

BIG IDEAS, YOUNG VOICES

Indiana Civics Bee Spotlights Future Leaders

By Matt Ottinger

Inside the Indiana War Memorial in downtown Indianapolis this summer, middle school students stepped to the microphone with big ideas for their communities – and the confidence to make a case for them.

The occasion was the third annual Indiana Civics Bee, hosted by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation and presented by Cummins Inc. Part quiz competition, part public speaking showcase, the event brought together Hoosier students in grades six through eight to test their civics knowledge and present solutions to challenges they see close to home.

By the end of the competition, Ayan Reddy of Newburgh, representing Castle North Middle School, had earned the top prize. His proposal focused on bringing more fresh food into school cafeterias through partnerships with Indiana farmers – an idea he said was designed to support student health and development while strengthening local connections. Reddy received $1,000 and the opportunity to participate in the National Civics Bee in Washington, D.C., later this year.

Serenity Hayden of St. John Lutheran School in Kendallville finished second and received $500. Hasini Kosaraju, representing Zionsville West Middle School, placed third and received $250.

The Indiana competition is part of the National Civics Bee®, organized in partnership with The Civic Trust of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Its purpose is straightforward but important: encourage more young Americans to understand civics, engage with public issues and contribute to the places they call home.

For the Indiana Chamber, that mission also aligns with Indiana Prosperity 2035, the organization's long-range visioning plan for the state. President and CEO Vanessa Green Sinders noted in her opening remarks that civic engagement is essential to building stronger communities and a stronger Indiana.

"We're incredibly proud of the students who participated in the program and made a deliberate choice to focus on civics and community engagement," Sinders relays. "The speeches we heard reflected a genuine commitment to making a difference and serving their communities, both locally and beyond.

"Opportunities like the Civics Bee give students, at a critical stage, the chance to develop skills such as public speaking, problem-solving and teamwork – abilities that will benefit them in every aspect of their future. We're excited to continue to grow participation in this program."

Students advanced to the state event through regional National Civics Bee competitions held over the past several weeks. Those contests featured participants from across Indiana who submitted essays before taking part in live quiz rounds and presentations. Regional partners included the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, Kendallville Area Chamber of Commerce, Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, Wayne County Area Chamber of Commerce and Zionsville Chamber of Commerce.

Indiana's program also carries momentum from a strong showing in 2025, when state champion Barrett Hodorek of Lakeview Middle School in Warsaw finished as the national runner-up and recently appeared on NBC's "TODAY" show.

The Civics Bee's emphasis on community engagement also resonated with Cummins, the event's presenting sponsor.

"Cummins is proud to be the presenting sponsor for this year's Civics Bee because we take pride in our corporate responsibility to power the prosperity of the communities where we operate," says Cummins Chief Administrative Officer and Corporate Secretary Nicole Y. Lamb-Hale. "Our society is better off when our youth are equipped with an understanding of their rights, responsibilities and how they can make a difference in their communities. After hearing from these bright Civics Bee contestants, I am inspired by their promise and proud to congratulate them on all they have already accomplished."

The event was also supported by technology sponsor Bill of Rights Institute and supporting sponsors Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site, Eli Lilly and Co., Kroger, Gardis & Regas, LLP and Indiana Bar Foundation.



Ayan Reddy's standout performance earned him the state title and a spot at the national competition later this year. Civics Bee emcee Charles Hyde of the Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site, Indiana Chamber President and CEO Vanessa Green Sinders and Nicole Y. Lamb-Hale of Cummins Inc. offer their congratulations.

RESOURCE: www.indianachamber.com/civicsbee