

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
VFW District 2, Department of New York
10 Melody Lane
Warwick, NY 10990

31 August 2026

SUBJECT: 2026–2027 VFW Patriot’s Pen, Voice of Democracy, and Smart/Maher Citizenship Education Teacher Award

Dear Superintendent, Principal, or Educator,

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has long believed that service to our country includes investing in the young people who will inherit it and recognizing the educators who prepare them for that responsibility.

For the 2026–2027 school year, VFW District 2, Department of New York, invites your students, teachers, and school community to participate in three nationally recognized VFW programs: Patriot’s Pen, for students in grades 6–8; Voice of Democracy, for students in grades 9–12; and the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award, recognizing outstanding teachers in grades K–5, 6–8, and 9–12.

For 2026–2027, both student competitions share the theme, *“What a Veteran Taught Me About America”*

This theme gives students considerable freedom. Their work may be inspired by a family member, neighbor, teacher, community veteran, historical figure, or another meaningful encounter with the experiences and lessons of America’s veterans. The purpose is not to produce a particular political or historical viewpoint. It is to encourage students to think, write, speak, and reflect on citizenship, service, sacrifice, American history, democratic values, and what those ideas mean to them.

- **Patriot’s Pen** is a written essay competition for eligible students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Contestants prepare an original 300–400 word essay addressing the annual theme. Entries are first submitted to a participating local VFW Post and may advance through Post, District, Department of New York, and National competition. The national first-place award is currently \$5,000, with additional recognition and awards available at multiple levels.
- **Voice of Democracy** is the VFW’s premier high-school scholarship competition and is open to eligible students in grades 9–12. Contestants write an original essay and record themselves delivering it as a 3–5 minute audio essay in MP3 format. A typed copy of the essay is submitted with the recording and entry form. The national first-place scholarship is currently \$35,000, with additional scholarships and awards offered throughout the competition. First-place Department winners also participate in the VFW’s national-level program associated with the competition.

Our third program recognizes the people helping prepare these students for citizenship.

- The **Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award** honors current certified or licensed K–12 educators who demonstrate exceptional commitment to citizenship education, civic responsibility, American history and traditions, community involvement, patriotism, and the development of responsible citizens. Teachers compete in three categories: K–5, grades 6–8, and grades 9–12. Candidates may be nominated by fellow educators, supervisors, family members, students, community members, or themselves. National Teacher Award recipients in each category receive a \$1,000 Smart/Maher award for professional development, their school receives a \$1,000 award, and the program includes commemorative recognition and an all-expenses-paid trip to the VFW National Convention.

These programs can be incorporated into English language arts, social studies, history, civics, public speaking, or other classroom activities, or offered as independent and extracurricular opportunities. Schools, classes, and youth groups with substantial participation in Patriot’s Pen or Voice of Democracy may conduct an initial competition and forward eligible winners to their participating VFW Post. All three programs begin locally. Entries and nominations must be received by a participating VFW Post no later than midnight, October 31, 2026. Entries should not be sent directly to VFW National Headquarters.

We respectfully ask your school or district to share these opportunities with students, teachers, counselors, department chairs, and families and to consider incorporating the student programs into appropriate classroom instruction during the fall semester.

These are grassroots programs. The veterans evaluating and recognizing your students and teachers are members of the communities those schools serve. Every entry begins locally, and every student or teacher who reaches the national stage gets there because someone in their hometown first gave them an opportunity to compete.

Thank you for helping us provide that opportunity.

Respectfully,



CSM, R USA

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