



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents

FROM: Ellen Weaver
State Superintendent of Education

DATE: September 12, 2023

RE: Two Important Civic Competitions

Constitution Day (September 17) is almost here. Yet, sadly, Americans' appreciation for our constitutional republic – the values and vision which should unite us – is in serious decline, as is basic knowledge of how our system works. For example, a recent study by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Center found that less than half of the adults surveyed could name the three branches of government. That's right -- less than half.

To help revive an appreciation for the rights and freedoms we enjoy as American citizens, my department is encouraging students throughout the Palmetto State to participate in one (or both!) of the following civics competitions:

- The **“I Have a Dream” Student Writing Contest**. Launched on the 60th anniversary of MLK's famous speech at the 1963 March on Washington, this competition invites high school students to stand in Dr. King's “symbolic shadow” and write a 500- to 600-word speech highlighting their own American dream for our shared future.

The deadline for this statewide competition is fast approaching – September 29. Student winner(s) will be announced in late October and will receive recognition at the African-American History Calendar Event on November 27. For more information, see: <https://ed.sc.gov/Newsroom/i-have-a-dream-student-writing-contest/>

- The **“MyImpact Challenge” Civic Engagement Contest**. Sponsored by the Bill of Rights Institute (BRI), this national competition seeks to foster a robust understanding of citizenship and get middle school and high school students active in their communities now!

Two Important Civic Competitions

Page 2

September 12, 2023

Currently in its third year, BRI's MyImpact Challenge annually offers a \$10,000 Grand Prize (and \$40,000 in prizes overall) to students who design and execute an exemplary community service project that aligns with constitutional principles. Importantly, the contest encourages students to consider ways they can solve problems through non-profit and/or for-profit enterprises (not just through political activism).

Deadline for submissions is May 19, 2024; but work on one's project can begin now. For more information, see: <https://bilofrightsinsitute.org/my-impact-challenge>

Please encourage social studies teachers (and other school leaders) to promote these contests within your district. We'd love to see some South Carolina students really "shine" – and for all participating students to benefit from a meaningful project-based learning experience.