

In the overwhelming morass of curriculum standards and SOLs, it seems that civics education sometimes gets lost. Furthermore, as citizens become more and more cynical about government and its effectiveness, it is critical that we begin to turn the tide by making sure that our youth understand the value and importance of local government. I believe that the Virginia Municipal League (VML) has a role to play in facilitating civics education in the Commonwealth. To that end, our first initiative was the establishment of an “If I Were Mayor” essay contest.

Last Year, 999 seventh graders from around the state submitted essays for consideration. That means that nearly 1,000 children in Virginia spent time thinking about local government. Perhaps more importantly, they thought about what it would be like to have their voices heard and to serve as a leader in their community.

At VML day at the Capitol in January, we honored eight regional winners (including one statewide winner). The awards were presented by the Governor and it was a very special occasion for the students, their families, their teachers, and their communities.

We know that localities are engaged in a variety of projects to promote civics education and we hope that your community will consider participating in this year’s contest. The announcement will be mailed to teachers in the third week of September. We will also be sending a notification to mayors at the same time.

Please encourage your mayors to work with the local schools regarding this contest. For example, in some communities, mayors visited 7th grade classrooms. In others, the teachers took the kids to town/city hall for a tour. Whatever path your locality decides to follow with respect to civics education, teaching young people about local government is one of the most important projects that we can undertake. It is my sincere hope that VML’s essay contest, along with future projects, will be of assistance to you in achieving this goal.

For more information on the If I Were Mayor essay contest, go to <http://www.vml.org/education/essay-contest> or contact me at 804-523-8521.