

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Hawkins Students and Teachers Win Writing Contest**



Five Hawkins County students, one teacher and one guidance counselor have written prize winning essays in the Utrust Make a Difference Writing Contest. Derek Mabe, Bailey Schwartz, Brianna Ennis, Jessica McVay, Jodi Horton, Jessica Drinnon and Megan Sturgill were all big winners this week. Utrust Administrator, Dr. Dan Tollett, and Kristi Coleman, Utrust Director of Finance and Administration presented the awards on Monday, December 17. Director of Schools, Charlotte Britton and Assistant Director, Nedra Jackson participated in each of the award ceremonies.

Derek Mabe, a Volunteer High School student, won the \$1000 grand prize for his essay honoring special education teacher Christy Thacker. He wrote about how his life has been changed because of Mrs. Thacker. He says “She has taught me how to fend for myself in everyday life. I thank her every day for being nice to me.” Mabe describes how his introduction to Special Olympics by Thacker was a big deal for him and the way that she gave him opportunities that he wouldn’t have had without her as a teacher. He finishes with “Mrs. Thacker showed me that I am just as important as anyone else and I have a lot to be proud



of.” He also told about his personal work with “Spread the Word to end the Word” campaign focused on helping people stop using the “R” word.

Church Hill Middle School student Bailey Schwartz took second place in the east division with her essay “Mr. Johnson’s Impact” and won a \$500 prize. She wrote about Science teacher, Mr. Charles Johnson. Schwartz described the difficult time she was having adjusting to middle school and how Mr. Johnson took time to encourage and challenge her.



“He taught me not to use my problems as excuses for how I act and to set goals then achieve them,” she said. Because he believed in her, Schwartz has “greatly improved her responsibility skills and takes pride in working hard to do a good job.”

Brianna Ennis, a Volunteer High Student, took home a \$100 prize for her essay about Miss Betty Brennan, her medical therapeutics instructor. Ennis wrote “She is the wisest person I have ever known” and “She inspires me to do my best with no help.” The essay describes how Miss Brennan cares about Ennis and all her other students. Her outstanding teacher made Ennis more sensitive to helping others and taught her “that she should take care of other people in this life.”



Jessica McVay won \$100 for her essay about Ms. Pam Griffin. The Bulls Gap student describes how Ms. Griffin helped her work through some learning challenges like



dyslexia and a stutter. She said that when others made fun of her, “Ms. Griffin told me to wipe it off and pretend you are the smartest kid in the class.” Jessica credits Ms. Griffin for her move to all regular classes and is grateful for the support and encouragement of a wonderful teacher and person like Pam Griffin.

Jodi Horton, a Surgoinsville Middle School student, chose to honor Mr. Marty Schism in her \$100 prize winning essay. She says that “the seventh grade science teacher is funny, interesting, good at his job and always teaching us something new.” Horton mentioned that one of her favorite things about Mr. Schism was “he taught us not only what we were required to learn but also what we wanted to learn.” Her award was presented at a school assembly called by Principal Shane Bailey.

Mooreburg Elementary School teacher Jessica Drinnon earned the grand prize of \$1000 in the adult division for her **One Child’s Journey**. The essay describes her own journey and how her fifth grade teacher Mrs. Becky Bowman changed her life. Drinnon describes how her time with Bowman as a teacher and as a basketball coach had a huge impact on her as a child. She says “Mrs. Bowman continued encouraging me to do the best I could in whatever task I was given.” This encouragement helped Drinnon stay focused and rise above her



struggles and challenges. Because of Mrs. Bowman's involvement in her life, Drinnon wrote, "I went from a shy child with no aspirations to one with hopes and dreams." Drinnon chose to become a teacher herself



because of Mrs. Bowman. Drinnon writes that her essay is her way of paying tribute to the woman who made such a difference to her and hopes that this honor will help Bowman retire with the honor she deserves

Megan Sturgill, a counselor at Surgoinville Elementary School submitted an essay about food service manager Betty Sandidge that won her third place in the adult division and a \$250 prize. Megan wrote "Mrs. Betty puts food in their hungry bellies and soothes their souls." Sturgill also writes about the story behind the story of all the difficulties that Mrs. Betty has to deal with and yet "she fights for what is true and just, for children, both her own and her school ones." "Mrs. Betty is a hero" and the world needs more of those.

Utrust awarded 18 cash prizes to winners across the state for entries like these about school employees who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to make a difference in the lives of students.

"Many school employees across this state go above and beyond what is required of them every day," said Dr. Tollett. "We want their





stories to be written and celebrated. We ask every person who submits an essay to share it with the person about whom it is written. It makes a big difference in staff morale. It also makes a difference in students' lives when they learn to recognize and express appreciation to others. We want to see students develop and display an attitude of gratitude," he continued.

Assistant Director of Schools, Nedra Jackson said, "The citizens of Hawkins County should be proud of our students and our school system. Seven of the 18 awards presented by Utrust statewide were presented in Hawkins County. We had the first place winner in both divisions as well as the first Place winner in East Tennessee. That says a lot about the quality of our schools."

Utrust is a statewide organization that assists local school boards, administrators and students to recognize and appreciate school employees. Utrust sponsors the School Employee Appreciation Program that includes celebrations throughout each school year to honor school employee groups. Utrust awarded 18 cash prizes ranging from \$1000 to \$100 to winners of the writing competition across the state.

These special stories will be permanently added to the Utrust Make A Difference Library.

Visit [www.tnuct.com](http://www.tnuct.com) for more information or to read the essays.