen. I would help create a community green space, enhance the educational experience, and establish a mentorship program.

Enhancing the educational and classroom experience would be beneficial for everyone. It would make school more enjoyable, and help make lessons useful in real-world situations. This would include having classes outside, making volunteer and hands-on opportunities available to everyone, and using technology to enrich lessons. Students could volunteer in community cleanups, or be able to access labs or computers after school to create new things and experiment. The better your education is, the brighter your future.

Establishing a mentorship program in local schools could really make a difference. Older students could work with younger ones to build confidence and a sense of self-worth. Mentors could help with homework and studying, or just support their mentees through rough patches in their lives. Students who didn't have someone at home to help them would have someone to assist them in reaching their goals in school. It would encourage responsibility in the mentors as well, because they'd know that someone was looking up to and counting on them. Mentors could be critical in helping students reach their potential. No one should be at a disadvantage in the classroom because of a lack of support or encouragement.

The creation of a local green space could greatly improve my county. A community garden or park could provide a beautiful location for families and recreation, an expansion of the classroom, and the provision of fresh vegetables to those who would not be able to afford them. Students could work in the garden and learn about plants, how to grow them, how the ecosystem works, etcetera. Fresh vegetables would be an extremely beneficial addition to the county food bank. Low-income residents who might not otherwise get fresh produce would have easy access to locally grown, organic food. Also, a park would provide a nice place for families to unwind and for kids to play. A community green space could bring nutrition to those who need it, hands-on education for local kids, and beauty for all.

I believe that if you have been elected by the people of your community to a government position, it is your responsibility to cause change for the better. If I were mayor in my community, I would do my best to represent my fellow residents as best as possible. I would encourage the creation of a local garden or park, work to establish a mentoring program in local schools, and assist in efforts to enhance the educational experience for all students.

> *Establishing a mentorship program in local schools could really make a difference. Older students could work with younger ones to build confidence and a sense of self-worth.*
>
> **Maeve Myers**

Tina Li

Academy for Discovery at Lakewood
Norfolk, VA

If I Were Mayor ...

A mayor is very limited as to what they can or cannot do for a city, but if I were mayor, I would ensure Norfolk is safe and secure by preventing problems from increasing.

As sea levels are rising, Norfolk is sinking, and floods are occurring more often. It may not affect us now, but stopping this epidemic could provide a stable coastline for our descendants. I will fund the construction of seawalls and levees around the city, and begin to implement beach nourishment, which is adding sand onto beaches to repair coastal erosion. I would also work to pass a law for construction of homes and buildings to be elevated, and encourage floatable buildings along the waterside.

Another challenge in Norfolk is the pollution of land and water, which can harm animals and also cause long term detrimental effects to humans. If I were mayor, I would build more trash and recycle bins throughout the city, so people will be more likely to dispose of their garbage properly. Also, I would support the Senate's bill to place a tax on plastic bags, because plastic bags can damage soil and harm aquatic life.

Norfolk Public Schools are ranked among the state's worst performing school districts. As mayor, I would advocate for better education, because a good education lays a solid foundation for the rest of life. I will organize meetings with the teachers in Norfolk so that they can discuss lesson plans and improve their teaching strategies. I will also discourage ability grouping in schools, because placing students of different skill levels in the same classes improves cooperation and team building, and everyone will get an equal education.

Norfolk has one of the highest crime rates in the nation, so if I were mayor, I would help decrease criminal activity like gang violence and assaults. I will increase public surveillance, so the city can investigate criminal acts. Also, I will help ensure that ex-offenders receive stable housing and employment, because they may be less likely to commit crimes if they are content with their lives. Early intervention can be very beneficial to crime prevention, so as mayor, I would improve family environments to ensure healthy child development. Also, I will set up support groups for children and teens.

Homelessness and extreme poverty is a challenge for adults and children in Norfolk, so if I were mayor, I would build more shelters for families and individuals. Also, I would encourage families to adopt homeless children or become foster parents.

Not only that, but I will also create a program from which homeless people can receive loans and pay them back when they get back onto their feet.

Being mayor is a difficult task, but with the right mindset and innovative ideas, I can help ensure equity and peacefulness in Norfolk.

As mayor, I would advocate for better education, because a good education lays a solid foundation for the rest of life.

Tina Li