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THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT/
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Office for Diversity and Access

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Administrators, Directors, Headmasters and Deans: For Distribution to ELA Teachers, History Teachers, and Art Teachers

FROM: LaShanna S. King, Director, Office for Diversity and Access

SUBJECT: Request for Submissions: 2026 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Fine Arts and Essay Exhibition Sponsored by the New York State Education Department

We are pleased to announce that the New York State Education Department will sponsor an exhibition in recognition of the life and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As in years past, we honor Dr. King's memory by inviting schools to submit student art and essays that reflect Dr. King's teaching. This exhibition is not a contest. We encourage all schools to join in this initiative and all submissions will be exhibited. A maximum of one piece of artwork and one essay entry may be submitted per student. Group work within each level is permitted and encouraged.

This year, we are requesting schools submit their student works online. Schools may submit digital versions of their original artworks illustrating Dr. King's Six Principles and Steps of Nonviolence or essays celebrating Dr. King's birthday. Students enrolled in any K-12 program are encouraged to participate. As part of the celebration, all entries will be viewable in an online exhibit via www.empirestateplaza.ny.gov/nyking.

GUIDELINES

- Distribute to students Dr. King's Six Principles and Six Steps of Nonviolence. They can be found by following this link: https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/

- The theme this year is, ***The Beloved Community.*** Encourage students to create artwork based on one or more of Dr. King's principles and/or to write an essay examining the ways in which they can celebrate Dr. King's birthday all year long. Artwork may include all types of media, digital photography, painting, drawing, writing, sculpture etc. Student essays traditionally focus on core ideas of social justice and Nonviolence. Essays should be one page in length, whether typed or handwritten. Please submit artwork and/or essays digitally online.

- Please note that under Personally Identifiable Information (PII), which include protections for minors under law, students' names cannot be displayed online. **Please remove student names from the front of any artwork or essay images of their online submissions.**

PURPOSE

- To understand that Monday, January 19, 2026, commemorates the birthday of Dr. King and reminds all Americans of his dreams and goals for this nation
- To have the opportunity to take part in the celebration of Dr. King's birthday
- To reflect on ways to celebrate Dr. King's birthday and legacy in everyday life
- To learn about the social, political, and economic factors that contributed to the civil rights movement
- To learn about the philosophy of nonviolence as practiced by Dr. King and to understand its relevance for today's society
- To appreciate and respect the contributions and rights of others without regard to the similarities or differences they may present

GRADE LEVELS

All students enrolled in grades K-12 in New York State public and non-public schools are eligible to submit entries.

- Level 1: Kindergarten – 3rd grade
- Level 2: 4th grade – 6th grade
- Level 3: 7th grade – 8th grade
- Level 4: 9th grade – 12th grade

ENTRY PROCEDURES

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE SUBMITTED DIGITALLY VIA DROPBOX by FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025

Digital Submissions via Dropbox:

- Each school should designate an official who will be responsible for submitting their school's digital entries.
- Digital submissions must be **JPG file formats** of **1-5 MB**. All sculpture and 3D submissions MUST be submitted digitally.
- Please refer to the **Photo Guide** for best practices when taking photographs of your submissions. See attached.
- Each file name should be structured **STUDENTLASTNAME_TEACHERFULLNAME_SCHOOL_GRADE**
- **PLEASE REMEMBER**: All entries of digital work received via Dropbox will be included in the online exhibit. That is why, under Personally Identifiable Information (PII), which include protections for minors under law, students' names cannot be displayed online, and we ask that you remove student names from the front of artworks or essays.
- Once your artworks and essays are ready for upload, please email MLKExhibit@ogs.ny.gov to receive your school's personalized **Dropbox link**, **digital Class Participation Form**, and **further instructions**.
- ALL participation information including this letter, class participation form, and photo guide can be found online at www.empirestateplaza.ny.gov/nyking.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

- For more information about the *2026 NYS Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Fine Arts and Essay Exhibition*, please contact:

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