Mojave Water Agency

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NEWS BRIEF

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High Desert student earns $3,000 scholarship in Mojave Water Agency's annual essay contest

High Desert students earn a combined $6,000 in scholarships for their vision of the region's water future

APPLE VALLEY, Calif. – Alyana Gonzalez, a senior at the Academy for Academic Excellence, earned first place and a $3,000 scholarship in Mojave Water Agency's (MWA) 2026 Annual Student Essay Contest. Gonzalez was one of three finalists who presented their recommendations for securing the region's water future during the Agency's Finals Night event on November 17 at MWA headquarters in Apple Valley.

This year's competition challenged students who live or attend school in the Agency's service area to consider a question that reflects the real-world challenges facing water resource managers:

"If you were responsible for securing the Mojave Desert's water supply for the next 50 years, what would be your highest priorities and why?"

The Agency received 19 qualifying essays, from which three finalists were selected to advance to the oral presentation phase of the competition.

In her winning essay, *The Future of the Mojave River*, Gonzalez explored how the region could transform the challenges associated with extreme weather and flooding into opportunities to strengthen its long-term water supply. Her recommendations included expanding groundwater recharge and storage capacity, increasing the use of recycled water, restoring native vegetation along the Mojave River to reduce erosion and improve water quality, and strengthening infrastructure to protect surrounding communities during major storm events.

Drawing on the region's history of flooding and drought, Gonzalez emphasized the importance of balancing economic development, environmental protection, public safety and water reliability through proactive planning and investment.

"Securing our region's water future is a responsibility that extends well beyond any one generation," said MWA Board President Marina West. "Each year, this competition brings forward some of our region's most talented young writers, and this year was no exception. What makes this competition so meaningful is that we are encouraging young people to engage with the very challenges we face as water resource leaders today. These students bring fresh perspectives, thoughtful recommendations and a genuine

investment in the future of their communities. Their accomplishments are a reminder of why investing in youth education is so important."

Nicholas Sevy, a sophomore at Hesperia High School, earned second place and a $2,000 scholarship, while Alexia Cabrera Morales, a junior at University Preparatory, earned third place and a $1,000 scholarship.

As part of the competition, each finalist was paired with a community leader who volunteered their time to mentor the student and help prepare them for their final presentation. This year's mentors included:

Silvia Urenda, Assistant Director of Economic Development and Housing for the Town of Apple Valley, who mentored Gonzalez.

Eric Swanson, Hesperia Unified School District Board President, who mentored Sevy.

Trenae Nelson, Superintendent of the Apple Valley Unified School District, who mentored Cabrera Morales.

Gonzalez will have another opportunity to share her winning presentation as a featured speaker at the Innovators High Desert Water Summit on February 5, 2027, in Victorville. The annual event brings together middle and high school students, educators and water industry professionals to explore water resource management, emerging technologies and career opportunities.

Sevy has also been invited to serve as the student emcee for the event, and all three finalists will be recognized on stage for their accomplishments.

Investing in the Next Generation

Scholarships and educational opportunities like these are made possible, in part, through the generosity of community partners who share the Agency's commitment to youth education. MWA extends its appreciation to Northwest Pipe and the San Bernardino County Department of Public Works for their contributions to the Agency's 2026–27 Youth Education Sponsorship Program.

With a fundraising goal of $15,000 for the current program year, MWA is continuing to seek support from businesses, organizations and community partners interested in investing in the next generation of water resource leaders. Sponsorship contributions directly support student scholarships, school participation stipends and educational opportunities through programs such as the Annual Student Essay Contest, Problem Solvers and Water Sleuths.

MWA's youth education initiatives are designed to foster water literacy, critical thinking, leadership and an understanding of the unique water resource challenges facing the High Desert. In addition to researching complex water issues, students develop valuable communication, problem-solving and public speaking skills that will serve them well beyond the classroom.

Businesses and organizations interested in becoming a Youth Education Sponsor are encouraged to contact Mojave Water Agency's Public Information Department.

For more information about Mojave Water Agency, its educational programs and sponsorship opportunities, visit www.mojavewater.org.

About Mojave Water Agency

Mojave Water Agency is a wholesale water agency responsible for managing water resources across approximately 4,900 square miles of the High Desert, serving a region with more than 500,000 residents. As one of 29 State Water Project contractors, MWA works to ensure a sustainable water supply for current and future generations.

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