



Governor Ron DeSantis' and First Lady Casey DeSantis' Black History Month Essay Contest 2026

"Celebrating Black History"

Official Essay Rules and Guidelines Grades 4-5, 6-8, 9-12

Governor Ron DeSantis' and First Lady Casey DeSantis' Black History Month Essay Contest is open to all students attending any Florida school in grades 4-12. Six winners will be selected: two elementary school students (grades 4-5), two middle school students (grades 6-8), and two high school students (grades 9-12).

Eligibility: Contestants must be Florida residents, attend school in Florida in grades 4-12 (including public, charter, private, home or virtual) and able to provide a Social Security Number. Each student may enter only one essay, written in English, no longer than 500 words.

Entry Dates: Entries can be mailed to Volunteer Florida, Black History Month Committee, 1545 Raymond Diehl Road, Suite 250, Tallahassee, Florida 32308, or submitted electronically at www.floridablackhistory.com. All entries must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, February 9, 2026. (Contestants are responsible for all shipping costs.) Entries submitted electronically will receive email confirmation.

Entry Form: Student must provide all required information requested on the entry form and entry form must be legible. The student and parent/legal guardian are required to read and understand these rules in order to complete the entry form in its entirety. The entry form includes a release and certification that must be signed by a parent or guardian.

Labeling Requirements: Essays must include student's name, home address, telephone number, school the student attends, grade level, title of the essay, and a word count. Essays must be no longer than 500 words in length, written in English, and should be typed.

Public Disclosure: The Florida Public Records Act, located in Chapter 120, Florida Statutes, generally requires that all activities, including this contest, are open to the public. Therefore, all aspects of your involvement in this contest, including your essay, will be subject to public disclosure.

Awards: Each winner will receive a 2-year Florida College Plan scholarship provided by the Florida Prepaid College Foundation and a \$200 gift card for school supplies. Once winners are announced, the decision is final.

In addition to the 500-word essay, each student must also submit each of the following:

- ☐ A letter of recommendation (no more than 250 words) from an educator (teacher/principal/coach) or professional (employer, community or business leader) describing why the student is worthy to receive a scholarship and how he/she stands out from his/her peers. **Letters of recommendation sent separately, via mail or electronically, will not be accepted.**
- ☐ A 200–250-word personal essay of why the student believes he/she is deserving of the scholarship, what his/her plans are for the future, and what he or she has done recently – during the past six months – to give back to his/her community.



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There are many examples throughout our state's history of African Americans and their contributions to Florida's success. Using your own words, write about an African American who has had an impactful effect whose story should be shared. The subject of the essay should be a Floridian. Some examples are:

- **John Davis** – John Davis is from the small town of Pahokee, Florida. His humble beginnings did not deter him from chasing his dream of playing collegiate football; he earned a spot on the Florida State University football team under Coach Bobby Bowden. Mr. Davis then spent the next 25 years of his career in the private and public sectors working tirelessly to champion freedom and support the pursuit of the American Dream. He now serves as Athletic Director for Florida A&M University.
- **Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune** – Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune was the founder of a school that became Bethune-Cookman University which provided educational freedom for African Americans in Florida during the 1900s. Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune played a crucial role in the early civil rights movement and was a key advocate for African American women's rights and education. Her legacy continues to be celebrated today as a trailblazer for African American rights and opportunities in the nation.
- **Ray Charles** – Ray Charles grew up in Greenville, Florida, attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind in St. Augustine and began his music career in Florida. Despite being blinded at a young age and facing adversities throughout his life, Ray Charles overcame these challenges with a strong will and refused to allow any circumstance to take away his freedom. His determination to pursue his dreams made him one of the most iconic and respected musicians of the 20th century.
- **Representative Kiyan Michael** – Representative Kiyan Michael was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2022 to serve District 16, which is a part of Duval County. One of her passions is to provide a voice to Angel Families, including her own, who have experienced the damaging impacts of open border policies. Her tireless efforts and contributions to preserving freedom and protecting constitutional rights make her an essential figure in her community.



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Grades 4-5

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about a Florida African American and their contributions to Florida's success. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Grades 6-8

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about a Florida African American and their contributions to Florida's success. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Write your essay in a way that encourages the reader to continue to explore the topic further.

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Grades 9-12

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about a Florida African American and their contributions to Florida's success. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Write your essay in a way that demonstrates a deep understanding of the topic and historical context.

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)



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Essay Contest Checklist:

- ☐ Responds to prompt for appropriate grade level.
- ☐ Student uses their own words to explain why the subject of the essay is worthy of celebration.
- ☐ No longer than 500 words
- ☐ Written in English
- ☐ Typed
- ☐ Use of previously published works properly referenced on a separate page.
(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Information included on essay:

- ☐ Title of essay
- ☐ Word count
- ☐ Student's name
- ☐ Telephone number
- ☐ School student attends
- ☐ Grade level

Additional items to be included and submitted together in the entry packet:

- ☐ Completed, legible entry form
- ☐ Signed Parent/Legal Guardian Waiver
- ☐ Letter of recommendation (no more than 250 words) from educator or professional. **Letters of recommendation sent separately, via mail or electronically, will not be accepted.**
- ☐ Personal essay including community service statement (200-250 words)
- ☐ **Submitted in time to be received by Volunteer Florida by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time Monday, February 9, 2026.**



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**Entry Form and Parent/Legal Guardian Waiver Form
Grades 4-5, 6-8, 9-12**

Student Name:		Grade:	
Title of Essay:		Word Count:	
Home Mailing Address:		Age:	
City:	State: Florida	Zip Code:	
Parent/Legal Guardian Name:			
Parent/Legal Guardian Cell Phone Number: <i>(including area code)</i>		Parent/Legal Guardian E-Mail Address:	
School Name:		County:	
School Mailing Address:			
City:	State: Florida	Zip Code:	
School Phone Number: <i>(including area code)</i>			

Release Statement:

As parent or guardian, I acknowledge that my child has written the attached essay. Should he or she win the essay contest, I agree to allow the essay to be distributed publicly. I also understand that if it is discovered my child plagiarized or that the thoughts expressed are not his or her own, the essay will be subject to disqualification.

I, _____,

(Print Name of Parent/Legal Guardian), hereby certify the following:

1. I am the parent/legal guardian of _____
2. My child is currently a legal resident of Florida and attends a Florida school.

Parent/ Legal Guardian Signature

Date