



Best & Brightest 8th Grade Essay Contest 2026

The Best & Brightest Awards invites Leon County 8th-grade students to recognize their potential and dream about their future through writing. This annual essay contest celebrates young leaders who show promise, compassion, and a commitment to making a difference in their schools and communities.

ESSAY PROMPT

“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands: one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.” – Audrey Hepburn

Reflect on this quote and write an essay describing how involvement in community service can make a difference in your community and/or in your own life as you prepare to enter high school.

CONTEST DETAILS

Eligibility

Open to all 8th-grade students attending accredited schools in Leon County. Only one essay per student will be accepted.

Essay Requirements

- Maximum **500 words**
- Typed, **12-point font, double-spaced**
- Original work only; non-original content must be footnoted (footnotes not included in word count)

Judging Criteria

Essays will be evaluated on creativity and originality, logic and clarity of ideas, grammatical accuracy and writing quality.

How to Enter

1. Students will submit their essay to their Language Arts teacher by the school's internal deadline.
2. Each school's Language Arts Department Chair will coordinate judging and select the top three essays.
3. Winning essays, with entry forms, will be submitted to the Best & Brightest staff for countywide review.

Note: A rubric for judging essays is provided to assist teachers in the selection process.

PRIZES

The top three essay winners from each school will receive a certificate from the Best & Brightest Awards. These winning essays will then be judged countywide against other school winners for the chance to earn additional prizes in the Best & Brightest 8th Grade Essay Contest. All school-level winners will be invited to the Best & Brightest Awards Ceremony on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, where the final countywide winners will be announced and prizes awarded.

Final Winner Prizes:

- Winner: \$500
- Runner-Up: \$250
- Honorable Mention: \$100

TIMELINE

October/November 2025	Department Chairs share details with all 8 th grade Language Arts teachers.
November/December 2025	Teachers share details with all 8th grade students.
January 2026	Teachers remind students about the essay contest.
Mid-February 2026	- Students turn in essays to teachers. - Language Arts teachers meet to select top three essays.
February 25, 2026	Principals (or designated Best & Brightest liaison) submit top three essays to Best & Brightest staff.
May 13, 2026	Best & Brightest Essay Contest presentation during Best & Brightest Awards Ceremony at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall.
May 18, 2026	School winners will be recognized at Best & Brightest with a certificate for 8 th grade commencement ceremonies.