

Two ACPS students honor local heroes in award-winning essay, artwork for Florida Black History contest

When Brynley Ashraf and Immanuel Howard each chose the person they considered a 'community champion,' they didn't have to look any further than their own schools.

Florida First Lady Casey DeSantis announced this week that Brynley and Immanuel were among just five students statewide to be named winners in the state's 2021 Black History Month Contest. Brynley wrote the top elementary school essay, while Immanuel was one of just two Florida students to win the art contest.

"The Governor and I are honored to celebrate this year's Black History Month student and teacher award winners and their achievements," DeSantis was quoted in a news release from the Governor's Office. "It is our hope that today's award recipients continue to share their gifts and serve as inspirations across our great State of Florida."

Participants in the competition submitted entries based on this year's theme of "Community Champions – Celebrating the Contributions of African Americans in Florida's Communities."

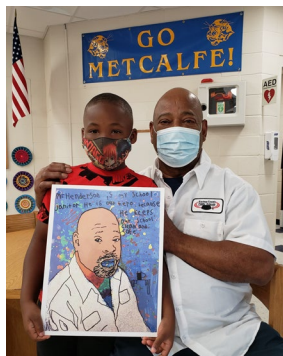
Brynley, a 4th-grader at High Springs Community School, bypassed a list of suggested subjects and instead wrote about the school's resource officer, Officer Adam Joy. In her [essay](#), entitled "The 'Joy' of Our Community," she outlined the many ways he serves the High Springs community, including programs like Meals on Wheels, No Son Left Behind, and a variety of giveaways and community events.



"I believe Officer Joy should be recognized for the amazing work," wrote Brynley. "From mentoring kids, supporting families and helping senior citizens, there's no limit to his kindness."

Officer Joy, who works for the High Springs Police Department and is in his first year as the SRO at the school, says he was surprised that Brynley wanted to make him the focus of her [essay](#).

"It was very humbling," he said. "You just never know who may be watching what you do. I'm really honored."



The inspiration for Metcalfe Elementary 2nd-grader Immanuel's award-winning artwork is James Henderson, who has been a custodian at Metcalfe for 14 years. Immanuel created a colorful portrait of Henderson and wrote at the top "Mr. Henderson is my school janitor. He is our hero because he keeps our school clean and safe."

"He keeps coming into our classroom and cleaning up, and making sure that the virus was out," said Immanuel. "He looked like a superhero to me."

"It means a lot to me," said Henderson on being Immanuel's choice. "It makes me feel in my heart that I've done something that will be remembered, and it gives me that lift to keep doing what I'm doing."

As one of the three Florida essay competition winners, Brynley has earned a four-year Florida College Plan scholarship.

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