



# VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Rivanna Ridge Professional Building  
200 Hansen Road, Suite 2  
Charlottesville, VA 22911

## News Release

*For Immediate Release*

### Contact

Gina Patterson, executive director  
434-295-8722 or [gina@vsba.org](mailto:gina@vsba.org)

### Second Annual VSBA Student Essay Contest Winners Announced *Winners Recognized at the VSBA Conference on Education*



**July 19, 2022** – Three students received recognition for their submissions to the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) Second Annual Student Essay Contest. The three finalists were recognized at the VSBA Conference on Education, which took place earlier today. This was the second year the contest was held, and the theme of the contest was “Food Security”. This year, thanks to a generous donation from an anonymous donor, the top three finalists each received a \$1,000 scholarship.

Courtney Begoon (pictured above, left), a recent graduate from Augusta County Public Schools, Isabel Gonzales (pictured above, middle), a rising sophomore from Portsmouth City Public Schools, and Nainika Sompallie (pictured above, right) a rising junior from Henrico County Public Schools were selected by a panel of judges who were presented with the written essay as well as a recorded speech.

- To view Courtney’s winning speech please visit: <https://youtu.be/bQj8FjW3ULE>.
- To view Isabel’s winning speech please visit: <https://youtu.be/f3SerypJad4>.
- To view Nainika’s winning speech please visit: <https://youtu.be/7YtzajZK9MI>.

“This contest provides a wonderful opportunity for school board members from across the state to hear student voices on a subject of importance to them, food security. This is very timely for the VSBA, as we are celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> year of the VSBA Food for Thought Awards, which was spearheaded by former VSBA Past President Joan Wodiska, as an opportunity to educate, engage, and empower school leaders to address childhood hunger while also providing all students in Virginia with healthier, more nutritious school meals,” said executive director Gina Patterson.

As award recipients, Begoon, Gonzales, and Sompallie all received special invitations to attend the Conference on Education and delivered their speeches to the audience of Virginia school board members and superintendents.

### **About the Virginia School Boards Association**

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training, and services. The Association offers conferences, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth's educational leaders.

**###**

**[www.vsba.org](http://www.vsba.org) | 434-295-8722 | 800-446-8722 | Fax: 434-295-8785**