

ABUZZ WITH CIVICS

Inspiring a New Generation

By Rebecca Patrick

As summer drew to a close, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana Department of Education hosted the first-ever state Civics Bee at the Indiana Statehouse, where middle school students in grades six to eight participated in live quiz rounds to test their civics knowledge and gave presentations on issues facing their communities in front of a panel of judges.

The event was part of the National Civics Bee, held annually and organized in partnership with The Civic Trust® of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

At the conclusion of the Indiana Civics Bee, Ellie Fost from Richmond Friends School in Wayne County was declared the winner. Her talk centered on the importance of mental health support – something she said she’s learned firsthand. Fost received \$1,000 and represented Indiana in the National Civics Bee in Washington, D.C. in mid-November.

Fiona Steuer, representing Willowcreek Middle School in Portage, won second place and \$750 with a spirited speech about equal pay for women, noting the disparity in her own community. Doing away with the corporate tax to spur economic growth was the topic championed by Hunter Reed, representing Delta Middle School in Muncie. He took home third place and \$500.

All top three finishers were eighth graders when their Indiana Civics Bee journey began earlier this year at initial contests held in partnership with local chambers across the state. Those events produced the nearly 20 participants who competed for the state title.

The goal of the 2024 National Civics Bee is to encourage more young Americans to engage in civics and contribute to their communities. That aim is one the Indiana Chamber shares for Hoosiers, including it

in its latest long-range visioning plan for the state, *Indiana Prosperity 2035*, as noted by the organization’s president and CEO Vanessa Green Sinders in her opening remarks at the state Civics Bee.

She adds, “The Indiana Chamber believes this event can be part of inspiring a new generation. We want to spread the message to all young Hoosiers that it’s cool and rewarding to be involved in your community and make a difference in that way. I encourage the students who took part in this competition at the local and state level – and all middle schoolers – to find their own path of how they can be impactful and serve.”

One of the judges for the state Civics Bee was Dr. Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education.

“In Indiana, we have placed a significant focus on preparing students to serve as proactive, engaged contributors to society,” she says. “This includes ensuring every sixth grade student completes a civics course, elevating civic literacy as a skill of an Indiana Graduate Prepared to Succeed (dashboard), as well as providing increased opportunities for students to engage in service-based learning or to take part in high-quality civic literacy programs.

Jenner continues, “To encourage civic engagement, it is essential that more young people have access to learning opportunities – such as the Civics Bee – which help build their knowledge and skills and empower them to make a difference. Our students’ passion and commitment to addressing real issues in our communities was on full display at this event, and I’m excited to see how these young Hoosiers will continue to positively shape our state and our nation.”

Rounding out the judging trio were Charles Dunlap, president and CEO of the Indiana Bar Foundation, and Charles Hyde, president and CEO of the Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site.

The Indiana Bar Foundation, Kroger Gardis & Regas and Indiana University Center on Representative Government sponsored the Indiana Civics Bee.



Officials from the Indiana Chamber and Indiana Department of Education congratulate the top winner, Ellie Fost. (Right) Nearly 20 middle schoolers from across the state took part in the inaugural Indiana Civics Bee and presented their ideas to address issues they see in their communities.

RESOURCE: National Civics Bee at www.civics.uschamberfoundation.org/national-civics-bee