

# Governor presents 8 awards for winning entries in VML essay contest

**A** HOPEWELL 7<sup>TH</sup> GRADER was the statewide winner of the Virginia Municipal League's first-ever "If I Were Mayor" essay contest. Na'Seem Hopson's 500-word essay was judged the best of eight regional winners from across the Commonwealth.

Gov. Terry McAuliffe, assisted by VML President Bill Euille, presented the eight students with their awards on Wednesday afternoon, Jan. 28, in the Lecture Hall of the Library of Virginia in downtown Richmond. The awards were presented following the governor's remarks to approximately 220 local government officials who attended the association's VML Day at the Capitol program. In addition to family members, many of the students were accompanied by the mayors from their home towns.

The "If I Were Mayor" contest drew nearly 1,000 essays from 7th graders across the Commonwealth. It was the first of a number of upcoming VML initiatives that will involve civics education for students across the state.

The regional winners were:

**Region 1** Bailey Nash, Jonesville Middle School (Lee County)

**Region 2** Kendryek Wheeler, Woodrow Wilson Middle School (City of Roanoke)

**Region 3** Macalister Gordon, Daniel Morgan Middle School (Winchester)

**Region 4** Garrett Love, Buckingham County Middle School

**Region 5** Logan Kurtz, Manassas Park Middle School

**Region 6** Adele Masson, Culpeper Middle School

**Region 7** Na'Seem Hopson, Hopewell Redevelopment & Housing Authority

**Region 8** Sophie Freiling, Berkeley Middle School (Williamsburg)

In addition to a framed certificate, each regional winner received a check for \$150. The statewide winner received a certificate and \$250.

Read all eight of the winning entries and an assortment of illuminating excerpts from some of the other 991 entries on the pages that follow.



MICHAEL L. WHITE, GOVERNOR'S OFFICE



With Gov. Terry McAuliffe are winners (l-r) Sophie Freiling, Adele Masson, Logan Kurtz, Garrett Love, Na'Seem Hopson, Macalister Gordon, Kendryek Wheeler and Bailey Nash.

# Region 7 and Statewide Winner



## **If I Were Mayor ...**

**By Na'Seem Hopson**

*Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority*

If I were mayor, I would improve the lives of children living in Hopewell. I would begin by addressing bullying because it has a negative impact on children and some die. I would try to convince those children to talk to their parents about their feelings and problems. I would promote anti-bullying campaigns throughout my city and have events where everyone could come together to solve this problem.

I see a lot of problems in my community even though I am a child. I live in public housing and know that my community needs a lot of help. I would promote peace in my neighborhood. I hear gunshots sometimes and am afraid. It is hard to tell how close the gunshots are to my house and if they are coming from the military base or not. I would work with the Police Department to begin new safety programs with community officers. I would increase their budget so that more officers could be hired to ensure the safety of citizens. As mayor, I would also attend the community meetings to connect to the residents.

My neighborhood is filled with litter every day. I would start a campaign that would teach people about the environment and recycling. I would have a community clean-up day and invite citizens to clean up all the litter and plant trees. My campaign would be part of Disney's Big Green program. I believe that no one cares about my neighborhood because there is always trash on the ground. Living in a clean neighborhood would make me feel happy.

More activities are needed for the youth in my neighborhood. If there were more activities for us, so many children would not be doing things that could get them into trouble. If we had people to help us, I believe that there would be less children dropping out of high school. High school dropouts have less chance at succeeding in life.

There needs to be different procedures used in the schools to teach children. Everyone does not learn the same and many struggle with the SOL testing focus. School can be very boring and students spend a lot of time there. I would add technology into teaching for all students. I would use games, websites, and mobile apps to teach lessons. I would make sure that the school budget included money for every student to have access to a tablet or computer. I would also encourage students to be themselves and use their voices to bring attention to issues they may be dealing with. I would encourage them to focus on completing their education so that they could have careers as adults.

My term as mayor would be focused on children because we are the future. Every child does not have the same access to opportunity. I would work with churches, agencies and organizations to close the divide so that all children might have better futures.

# Region 1 Winner



## **If I Were Mayor ...**

**By Bailey Nash**

*Jonesville Middle School*

Being mayor sounds really interesting. The mayor has the privilege of helping the community. The mayor can't be fired. Even though the pay is not high, the rewards are great. If I were mayor, I would make some improvements to the town of Jonesville.

As mayor, with the approval of council, I would improve the playground equipment at the park. I would also use the amphitheater at the park more often to raise money for other projects. I would use the baseball field much more and work on constructing a football and soccer field as well as sports teams for the Town of Jonesville.

If elected mayor, I would encourage more businesses to come to the area. To do that I would exempt them from town taxes for a year. If I could get more businesses to come to this town, I would try to convince them to use recycling bins and half of the proceeds will be donated to special causes and charities. That is just a portion of what I would do as mayor.

I, as mayor, would require more advanced training for the police squad and more advanced training for the fire department. I would have better buildings built for both of the services. I would also have better equipment purchased for the police squad as well as the fire department.

While being in the mayor's position, I would promote the airport much more than it is. If the airport was advertised more, it could be good for the economy of Jonesville. We could have businesses encouraged even more to come here. So if I were mayor, some of my goals would be to increase revenue and population.

These are some of the things I would do as mayor. If you want these changes and improvements to happen here in Jonesville, then elect me as mayor.

# Region 2 Winner

## If I Were Mayor ...

By **Kendryek Wheeler**

*Woodrow Wilson Middle School*



In the late 1880s, Roanoke was proclaimed the “magic city” of the New South because of the population boom resulting from a railroad merger. Today, I believe that Roanoke still is a magic city but for different reasons. Roanoke has majestic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a thriving healthcare industry, Greenway bike and running trails, and a beautiful parkway that allows people to view all that the Roanoke Valley has to offer. I will run for mayor in order to preserve these great attributes of Roanoke as well as make some changes to enhance our magic city.

As soon as I am elected mayor, I will improve two main areas in the magic city of Roanoke. These areas are raising the minimum wage and improving transportation. People deserve to be paid more money for the jobs that they do. Also, our city is clean and beautiful, and we need to cut down on pollution from vehicle exhaust to keep our city that way. Enhancing these areas will help improve the economy and make Roanoke more progressive and inviting to its current residents, as well as attracting even more newcomers to the area.

Today, Roanoke’s current minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. I will double the minimum wage to \$14.50 an hour because of a really deserving reason. Roanoke is mostly a health care industry, and because of that, Roanoke has a plentiful amount of healthcare support workers who work hard to help doctors and nurses cure illnesses and diseases and help save people’s lives. The health care workers literally save LIVES, and therefore, they all deserve a reward for working hard to save Roanokers.

With healthy Roanokers, we need healthy transportation options. As soon as I become mayor, I will add healthy options to the already functional transportation outlets. With such an influential healthcare system in Roanoke that focuses on a healthy lifestyle, I think that Roanoke should have some type of electric bike share program. People could rent a bike from one station and park it at another station close to their destination. Electric bike stations could be located near neighborhood schools so that people could walk from their homes to the station and then ride the electric bike to their destination. This would allow people to exercise, get fresh air, and save the city from pollution. I think electric bikes would serve Roanokers well because some people want to exercise but may not have the stamina to go really far, so they could switch from pedaling to turning on the electric motor. I would call this program *iBike Magic Share Program* and ask Apple Inc. to be a sponsor along with developing an app for it. I would also offer tax incentives to people who commit to using this program since it would help the environment.

In conclusion, enhancing Roanoke’s transportation options will make our magic city more eco-friendly, and we could become nationally known for our commitment to a clean environment. With a higher minimum wage, we could attract more outsiders to move here and join our workforce. The newcomers would buy goods and services in Roanoke, which would boost our economy. Natives of Roanoke would continue to be proud to show off our magic city, with its heritage and progress. If I were mayor of Roanoke, I would help create more magic in this magic city!

# Region 3 Winner



## If I were mayor ...

**By Macalister Gordon**

*Daniel Morgan Middle School*

If I were mayor, I would focus on making the city of Winchester a better and more appealing community. As mayor, I would work closely with the city council to ensure that decisions made and implemented would be based on what's best for the overall good of the community and citizens. During my term as mayor to make the city of Winchester a better place to live, I would concentrate on improving the economy, our education system and our sports facilities.

My first priority would be to help grow the city's economy. I would advertise the many historical events hosted in Winchester to bring people outside of the city to attend and eat at our local restaurants. I would help create more jobs and make sure that local employees are ready and prepared for the jobs. While working with the city council, I will make sure that good decisions are made on how money is spent for the city.

A very important priority of a community is to ensure an educational experience that will prepare students to be functioning citizens with employable skills. I would help implement a business partnership with schools so that business employees could come into schools and volunteer and mentor our future leaders. Students would have the opportunity to spend time in businesses to be exposed to different types of jobs available within companies which would help direct students on a career path of interest to them. I would also focus on making sure that our students had updated technology and instruction to be able to compete in a world that advances in technology every day.

Another area that I would focus on would be planning and building a new soccer complex for our city. Hundreds of Winchester families are involved in recreational and travel soccer programs. A new soccer complex would allow more opportunities for local citizens and would help create new jobs. The city could host soccer tournaments which would bring families to our community and help make money for our city by people paying for hotels and food and visiting our rich historical city. This complex could also be rented for other events which would help bring in more revenue for the city.

With my focus for the city, I think I could fulfill the job of mayor. I would be ready for anything and driven to help make Winchester the best city for its citizens and students. The ideas that I have could bring the attention to our city by improving our city school, creating new sports opportunities and increase the number of visitors and revenue. Welcome to the wonderful city of Winchester!

# Region 4 Winner



## If I were mayor ...

By **Garrett Love**

*Buckingham County Middle School*

If I were mayor of Dillwyn I would build a bike trail, so Dillwyn can be known all around the country and the state of Virginia. Also, I would build a bike shop to provide things for people that ride on the trails.

Here are some of my reasons to build a bike trail. One of my reasons is so people can get exercise and just have fun. Also, people can get jobs to maintain the trail and build it. To add to that, people can find out about Dillwyn and come here for the experience and to ride on the bike trail. This can also make money for Dillwyn to add new things to the town! The money can also go to the people in need in the area. And those are a few of my reasons to build a bike trail.

We could build different trails for different things. We could build a sightseeing trail for people to take a relaxing ride on a paved trail. Then, we could build an easy trail for younger and less experienced people. After that, we could build an intermediate trail with steeper hills and a harder trail to ride on that is longer than the one before. Then, we could build an expert trail for really good riders and making everything harder on this trail. After that, we can build a mountain biking trail with jumps. Those are some trails that I would build in Dillwyn.

I would build a bike shop to supply the bikes for people to ride on the trails and supply things that they need, like helmets and water bottles. Also, it will give people jobs to run the bike shop. This shop could help out people in need in the Buckingham area. The shop could take up one of the vacant shops in the town, so it can be in use again!

So now, you see what I would do if I were mayor of Dillwyn. It would help the community, it would make money to help people in need and it would help build more things in Dillwyn. It also would create jobs for people that don't have one and for people to have fun and learn about Dillwyn and help make it known.

# Region 5 Winner

## If I were mayor ...

By Logan Kurtz

*Manassas Park Middle School*



What would I do if I were mayor? If people were asked this question, especially in my age group, they'd have all sorts of answers. Some would build amusement parks based around themselves. Others would say something silly, like banning little siblings from their rooms, or city-wide holidays. Although these ideas may seem extreme, and definitely what other students would enjoy, being mayor has nothing to do with actions like that. Being a mayor deals with solving problems and accomplishing goals that would benefit everyone for the better.

First of all, I'd make a balance of housing and natural areas in the city. There are about sixty new students in my school, and they're still building houses! Of course it's great to have so many new people in the city, but in order to construct the houses they had to cut down lots of trees. I would plant more trees in another area to make up for the trees as well, making Manassas Park a better place to live.

I would also add a sidewalk that leads to schools. Many students walk to school, even though there's no sidewalk. Then, students will still have a way to get to school if they miss the bus, even if their parents are unable to drive them.

Another action I would take as mayor is to work with the local School Board and raise the salaries of teachers, police officers and firemen. The average starting salary for the teachers is about \$36,700 a year, which is too small for the amount of work that they do! Firefighters and police officers also get a small amount, with only about \$47,500 annually! They help our community for the better, and deserve to be treated with higher salaries and respect from the people they serve. I want to make sure that they get the thanks that they deserve for helping the city.

I would also enforce recycling throughout the city. I care deeply about making the city more environmentally-friendly. Recycling would be a great way to help! Manassas Park is already taking great steps forward in this direction by putting recycling bins in every classroom, and the elementary school is using actual silverware so that they could stop throwing out so much plastic. It is great that the schools are environmentally-friendly, but once students leave, they might continue to throw recyclable objects away. As mayor, I would make recycling available to everyone. I would make recycling services free, so more people would start to do it.

There is more to being mayor than amusement parks, silly laws and mansions. Mayors help out with real problems and work with and for real people.

# Region 6 Winner



## If I were mayor ...

**By Adele Masson**

*Culpeper Middle School*

If I led Culpeper as mayor, I would do more than the normal mayor jobs, such as running and representing the town, attending ceremonies and advertising Culpeper. I would try to help the needy by doing food drives and such, give more town services, and do more to help us become a better place as a whole. We have a great town here, and I would try to make it even better, no matter how hard it may be.

As mayor I would help the immigrants and people who do not speak English to learn the English language. I would set up a program to help them so they can get better jobs. In Culpeper, almost every day you can see laborers standing by the street, trying to get jobs and money so they can support their families. If they spoke English, they would more likely get a steady income and a better job. Sometimes they get cheated out of money, but it would be easier to stop people from doing that if the worker could understand what was happening.

Our town has good services, including garbage collection, schools, town police and highway maintenance. To these services I would like to add more carnivals and festivals, a public art gallery, and I would replace traffic lights with traffic circles, along with other things. To make our environment better I would organize groups to pick up trash and help them, personally, to carry this task out. I would promote recycling and compost, and help find ways to decrease the amount of pollution we have.

In order to supply more money, my job would be to advertise the history aspect of our town more, especially the Civil War period. I would put signs up about the Graffiti House and other places, and possibly set up a website about it! I would also advertise our setting to people looking for houses, and build houses with good view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I would tell people about our ideal location, about one hour away from D. C., but not in a city. Hopefully, we would attract more people here and raise the population.

I would add more fun things for the teenagers and kids in Culpeper, such as an arcade. I would bring in more stores, and maybe some restaurants. I would like to add a Macys and possibly a toy store, like "Toys R Us". To make even more money, I would open an Olive Garden. I would put inns, hotels, and motels in better locations than the ones they are in now. These things might attract more visitors here.

If I were mayor, I would try my best to make Culpeper the best place to be. As mayor I would be doing all these things to help make our relatively poor town richer. Adding more of these industries will make us better. Culpeper is a great town with amazing potential, and I would carry out my ideas to help us fulfill it.



# Region 8 Winner

## If I were mayor ...

By **Sophie Freiling**

*Berkley Middle School*



After living in Williamsburg my whole life, if I were mayor some of the key issues I would address are the struggling tourism economy, the need for an additional middle school, the cost of healthcare for the city and local businesses, and transportation. If I were mayor, I would suggest making the first hour of the Prince George Parking Garage free to encourage more people to park and shop downtown to help the tourism economy. Another way to boost the tourism economy is to have development or investment companies redevelop the Williamsburg Shopping Center. A way to draw more people out for food would be to have more outdoor seating to create vibrancy, especially in Merchants Square. One more way to boost the tourism economy would be to create a focal point for the Arts District, a chance for more small businesses and another attraction for tourists.

Another thing I would like to do if I were mayor would be to address the need for an additional middle school. I would work more closely with James City County and the School Board to ensure that future middle school students don't suffer overcrowding.

Adding on to the middle schools we have now would be a cheaper alternative to building a new middle school. The additions could add about one hundred students to each school with enough space for everyone and leave money that the teachers could use in the future. The cost of healthcare for city and local businesses is another issue I would focus on. A way to fix this would be to buy Country Road from Colonial Williamsburg and turn it into a fitness park where people could run, bike, or just take a relaxing walk. This would promote exercise and would keep people healthier, lowering the amount of healthcare they need.

Another way to keep people healthy would be to have chain restaurants publish nutritional data on menus so people are aware of what they are eating. People will then have the option to choose healthier meals when they go out to eat and not consume empty calories. One more way to lower the cost of healthcare would be to build more hiking, walking, biking, and kayaking infrastructure. This would give the potential for more fitness areas and trails to exercise on.

The final issue I would address would be improvements on transportation. I would expand the train service so there are more trains running faster. This would allow people to travel without backing up the roads. When people do drive their cars, I-64 gets backed up very easily. Widening I-64 with two more lanes on each side would keep the traffic moving and make it easier and safer for tourists to travel to Williamsburg. By boosting the economy, preventing overcrowding in schools, lowering the cost of healthcare, and creating more transportation options I would make Williamsburg a better place if I were mayor.