Top student speechmakers selected at statewide MLK oratorical contest

COLUMBUS — Ohio students inspired by the lessons and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. presented original speeches on his teachings during the 20th Annual Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest held April 12 in Columbus.

Twenty-seven regional contest winners from grades one through 11 spoke before judges and others at the King Arts Complex.

“Congratulations to all of the students who participated in this contest and gave inspiring speeches on the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” said Governor Mike DeWine. “These young Ohioans are our future leaders, and their insight into Dr. King’s legacy helps ensure that his vision lives on through future generations.”

The contest is sponsored by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission, which is housed in the Equal Opportunity Division of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services.

“The mission of the commission is to serve as a statewide advocate of Dr. King’s principles of nonviolence and strives to carry out Dr. King’s dream of service to others,” said Rev. Joel L. King, Jr., vice chair of the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission and a first cousin to Dr. King.

Contestants were judged on performance, originality and composition.

The following speakers placed in the top of their respective divisions:

- **Senior Division (grades nine through 12)** First place – Playon Patrick, 11th-grader, Fort Hayes High School, Columbus. Runners-up – Bre’Anna Walker, 11th-grader, Columbus Alternative High School, Columbus; and Jacob Vinson, 11th-grader, St. Martin de Porres High School, Cleveland.

- **Junior Division (grades six through eight)** First place – Ayla Bella, eighth-grader, Columbus Gifted Academy, Columbus. Runners-up – Mackenzie Lewis, seventh-grader, St. Catharine School, Columbus; and Gabriella Falconer, seventh-grader, Miller South School for the Visual and Performing Arts, Akron.

- **Intermediate Division (grades three through five)** First place – Adonia Balqis, fifth-grader, Clinton Elementary School, Columbus. Runners-up – Beckham Nethken, fifth-grader, Miller South School for the Visual and Performing Arts, Akron; and Elena Earley, fifth-grader, Clinton Elementary School, Columbus.

- **Primary Division (grades kindergarten through two)** First place – Leah Jackson, second-grader, Glendale Primary School, Bedford. Runners-up – Isaiah Gatson, second-grader, Glendale Primary School, Bedford; and Jayden Hawkins, first-grader, College Hill Fundamental Academy, Cincinnati.
“Through this contest, we not only honor Dr. King’s legacy, but also help the young people participating to develop the communication skills and confidence to succeed in life,” said Director Matt Damschroder of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services.

Damschroder also noted the first-place finishers will be invited to speak at the 2020 Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration set for Jan. 16, 2020, in downtown Columbus.