



2026 Poster, Poetry & Prose Contest



THEME: TOGETHER FOR HEALTHIER AIR!

Creative ways that everyone can help keep the air healthy individually and community-wide!



PARTICIPANTS:

Illinois 5th & 6th grade students

ENTRY GUIDELINES:

- Electronic entries must be submitted by **February 2, 2026**
- Include Entry ID and Release Forms
- Visit epa.illinois.gov for more information and materials



AWARDS:

You could win statewide recognition, an environmental reference book for your school library, and an invitation to the awards ceremony in Springfield!



CONTACTS:

Kristi Morris (Springfield) – kristi.morris@illinois.gov
Eli Dollarhide (Chicago) – eli.dollarhide@illinois.gov

2026 Poster, Poetry, and Prose Contest

Contest Rules, Information, and Timetable

Together for Healthier Air!

Theme: Creative ways that everyone can help keep the air healthy individually and community-wide

Participants: Illinois fifth and sixth grade students

Art guidelines:

- Markers, crayons, pens, pencils, paints, or graphics software (two-dimensional media only)
- **Must be participant's own work (no AI)**

Poetry/Prose guidelines:

- One page maximum length, one-sided (no larger than 8-1/2" x 11" sheet)
- Neatly handwritten or typed; minimum 10-point font (must be readable)
- **Must be participant's own writing (no plagiarism or AI)**

Entries must be submitted electronically (word, pdf, jpeg, or tiff files). Please make sure to include the entire work in the photo with appropriate lighting to enhance the quality of the work.

The maximum number of entries per school is eight.

NOTE: Each student must submit a release form and entry ID with his or her work. Only one person per entry (no group projects).

Each student's work will be judged on:

- Understanding of the concept
- Originality of execution -- no magazine articles, commercial slogans or copyrighted characters or figures
- Clear, accurate message
- Emphasis on the theme
- Neatness/attractiveness, legibility/readability, correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar
- Effort put into the work

Submission Process for Teachers:

- Choose **eight entries** to represent your school
- Make sure completed identification forms are included
- Each entry must include a release form filled out and signed at the time of submission
- Entries must be emailed no later than **February 2, 2026**
- Email entries, ID and release forms (word, pdf, jpeg or tiff files) to: EPA.contest@illinois.gov

All entries become the property of the Illinois EPA and will be distributed for judging.

Awards:

Each participating student whose work meets the guidelines and requirements will receive a certificate. Finalists will receive a certificate, a ribbon, and an invitation to the awards ceremony in Springfield (subject to change). If needed, awards will be mailed to the teacher for distribution. Finalists include top winners, honorable mention, and special recognition. Twelve top winners (six in each category) will have their work displayed as such and receive an environmental reference book for their school's library.

Contest Timeline and Resources

January 2026	Educators introduce potential sources of air pollution and ways they can be reduced to help make a difference for healthier air, both individually and as a community.
January 12-23	Students create posters or written works relating to the theme: Together for Healthier Air!
January 26-30	Teachers display posters and poems/prose at their schools. If needed, students and/or faculty vote to select eight entries total per school to submit to the Illinois EPA for further judging.
February 2	Teachers submit up to eight entries per school to the Illinois EPA for judging Entries must be submitted electronically no later than February 2, 2026.
February 2026	Judging
April 2026	Awards Ceremony held in Springfield – <i>tentatively April 11</i>

If you have any questions, please contact: Kristi Morris, at: kristi.morris@illinois.gov or Eli Dollarhide at eli.dollarhide@illinois.gov. For more information or to download the participation packet, please visit the website at: <https://epa.illinois.gov/topics/education/contest/elementary.html>.

Informational resources can be found on the following websites:

- Illinois EPA curricula units:
 - *How Does a Bulb Light?* <https://epa.illinois.gov/topics/education/pathways.html>
 - *How Does My Environment Affect Me?*
<https://pathways.mste.illinois.edu/curriculum/environmental-justice>
- AirNow, Education Resources: <https://www.airnow.gov/education/>
- US EPA
 - Teaching Resources: <https://www.epa.gov/students/lesson-plans-teacher-guides-and-online-environmental-resources-educators>
 - Indoor Air Quality Tools for School: <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools>
- PBS, Kids Go Green: Reducing Air Pollution: <https://illinois.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ee18-sci-airpol/kids-go-green-reducing-air-pollution/>
- Subject to Climate, 5 Ways to Teach About Air Pollution: <https://subjecttoclimate.org/teacher-guides/5-ways-to-teach-about-air-pollution>
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Air Pollution and Your Health: <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/air-pollution>
- National Geographic, Air Pollution: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/air-pollution/>

Art/Poster Entry Identification

PLEASE FILL OUT THIS FORM AND RETURN IT WITH THE 2026 ART/POSTER ENTRY.

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Parent's Email: _____

School: _____ County: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Educator: _____ Educator's Email: _____

Student's statement about work: _____

Written Entry Identification

PLEASE FILL OUT THIS FORM AND RETURN IT WITH THE 2026 WRITTEN ENTRY.

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Parent's Email: _____

School: _____ County: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Educator: _____ Educator's Email: _____

Student's statement about work: _____

Appearance and Material Release Form 2026

In consideration that (student name), _____,
has entered the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's *Together for Cleaner Air!* contest
and said works are the property of the Illinois EPA, I hereby give my consent to the Illinois EPA
to publish my **child's name, school, city, photo, and creative works** on the Illinois EPA's
Internet site, publications and social media for educational, informational, marketing or other
purposes deemed necessary.

I hereby waive any right that I may otherwise have to inspect or approve the finished
product, or the manner of its use chosen by the Illinois EPA. I also release, discharge and agree
to hold harmless the Illinois EPA to whom this consent and waiver is given from any liability by
virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, or use in composite form, whether intentional or
otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking of said pictures or in any processing, or
in the publication and distribution. I understand that I shall receive no compensation
whatsoever in connection with the foregoing, beyond my child's opportunity to participate. I
hereby waive all rights of privacy in connection with the use of my child's name, school, city,
photo, or creative works. I also waive any and all rights, whether explicit or implied, in the
material and consent without reservation to the Illinois EPA using, distributing or otherwise
making available the material to other parties as it sees fit.

Parent or legal guardian must sign below (unless student is 18 years of age or older):

Parent/Guardian Name

Contact number or email

Address

Parent or Student (*if 18 or older*)

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Student Contest Evaluation Form

Based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor to 5 being very good), give each work a rating in each category. Select the four posters and the four written works (poem and/or prose) with the highest score to represent your school. Send these eight entries to the Illinois EPA for further judging.

Note: All work should reflect the theme:

Together for Healthier Air!

[illegible]