



**Academic Achievement and Community Service Define Top Seniors at
Leon County High Schools**

Best & Brightest Awards Announces School-Based Winners

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Leon County’s most outstanding high school seniors were selected for the 16th year as the 161 finalists in 2021 of the Best & Brightest Awards, which recognize and honor public and private school students who excel both academically and in service to school and community. The finalists from each school underwent an interview process culminating in the Best & Brightest Awards Ceremony, held Wednesday, May 12th, in which countywide winners will be announced.

“These students are truly the best and brightest in their schools and community, and we are truly honored to recognize and celebrate their accomplishments this year,” said Laura Rogers, program director of World Class Schools and coordinator of the Best and Brightest program. “They will join over 2122 other high-achieving students in the community who have established themselves as influential young leaders in academic excellence and commitment to service.”

The Best & Brightest Awards program, now in its sixteenth year, has awarded more than \$730,000 in scholarships to almost 2122 private and public high school seniors since its inception. The Best & Brightest Awards program is sponsored by Envision Credit Union in partnership with Leon County Schools, World Class Schools of Leon County, The Tallahassee Democrat, Sachs Media, HUB International/Rogers Gunter Vaughn Insurance and Sperry & Associates.

“As the proud long-time title sponsor of the Best & Brightest Awards program, we have emphasized the importance of community support through education,” said Darryl Worrell, CEO of Envision Credit Union. “We are grateful for the privilege of boosting this generation of talented young leaders in achieving their dreams. Their exceptional contributions through service and leadership in their schools and community are absolutely worth praise and recognition.”

On February 27th, panels of select community leaders interviewed the 2021 finalists on topics such as public speaking, technology, and drama to determine the winners of the countywide awards. This year, the 161 finalists will be evaluated on their academic

achievement, leadership, and community service. A winner, runner-up, and honorable mention recipient will be named from each category.

“I am incredibly proud of these students -- for their commitment and service -- and also for the excellent example they set for their peers as diligent and hardworking young citizens and leaders of the future,” said Ron Sachs, founder of the Best & Brightest Awards. “Their proven dedication to their various good works speaks volumes about the caliber of their character and the positive impact they will surely have on the world as they continue to thrive.”

To reach this point, finalists have demonstrated a solid record of academic achievement and expertise in one of 15 competitive categories in addition to school and community service. First-place winners in each category will receive scholarships of \$1,500; runners-up will be awarded \$750; and honorable mention recipients will receive \$500. All other finalists will receive a \$100 scholarship in recognition of their superlative accomplishments.

In addition to celebrating high school students, the Best & Brightest Awards program reaches out to younger Leon County students. The program conducts an Eighth Grade Essay Contest, and three students from across the county will win awards ranging from \$100 to \$500. The contest provides middle school students with much-needed positive reinforcement and helps encourage them to reflect on the importance of community involvement and academic achievement as they enter their high school careers.

Another feature of the program, first introduced nine years ago, is the Spirit of the Best & Brightest Award, presented to the Best & Brightest winner who best exhibits a deep commitment to civic duty and service. That student will receive a \$2,500 scholarship commemorating the late Brooks Rogers, in addition to his or her Best & Brightest scholarship award winnings.

This year’s finalists for The Best & Brightest Awards are:

Art: Emma Bryson (Leon), Calya Denson (FSUS), Abigail Erefah (Rickards), Adriana Feliciano (SJPII), Samari Franklin (Godby), Elexia Knight (FAMU DRS), Lena Le (Chiles), Annette Lu (Maclay), Mia Scott (Lincoln), Ava Tillman (SAIL)

Athletics: Mateus Bitencourt (Maclay), Daniel Campbell (Leon), Capri Cargill (FAMU DRS), Nick Ciarlariello (CCS), Daniel Dial (SJPII), Sydney Forslund (Chiles), Merilyn Fuller (Home School), Jabien Gordon (SAIL), Jackson Green (Lincoln), Eva Holmes (NFC), Emory Layerd (FSUS), Terrance McPherson Jr. (Rickards), De’Shawn Rucker (Godby)

Business: Nick Cicchetti (Maclay), Amanda Gibson (Chiles), Jordyn Granger (NFC), Isaiah Griffith (Godby), Johnny Liu (Leon), Nicholas Moran (SJPII), Gavin Reiter (SAIL), Jaidan Rumph (FAMU DRS), Abigail Thompson (Lincoln), Sabrina Zheng (Rickards)

Career/Technical: DeJordan Bright (FAMU DRS), Tobias Campbell (Lincoln), Nadia Collins (Leon), Saiabhinav Devulapalli (FSUS), Sam Dewell (Chiles), Sina Mollaei (Rickards), Britton Robinson (Maclay), Dakota Valentine (Godby), Jonathan Witmer (SAIL)

Drama & Performing Arts: Hannah Brown (Godby), Kaitlyn Burhans (SAIL), Joelle Campana (Lincoln), Abigail Clow (SJPII), Daja Gibbons (FAMU DRS), Jayla Harper (Rickards), Sam Scriven (Leon), Griffin Stanley (FSUS), Lindsey Szypula (CCS), Lily Zuehlke (Chiles)

English & Language Arts: Haleigh Blake (FSUS), Emily Butler (Chiles), William Gomer (Home School), Kayla Jackson (FAMU DRS), Amaya Jones (Godby), Leah Mazur (Leon), Ella McConnell (Maclay), Aniketh Mukhirala (Rickards), Lily Nelsen (Lincoln), Dean Newman (SAIL), Erin Szortkya (CCS),

Journalism & Media Production: Jamaría Baulkmon (FAMU DRS), Lauren Bonney (Chiles), Cooper Harrell (Lincoln), Maddelena Kaji (Leon), Veronica Marshall-Kirk (Maclay), Laasya Moparthy (Rickards), Maya Rhoads (FSUS), Kacie Ross (Godby), Montserrat Zeron (SJPII)

Leadership: Luke Aagaard (Home School), Asia Alexander (FSUS), Madeleine Christian (SAIL), Naveyh Frost (Godby), Saylor Gentry (CCS), Hayden Kelley (Rickards), Charlie Latimer (SJPII), David Monroe (Lincoln), Kayden Moreno (Chiles), Genesis Nerys (Virtual School), Kaila Randolph (FAMU DRS), Megan Steele (Leon), Michael Sweeney (Maclay), Genesis Yoshioka (CLA),

Mathematics: Kyrah Barrington (FAMU DRS), Nigel Brown (Godby), Rohan Davidi (Rickards), Serena D'Errico (SAIL), Xuan Li (Lincoln), Katherine Matthews (Maclay), Caleb Richards (Leon), Madison Rushing (FSUS), David Yang (Chiles)

Music: Chaela Green (FAMU DRS), Nadiyah Green (Godby), Joanna Johnson (Home School), Sara Machado (CCS), Cecilia Malley (Leon), Nia Ogletree (Rickards), Madison Perkins (Maclay), Maxwell van Hoeij (Lincoln), Hope Ward (FSUS), Milo Wilson (SAIL), Hannah Yang (Chiles)

Public Speaking: Collis Adcock (CCS), Curtisa Brown (Rickards), Eliya Campbell (Home School), Helena Connolly (SAIL), Jack Copenhaver (SJPII), Sanaa Crumiel

(NFC), Vaniah Cunningham (FAMU DRS), Ramsay Grant (Maclay), Argene Lynn (FSUS), Kolbie O'Neal (Chiles), Megan Peschl (Lincoln), Kendall Williams (Leon), Alias Wingfield (Godby),

Science & Health: Erin Collier (CCS), Khari Davis (Leon), Spencer Gibbs (Maclay), Sabrina Hu (Rickards), Seth Johnson (FSUS), Hayden Kwan (Chiles), Connor McFarlin (SJPII), Akosua Osei (SAIL), Riordan Pollock (Lincoln), Shemuel Roberts (FAMU DRS), Akaylah Rogers (Godby)

Social Science: Camdyn Baldwin (Leon), Raymond Burner-Reeves (SAIL), Alethea Franklin (FSUS), Arriana Ganley (Godby), Arsha Harris (Chiles), Zakari Nelson (FAMU DRS), Daniela Paredes (Maclay), Caden Philley (Home School), Ariauna Range (Rickards), Sarah Toole (Virtual School), Ar'myia Trueblood (Lincoln), Elizabeth Zedaker (SJPII)

Technology: Raniya Cooper (FSUS), Mackenzie Fravel (Leon), Hannah Gendusa (Chiles), Tanusri Mandapati (Rickards), Kathryn Merritt (Maclay), Tobey Power (SAIL), Jontavius Richardson (Godby), Kyle Wang (Lincoln)

World Languages: Elizabeth Arney (Rickards), Frances Cowles (SJPII), Jaden Johnson (FAMU DRS), Allen Kim (SAIL), Alex Moses (NFC), Sonu Patel (Maclay), Dariana Ramos (Godby), Isabella St. Pierre-Charles (Leon), Emily Sargent (FSUS), Ziya Tian (Chiles), Olivia van Vroenhoven (Lincoln)