

St. Genevieve Students Named Finalists in Three International Anthem Awards Categories

College-credit Leadership and Advocacy course earns international recognition as students engage government leaders and unite diverse school communities.

PANORAMA CITY, CA, UNITED STATES, October 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Students at St. Genevieve Parish Schools have been named finalists in three categories of the 6th Annual Anthem Awards, an international competition recognizing outstanding social impact initiatives, for their innovative Leadership and Advocacy course and its student-led campaign, "A Valiant Effort."

The students are finalists in three categories:

Education, Art & Culture — Community Engagement

Education, Art & Culture — Grassroots Effort

Education, Art & Culture — K-12 Education Innovation

The Anthem Awards, established by the organizers of the prestigious Webby Awards, recognize individuals and organizations whose work is making a positive impact on society. Entries are evaluated by members of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, an independent judging body that includes leaders from prominent nonprofit organizations, foundations and major corporations.



Brooks Allen, Education Policy Advisor to Governor Newsom stands Center with St. Genevieve Students

More than 2,000 projects from 42 countries competed in 2025. Previous Anthem Award honorees include UNICEF USA, Sesame Workshop, Google, World Central Kitchen, the ACLU and Make-A-Wish America.

For St. Genevieve students, the recognition is particularly meaningful because their Leadership and Advocacy course is unlike a traditional classroom experience.

Offered in partnership with Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, the three-college-credit course has one objective: convince California Governor Gavin Newsom to opt the state into the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit (EFTC).



SG Leadership and Advocacy Class after mailing 15,000 purple postcards to their Governor

There are no hypothetical assignments. No simulated legislative debates. No imaginary campaigns.

“

Part of our school's mission statement is to change the world. That's exactly what we're attempting to do through A Valiant Effort — change the world for millions of families across California.”

Alisa Bongco

The students are engaged in an actual public-policy issue, meeting with government officials, working with national education leaders, organizing public information events and learning firsthand how ordinary citizens can participate in the democratic process.

Their campaign, appropriately named “A Valiant Effort,” began at St. Genevieve but has grown into an initiative involving education leaders and organizations across California and beyond.

In April, the entire class traveled to Sacramento, where they met with the chief of staff to Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas and an education advisor to State Senator Caroline Menjivar. Two weeks later, four students returned to Sacramento for an in-person meeting with Brooks Allen, Education Advisor to Governor Newsom.

The meeting, originally scheduled for 30 minutes, lasted more than an hour. Allen listened to the students' presentation, asked questions and commended their preparation and advocacy.

When one student asked how they should respond to people who insisted Governor Newsom would never opt in, Allen explained that no decision had been made and encouraged them to continue their efforts.

They did.

In May, students solicited and mailed 15,000 purple postcards to Governor Newsom, each asking him to opt California into the EFTC. The campaign involved students across St. Genevieve's preschool-through-12th-grade community and demonstrated how young people could organize around an issue they believed deserved greater public attention.

Since then, the students have worked with education leaders and advocates representing different political perspectives, including Jorge Elorza, CEO of Democrats for Education Reform, and representatives of Teach Coalition, the California Catholic Conference and other organizations.

Most recently, the students organized and hosted a statewide Zoom information rally that brought together representatives of Catholic schools, Jewish schools, Armenian schools and charter schools.

Joining the students as presenters were Jorge Elorza; Samara Palko, now with the American Federation for Children; Sydney Altfeld of Teach Coalition; and Greg Dolan of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

The gathering reflected an important development in the students' work: their effort to encourage discussion of the EFTC across different educational communities.



St. Gen students posing with CA Catholic School Superintendents via zoom



SG students prepare to take to the streets of Panorama City

The federal program, scheduled to begin in 2027, would provide eligible taxpayers with a federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 for contributions to approved Scholarship Granting Organizations. Those organizations would provide assistance for qualified educational expenses, potentially benefiting eligible students attending public, charter and private schools.

California's participation requires a decision by Governor Newsom. The students were particularly encouraged by New York Governor Kathy Hochul's October 9 announcement officially opting her state into the program, making her the second Democratic governor, following Colorado's Jared Polis, to do so.

As their campaign has progressed, students have discovered that many of the political, education and community leaders they encounter are unfamiliar with the program and its potential implications for California families.

That discovery has shaped their approach.

After initially pursuing an ambitious statewide postcard campaign, the students adjusted their strategy to make participation easier. Working in partnership with Teach Coalition, "A Valiant Effort" is now distributing a link to a prepared letter concerning California's participation in the EFTC. Individuals can enter their personal information and complete the process in approximately 40 seconds.

The students have also met by Zoom with California's Catholic school superintendents during their statewide gathering in Monterey, encouraging education leaders to inform their school communities about the program.

For the students, these encounters are not extracurricular activities. They are the curriculum.

They are learning to research legislation, evaluate competing arguments, communicate with public officials, organize coalitions, speak before unfamiliar audiences and adapt their strategies when circumstances change.

And they are discovering that meaningful civic engagement requires persistence, preparation and a willingness to work with people whose perspectives may differ from their own.

For a school whose mission is "To know God, to live with honor, to change the world," the Anthem Awards recognition carries special significance.

The students have not yet accomplished their stated objective. Governor Newsom has not announced a decision to opt California into the program.

But the recognition of their work in three Anthem Awards categories illustrates something important about education: young people need not wait until graduation to become active,

informed participants in their communities.

“Part of our school’s mission statement is to change the world,” said Alisa Bongco, a St. Genevieve student participating in the Leadership and Advocacy course. “That’s exactly what we’re attempting to do through A Valiant Effort — change the world for millions of families across California.”

Daniel Horn

St. Genevieve Parish Schools

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