2022 AWESOME ADULT SPELLING BEE

BY AERIN MILLS, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

On April 28, 2022, Podium hosted our 9th Annual Awesome Adult Spelling Bee at the U-Turn Atrium in Richmond! With over 60 people involved, we had a phenomenal evening with tons of laughs, cheers, and good spirits towards Podium RVA!

Congratulations to all winners, from the Spelling Bee itself, to Best Team Spirit, to our raffle and auction prize winners, and more! Shoutout to our second place winners The Frizz Bees from ImpactMakers and an extra special congrats to our first place winners The Black Eyed Susans!

We can't thank you enough for such a fantastic event, and please check out images from the night on our Facebook page!

1st Place Winners: The Black Eyed Susans

2nd Place Winners: The Frizz Bees

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On May 26, 2022, Podium RVA hosted our inaugural Scholarship Awards Night. We presented three amazing and deserving youth with the Anne F. Waldruff Excellence in Education Scholarship. These three spectacular youth showcased incredible prowess and capability in their education, community involvement, passion for writing, and so much more!

For the past several years, Podium has been working in tandem with Robert and Anne Waldruff to create and fund these scholarships so we can give to our community in new and exciting ways. This event was the culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and commitment to the youth that Podium serves.

Everyone at Podium is so incredibly proud to reward these youth with this initial $5,000 scholarship, AND a future one, to pursue their higher education. A special congratulations to Kameron Belfield of Armstrong High School, Shaniece Gentry of George Wythe High School, and Lael Washington of The School of Tomorrow for their recognition last month!

Thank you to our incredible family, endlessly, for the love and support you show our youth writers and leaders, year after year!

Please consider an investment as we begin to build next year’s scholarship awards. Donations of all sizes are valued and vital to our success, and you may make your secure donation online at podiumrva.org/donate and note Pedestal Fund in the memo. By elevating opportunity and education in our community, we write a new future for Richmond.
SPRING PROGRAM RECAP & THE SUMMER BUZZ!

BY CANDACE WEATHER, PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

Out with the old and in with the new! Our spring programs have finally come to a close, and we couldn’t be happier with how they turned out. In total, we served 84 youth across five different programs. Three of our programs are with our 21st century community learning center partners at Armstrong HS, John Marshall HS, and George Wythe HS. We also completed two successful pilots at Highland Springs HS and Huguenot HS this spring. We are so happy to have nurtured relationships with two new schools that will serve as the blueprint for our programs there next year.

We also had several events this spring including a pizza and poetry night at George Wythe HS and a family vision board night at Highland Springs HS. The greatest end to our spring programs was our scholarship awards banquet. We were able to give away 3 scholarships to our brightest Podium seniors, and we can’t wait to see how far they go!

We are so incredibly excited for our incoming summer programs. We have 8 total programs at Fairfield MS, Wilder MS, Highland Springs HS, Southside Boys and Girls Club, George Wythe HS, John Marshall HS, Armstrong HS, and Writing Mentorship Programs with interns from Partnership for the Future and the Mayor’s Youth Academy. All of these programs will lead up to our Teen Professional Conference in August. We are so excited for summer programs to begin next week, and we can’t wait to see what the summer has in store!
LOOKING AHEAD: A BACK TO SCHOOL CHALLENGE
BY AERIN MILLS, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Reported by McKinsey & Company (2021), learning loss as a result of COVID-19 is at an all time high and has set back learning for all students, but especially for students of color and of lower incomes. Many children came back to school last fall a full-year behind expected literacy gains, and the struggle to catch up has continued. Currently, on average, only 33% of 8th graders in Virginia are reading at their grade level (VDOE).

Welcoming youth back to school prepared for a successful year of study is our top priority this fall. To do it right, Podium will be raising funds to combat learning loss across Richmond and to print and distribute our annual literary journals at schools and with the families and youth we serve.

Please be on the lookout August 15th - September 15th for our virtual Back To School campaign. We are challenging everyone in the Podium family to support our youth returning back to school, and prizes will be awarded for the most funding raised and the most social media influence garnered! Stay tuned for details on how to participate soon!