

Q1 2026 Newsletter

Richmond's writing and communication non-profit for youth



FAMILY INITIATIVES & REGIONAL LITERACY LEADERSHIP

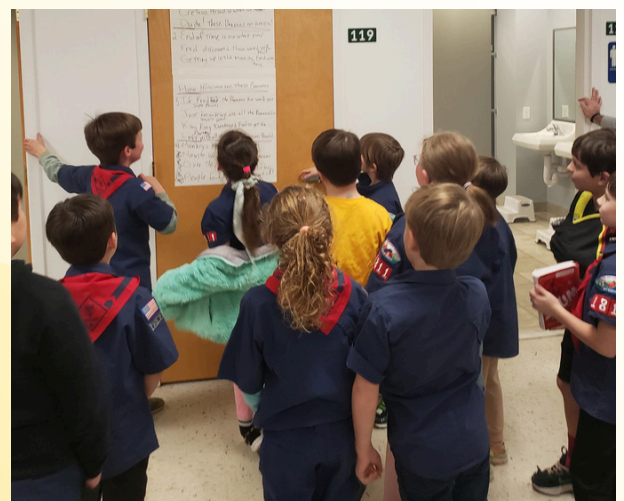
BY VICKI YEROIAN, MSW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Wow, has Podium had a busy first quarter of 2026! In addition to our 11 incredible weekly programs, Podium held several family initiatives this winter. Part of our mission is to take a holistic approach to youth literacy development, and we do that by getting everyone involved!

First, Podium was invited out to create stories with a local Cub Scout Troop just before their annual pinewood derby! We discussed our dreams and how they tell stories before we split into groups to make our own. Troop members worked together to create a story and learned about community service. Thank you to all the families who donated supplies for our winter programs - we're so grateful for you!

WHAT'S INSIDE?

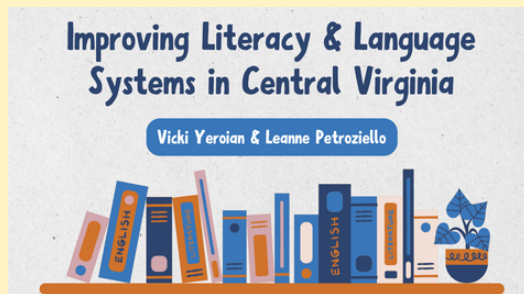
- 1 **Family initiatives & Regional Literacy Leadership**
- 2 **Winter Program Round Up + Springing Ahead!**
- 3 **Flash Fiction Competition Recap + Bingo Night Invite!**



Second, Podium partners with the Mary and Francis Youth Center at VCU annually to conduct parent engagement nights bi-annually. In March, Programs Director Meya facilitated a breathe easy night, asking parents to deep dive into their motivations for change and growth. These nights allow parents to take intentional time to self-reflect, write, process, and share with others. I felt so lucky to attend!



Third, Podium co-facilitates the Central VA Literacy Collaboration with the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond. This quarter, Co-Chairs Leanne and Vicki (that's me!) presented findings after a semester-long fellowship at the University of Richmond. The goal of this project was simple - create more resources for literacy and language organizations to communicate our impact across industries. We presented findings on how to measure literacy and language benchmarks for measuring growth in both social-emotional and workforce development. Long-term, we're working on creating a dashboard of indicators to help community initiatives identify when a literacy program, service, or resource is needed, and how to connect with them.



Project Goals

- 1 Provide literacy and language organizations with common language to utilize and communicate their impact to stakeholders.
- 2 Identify core literacy and language metrics and indicators for success relating to economic mobility.
- 3 Identify literacy and language skills as essential factors for wellbeing and connect existing efforts to new regional initiatives.

Social Emotional Wellbeing

The core language and literacy skills essential for social-emotional health and wellness primarily involve the ability to understand, process, and externalize complex thoughts.

SEL Competency	Core Language/Literacy Skill
Self-Awareness	Emotion Vocabulary & Labeling (Lexical Access)
Self-Management	Inner Monologue & Self-Regulation (Receptive/Expressive)
Social Awareness	Perspective-Taking & Interpretation (Reading Comprehension)
Relationship Skills	Effective Communication & Discourse (Negotiation/Speaking/Listening)
Responsible Decision-Making	Self-Reflection & Critical Analysis (Written Literacy/Reasoning)

Finally, I wanted to shout out our amazing partnerships with Higher Achievement and Richmond Public Schools. Working towards Love Out Loud, we're helping three RPS middle schools prepare for their city-wide showcase. We're also working with all seven RPS high schools to prepare for a city-wide competition. Each school is bringing a team of both solo and group poets, and we're beyond thrilled to see everyone shine! Please join us on Saturday, April 25th from 11 - 1:30pm at the Visual Arts Center to cheer on our youth!



WINTER 2026: THE WORK BEHIND THE WORDS

BY CHARMEYA MCMURRAY, PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

This winter, we focused on helping students grow as writers while giving them space to explore, take risks, and try new things, and they showed up for it.

Across our middle and high school sites, students engaged in poetry, creative writing, and self-reflection workshops that pushed them to think more deeply and write with intention. We saw growth in their use of figurative and descriptive language, and in how they expressed their perspectives on identity, family, and community. As they built those skills, students also explored new approaches through our pilot AI workshop series, using technology to support storytelling, generate ideas, and experiment with different styles. Shout out to our AI Pilot Sponsors, **Impact Makers**, for helping us create curriculum and assessment tools!

Beyond workshops, Podium expanded its reach across Richmond through pop-up programs at River City Middle School and the Armstrong Renaissance Apartments, connecting with new students while also building deeper relationships with communities we already serve. We also continued supporting our partners by working closely with students as they developed and refined pieces for Higher Achievement's Love Out Loud event and the Podium sponsored RPS High School Poetry Competition.

Behind all of this is the team that makes it happen. Podium continues to be powered by passionate staff and interns who bring energy and care into every space. This winter, we were especially excited to see Madeleine Warren, a VCU Social Work intern and program lead, share Podium's work with the broader community through a feature with [RVA Magazine](#), where student writing was highlighted and celebrated.

We're excited to carry this momentum into spring and continue creating spaces where students feel confident, creative, and heard!





SPRING 2026: FROM PAGE TO PRESENCE

Spring is all about building on what students started this winter and giving them more space to explore, lead, and apply their skills in real ways.

This session, workshops will continue to balance creativity with real-world connection. Students will engage in more experimental writing through STEAM-based activities and conversations around navigating the teenage years, while also diving into workshops focused on life after middle and high school. These sessions will create space for reflection, goal-setting, and thinking more intentionally about what's next.

At the same time, students will step into more leadership and visibility. After developing and refining their pieces this winter, many students will step into sharing their work at Higher Achievement's Love Out Loud event and the Podium sponsored RPS High School Poetry Competition. This shift gives students the chance to not only write, but to confidently present and take ownership of their voice.

This session also brings new partnerships. We're excited to expand our reach through new sites including Peter Paul Development Center, T.B. Smith Community Center, and a pop-up with Groundwork RVA. These partnerships allow us to connect with new students while continuing to grow our presence across the region.

Overall, this session feels like a time of growth, new connections, and continued momentum as students take what they've learned and push it even further.

GIVING OLD TALES A NEW TWIST

BY KAVIN JACKSON, COMMUNICATIONS & EVENTS DIRECTOR

In February, Podium hosted its 5th annual Flash Fiction Competition. This online event includes an hour-long writing competition in which writers are randomly assigned a prompt based on the year's theme. This year's theme was Rewritten Fairy Tales, and we received many tales of the love shared between princes and princesses, stories of triumphing over evil, and epic narratives of quests and rewards.

Thank you to our event sponsors, BloomED Group, KWE Publishing, & Design to Learn Consulting, and to our outstanding judges, Chelsea Jackson, last year's second-place winner Kayleigh Crandell, Jessica Ellett, and to our Head Judge, Kim Eley. With 13 writers competing, congratulations to our second-place winner, Meredith Slater, and to our first-place winner, Courtney Turrin!



Click the link [here](#) to read all of the stories from this year. If you'd like to hear the winning stories, check out the link [here](#).

Looking for more ways to get involved with Podium? On Thursday, May 14th at 6:30 pm, Podium RVA hosts BINGO Night at Starr Hill Brewery.

Purchase your tickets now and save when you bundle! There are also exciting sponsorship opportunities for anybody looking to make their company's name known as a catalyst for change in our community.

Get your tickets today at www.podiumrva.org/bingo-night!



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www.podiumrva.org



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