

## PRESS RELEASE

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November 18, 2025

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### **Mojave Water Agency annual essay contest scholarship winners announced**

Apple Valley, CA — In an age when teens strive to go viral, one local student is choosing a different kind of impact—one that lasts far longer than likes or views. University Preparatory School freshman Ariaella Randolph has earned the top spot in the Mojave Water Agency’s (MWA) 2025 high school essay contest by demonstrating how young people can use their voices to influence something truly enduring: the future of water conservation in the High Desert.

This year’s theme, “Influencing the Future of Water,” challenged students to explore how they can use their voices, creativity, and technology to spread awareness about conservation.

Out of a record-setting 74 entries, three finalists were selected for their insightful and solution-oriented essays. Each finalist worked with a community mentor to refine their written submission into a compelling public presentation delivered before a live audience of family, friends, and a panel of independent judges. As the first-place winner, Ariaella earned a \$3,000 scholarship and will reprise her presentation at the Agency’s Innovators High Desert Water Summit on Feb. 6 in Victorville. This signature event is free and open to junior high and high school students in the MWA service area.

Jeannine Jauregui, a senior at University Preparatory, earned a \$1,000 scholarship for her second-place contribution; and a third-place scholarship of \$1,000 went to Cobalt Institute for Math & Science senior Kierra Gesulga.

“Through this contest, we’re seeing students use the same tools and platforms as social media influencers—but they’re applying them to something much bigger: the long-term sustainability of our region’s water supply,” said Mojave Water Agency Board President Rick Roelle. “Ariaella, Jeannine, and Kierra showed that young people are ready to lead, innovate, and inspire their peers to care about water.”

The finalists were judged by a panel of the region’s top professional communicators, educators and marketers including Shannon Dunkle, Senior Public Relations Specialist for the Town of



*Ariaella Randolph*

Apple Valley; Katherine Lococq, a retired school teacher and coordinator of the Hesperia Elks Lodge's annual Americanism Essay Contest; and Paola Baker, Graphics and Marketing Coordinator with the Greater High Desert Chamber of Commerce. The judges agreed that what gave Ariaella the competitive edge was her audience interaction and the concrete examples of social media strategies she provided during her presentation.

Each finalist benefited from mentorship to polish their ideas and hone their public speaking skills, culminating in impactful presentations on finals night held in the MWA boardroom on Nov. 13. This year's mentors included Cari Thomas of Exquadrum, Inc., and Ginger Ontiveros and Mariann Johnson, both with Tomorrow's Talent.

"Our goal is to help students see themselves as future problem solvers and water professionals," said Adnan Anabtawi, General Manager of Mojave Water Agency. "Whether they pursue engineering, communications, or public policy, we want them to know there is a place for their talents in the water world, and that their voices can influence how our region uses and protects water for generations to come."

For more information about the Mojave Water Agency and its educational initiatives, visit [www.mojavewater.org](http://www.mojavewater.org) or call (760) 946-7000.

To register a student, class or school for the Innovators High Desert Water Summit, visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/78YGJ52>.

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