



**2023 Essay Contest**  
**Why Civility Matters**

# History of the Civics Essay Contest

The Civics Essay contest started in 2016 and was a proposal that came out of a meeting of our Civics Committee. The committee is comprised of eleven teachers from public and private K-12 schools whose goal is to promote Civics in Education across the state.

The Essay contest was designed to integrate Civics in classes such as English and Math rather than just being a focus in Social Studies around Election time. Since its first year participation in the contest has risen from 250 students to over 7,000.

# Essay Contest Overview

Every year in collaboration with our Civics Committee we decide on a topic for the Essay Contest. Our Civics Committee is made up of high-school teachers from across the state.

The contest is open to any student K-12 in Tennessee.

The essays are blind-judged and scored based on a predetermined rubric.

Each winner receives a TNStars 529 College Savings Program scholarship. First-place winners receive a \$500 scholarship, second-place winners receive \$250, and third-place winners receive \$100.

# Lack of Civility in Public Discourse

Civil Discourse is at an all-time low in our Country. According to a recent poll by Georgetown University Americans gave a mean score of 70.36 on a scale where “0” means there is no political division and “100” means that there is division on the edge of a civil war.

Despite pessimism about the current state of polarization and the direction of the country, over half (58%) of Americans expressed optimism about the future “because young people are committed to making this country a better place to live for everyone.” While this sentiment was shared across generational lines (74% of young voters and 61% of the oldest voters agree)

# 2023: Why Civility Matters?

A record **7,749 students** from across Tennessee participated in the contest making 2023 our biggest contest yet.

We promoted the contest through our civics committee, school principals, home school associations, social media, and a press release.

Students wrote insightful and thought-provoking takes on Civility, and our judges struggled to choose the winners.



K for kind means kindness. I for kind means initiative. N for kind means being nice. D for kind means doing the right thing. So being kind is so important to lots of things. So no matter where you are kindness is important. Kindness to school is also very important. So always be kind.



Margaret Brown  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade



**“K for kind means kindness. I for kind means initiative. N for kind means being nice. D for kind means doing the right thing. So being kind is so important to lots of things. So no matter where you are kindness is important, kindness to school is also important, so always be kind.”**  
- Margaret Brown, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

“Listening is one of the best ways to solve a problem. By listening to others, you become a better communicator and person. When you take the time to listen to others, they feel valued and appreciated. It is easier to come to a solution when you are listening, showing respect, and being kind to others.”

– Eliana Page

---



“Civil discourse helps individuals live peacefully in a civil society; think of it like the glue that binds society together.”  
– Ethan Elder

---





“Citizens are vital in promoting civil discourse in a democracy. By fostering a culture of respect, critical thinking, and active citizenship, individuals can create an environment where diverse perspectives can speak, and meaningful dialogue can occur. By embracing these principles in our own lives and encouraging others to do the same, we can work towards strengthening the foundations of democracy and ensuring a vibrant and inclusive society.”

– Ethan Elder

“The tapestry of leadership, woven with the threads of morality and strategy, not only shapes the destiny of nations but also influences the well-being of their inhabitants.”  
– Jasmine Smith

---



In addition to the scholarships, the winners from each category were invited to Nashville for a tour of the State Capitol and the State Library and Archives as well as a chance to page for one of their state legislators.

---



Since 2016 over 14,000 students from hundreds of schools have participated in the Civics Essay Contest.

