

Press Release

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West Virginia Kids Advise Governor and First Lady

Kids don't vote, political pollsters don't call them and policymakers rarely ask them what they think about the important public issues confronting the State. But West Virginia students have strong opinions about what would make West Virginia a great place to be a kid.

More than 4,000 students submitted essays in a contest sponsored by the West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition in response to the question, "What would make West Virginia the greatest place to be a kid?" Thirty essays were judged outstanding, and on February 14, 2007 during Children's Day at the Legislature, 10 students were recognized for their creativity and skills in expressing their opinions in writing.

The students, attending Children's Day at the Legislature, read their essays to First Lady Gayle Manchin. They and their families visited the Legislature and enjoyed juice and cookies with the First Lady at the Governor's Mansion. The Governor also made a quick appearance to congratulate the students for their efforts.

Many West Virginia children wrote that they love their home state. They love the mountains, the trees, the flowers and the animals. They love the rural lifestyle and write about the joy of picking fruit in their yards and vegetables in their garden. A new resident of West Virginia wrote, "I came to West Virginia from New Zealand, and I think this is a pretty great place to be a kid! Let's Go Mountaineers!" In the current

discussion about what slogan should greet visitors to the Mountain State, West Virginia students could add a new suggestion: “West Virginia: A great place to raise kids.”

Overwhelmingly elementary school students think West Virginia needs more theme parks, more waterparks, more playgrounds, more places for family fun. One of the more creative suggestions came from a student, who recommended the Governor build a giant waterslide coming down from the very top of the state capitol into a giant wave pool. Please take note of this suggestion Secretary Ferguson of the Department of Administration and Finance.

West Virginia’s elementary school students seem very aware of the problems of unhealthy lifestyles. They want no smoking, no drugs, no gambling, no slots, no bars. One young child wrote, “I would be happy if my pappy would not chew snuff around me, and I’m happy because my mom stopped smoking.”

Kids also know they should eat healthy and nutritious food -- more fruits and vegetables, drink lots of water and eat less candy. Kids are concerned about the environment. They worry about pollution and littering. They support more recycling and alternative fuels.

West Virginia kids are not just concerned about more fun for themselves; they also worry about homeless and poor children. They recommend more houses for the homeless.

They are safety conscious and wear their helmets when they go on the four-wheelers with their daddies. Some children are concerned about the level of violence and about their own personal safety. They suggest more police and security guards.

Many children have been touched by the Sago tragedy. One child wrote, West Virginia would be a better place if I didn't have to worry so much. My daddy is a coal miner. I worry about him a lot." Another child wrote, "I've got all the miners in my heart." All the winning essays are on line at www.wvhealthykids.org

Essay winners were:

Elementary School - Nicholas Koenig, Kanawha; Pamela Nestor, Mercer; Logan Campbell, Ritchie; Nicole Bailey, Mercer; Hannah Osborne, Wayne; Shelley Montgomery, Roane; Skylar Kipps, Raleigh; Senaia Harris, Kanawha; Mac Roberts, Wetzell.

Middle School - Brianna Mayo, Monongalia; Lindsay Gallegly, Monongalia; Bobby Fetty, Marion; Leanne Anderson, Roane; Jade Cullers, Hardy; Emily Pedigo, Mercer; Ethan Glover, Lincoln, Alexis Kimbrough, Marion; Ashley Moore, Monongalia; Annamariah Hopkins, Wood;

High School - Ellen Freeman, Wheeling; Whitney Hacker-Minih, Gilmer; Justin Harvey, Monroe; Melissa Hope Cole, Gilmer; Lauren Dittebrand, Kanawha; Raquel Fagundo, Ohio; Nainika Nanda, Raleigh; Jennifer Thompson, Kanawha; Tyler Chiplinski, Ohio; Samantha Smith, Wood.