



2026 ASBA ANNUAL
STUDENT ESSAY & SPEAKING CONTEST
ONE YEAR FROM GRADUATION...

Your voice. Your future. What comes next?

Application Deadline: 4 p.m., October 23, 2026



Student-Focused
Leadership

2026 ASBA Annual Conference Student Essay & Speaking Contest

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The Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) is excited to invite YOU to step up, speak out, and shine!

Arkansas 11th and 12th graders are invited to participate in the **2026 ASBA Student Speaking Contest**. Winners will present their ideas live at the **2026 ASBA Annual Conference**, before school board members and administrators from across the state, held December 9–11, 2026, at the **Little Rock Marriott – Statehouse Convention Center** in Little Rock.

Why this contest matters:

- Share your creative ideas and unique perspective on education
- Build confidence in writing, research, and public speaking
- Gain recognition for your leadership and vision
- Inspire education leaders with the voice of Arkansas's next generation

This year's theme is **ONE YEAR FROM GRADUATION....**

Picture yourself one year after high school.

Where are you? Maybe you're sitting in a college classroom, learning a trade, serving your country, working your first full-time job, building something of your own—or still figuring out exactly where you belong.

Now think beyond where you are.

For years, school has provided a familiar rhythm—classes, schedules, teachers, activities, expectations, friendships, and people to turn to. After graduation, some of that will change. You may find yourself making more decisions on your own, taking on new responsibilities, meeting people with experiences different from yours, facing unexpected challenges, or discovering that the future you imagined looks different once you get there.

That first year won't just be about what you know. It will also be about who you are becoming.

Think about the experiences that have shaped you, the people and lessons you will carry with you, and the things you may still have to learn along the way.

THE PROMPT

Imagine yourself one year after high school. As you step into greater independence, new responsibilities, and an uncertain future, who will you need to be—and what do you believe will matter most? Why?

Use your own experiences, perspective, and hopes for the future to bring your response to life. We want to hear your voice—not the answer you think adults expect to hear.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 4:00 PM, Friday, October 23, 2026.

RECOGNITION

The contest offers the following incentives:

- 1st Place: \$1,000 cash prize
- 2nd Place: \$ 750 cash prize
- 3rd Place: \$ 500 cash prize
- Honorable Mention: \$ 250

☆ The top 3 winners are required to attend the 2026 ASBA Annual Conference, be recognized, and present their essay as a speech to the general session audience. The location for the conference is:

**Little Rock Statehouse Convention Center
101 E. Markham Street
Little Rock, AR 72201**

- ☆ The winning student and 2 guests will receive complimentary tickets for the meal at the conference.
- ☆ Winners will be recognized on the ASBA website.
- ☆ Winners will permit their presentations to be videoed.
- ☆ The winning students and their work will be recognized in an issue of the ASBA quarterly publication, *Report Card*.

DATES & TIMES

- 1st Place Presentation: Thursday, December 10, 2026
- 2nd Place Presentation: Friday, December 11, 2026
- 3rd Place Presentation: Friday, December 11, 2026

Specific times for presentations during the conference will be announced in November.

SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF CONTESTANTS

Only one student per ASBA member high school may submit a contest application. Each school may select its one applicant by whatever method it considers most appropriate.

ENTERING THE CONTEST & REGISTRATION DEADLINE

This contest is open until **4 p.m. on Friday, October 23, 2026**, to all 2026-2027 school year **juniors** and **seniors** who are enrolled in school districts/organizations that are current members of the Arkansas School Boards Association. Complete the application online in **full no later than 4 p.m. on Friday, October 23, 2026.**

- ☆ Applicants must submit ALL of the following by the date shown above to be part of the contest:
 - The online application form (bit.ly/sscontest26), which includes the following –
 - A 600-750 word personal essay that addresses the prompt (four-five minutes of speaking)
 - A video of the essay presented as a speech (Non-edited)
 - A completed and signed Parental Release Form (**found on the final page of this document**)

JUDGING CRITERIA

A panel of judges selected by the Arkansas School Boards Association will choose the winners. Judging criteria for the essays and presentations include the quality of the written essay (form and content) and the student's delivery as demonstrated in the video. Accuracy of facts, demonstrated mastery of the topic, effective communication of concepts, thoughts, and ideas, proper use of voice and articulation,

and originality are all important. A sample of the judging worksheet is shown below. Judges' decisions are final.

Essay Qualities

30 points

- No plagiarism in evidence
- Well-organized information
- Accuracy of material
- Informative
- Original & creative thinking

Speech Presentation (Video)

35 points

- Captures attention of audience
- Organizes ideas (& presents a specific point of view)
- Interprets and understands subject
- Unedited version of video

Student Delivery Qualities

35 points

- Shows poise, confidence, and passion
- Speaks fluently and with clarity
- Uses satisfactory pronunciation
- Has control of fillers ("ums", "you knows", like")
- Effectively uses voice quality and volume
- Delivery is smooth and natural
- Develops rapport with audience
- Uses body movements appropriately (gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, posture)

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR PRESENTATION TO ASBA

Submit the application and all other required materials listed above using this link: <https://bit.ly/sscontest26>, no later than **4 p.m. Friday, October 23, 2026**. Remember that partial submissions will not be considered for participation in the contest.

RULES AND GUIDELINES

- ☆ All entrants must be classified as high school juniors or seniors during the 2026–2027 school year.
- ☆ The school where the applicant is enrolled must be a member of the Arkansas School Boards Association.
- ☆ By entering, you are agreeing to present your essay/speech during the 2026 ASBA Annual Conference if chosen as a winner. This is required to receive any cash award.
- ☆ Although this is meant to be a personal, rather than an academic essay, attention should be given to content, organization, style, and correctness.
- ☆ Essays/presentation must be original. Consultation with teachers or other resources is encouraged. Plagiarism and use of AI, however, are not acceptable and will disqualify an applicant.
- ☆ Credit must clearly be given to any source where borrowed material is directly used or quoted.
- ☆ Essays should be approximately 600–750 words in length (appropriate for four–five minutes of speaking).
- ☆ A video of the presentation in its entirety must be submitted electronically.

- ☆ Presentations should be memorized, but students may use 3x5 note cards as references during their presentations. Presentations may not be read in their entirety from a manuscript or notes.
- ☆ Presentations must be approximately four to five minutes in duration. Presentations longer than five minutes or shorter than four minutes will be disqualified.

For Additional Information:

Tammie Reitenger, Board Development Director
Telephone: (501) 492-4822
treitenger@arsba.org

PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN MEDIA RECORDING RELEASE FOR STUDENTS

I, _____, Parent/Legal Guardian of
_____ (student's name), hereby grant permission to the
Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) to use the above-named student's video, photo, full name,
district, and grade for promotional purposes by ASBA in all manners, including, but not limited to news
releases, photographs, video, audio, website, and other electronic or printed published media. I agree
that these videos, photos, and/or voice recordings may be used for a variety of purposes without further
notifying me. ASBA has my permission for this use until I submit written revocation of my permission to
ASBA at 523 S. Ringo St, Little Rock, AR 72201, arsba@arsba.org, or you may call 501-372-1415. I
understand the ASBA does not have control over a third party who retrieves my student's information
published by the ASBA and uses it without my permission. I agree to hold the ASBA harmless for such
use of my student's information.

Parent/Legal Guardian Name

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date