

### Contact

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## VSBA Board of Directors Central Region Regional Scholarship Recipient Announced



**Charlottesville, VA** – The Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) proudly announces Zaharra Colla, a senior at Charlottesville High School in Charlottesville City Public Schools, as the 2026 VSBA Board of Directors Regional Scholarship recipient for the VSBA Central Region. Colla was recognized last week during the Charlottesville High School Awards Night and will receive a \$5,000 scholarship to support her post-secondary education.

Colla is a passionate student leader and advocate dedicated to youth empowerment, representation, and community impact. She served as a panelist for the 2022 YouthNex conference, “Pass the Mic: Amplifying Youth Voice & Agency,” and later became the organization’s first-ever youth co-chair for the 2024 conference, collaborating with University of Virginia professors to help plan and lead discussions focused on youth voice and the positive use of technology.

Colla plans to pursue studies in business, economics, and global affairs with the goal of working in the Foreign Service, focusing on international economic development and diplomacy. She also hopes to eventually return to Charlottesville to create mentorship opportunities for young women from multicultural and underrepresented backgrounds.

When asked what message she would like to share with her school board or educators, Colla said “I would encourage educators and school leaders to continue entering difficult spaces and investing in students whose voices are often overlooked. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned through leadership is that every person carries a unique perspective, and those perspectives deserve to be seen, heard, and valued.”

“Zaharra exemplifies the kind of student leadership and purpose we are proud to see across the Central Region,” said VSBA Central Region Chair and Louisa County School Board Chair Gregory Strickland. “Her ability to connect academic learning with real-world advocacy, while actively creating opportunities for others, speaks to both her character and her vision. We are honored to recognize her accomplishments and look forward to seeing the meaningful impact she will continue to make.”

VSBA Executive Director Gina Patterson stated, “The VSBA Board of Directors Regional Scholarship program highlights the very best of Virginia’s public schools, and Zaharra Colla is a powerful example of that excellence. Her leadership, her commitment to lifting others, and her passion for connecting education to real-world impact reflect the core purpose of this scholarship. We are proud to recognize her achievements and excited to see all she will accomplish in the future.”

### About the Virginia School Boards Association

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training, and services. The Association offers conferences, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth’s educational leaders.

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