

HHS Students Make Their 'Voices' Heard

- By [IAN MUNRO Daily News-Record](#)



Efrem Gebremikael, a sophomore at Harrisonburg High School, originally from Ethiopia, reads his poem about his dreams of becoming a doctor at the Our Voices as New Virginians event at Massanutten Regional Library on Saturday.

HARRISONBURG — Efrem Gebremikael, a Harrisonburg High School sophomore and Ethiopian immigrant, stepped to the podium.

It was his turn to recite his poem to the small crowd who gathered at Massanutten Regional Library for the Our Voices as New Virginians event on Saturday.

In his poem, Gebremikael expressed his dreams of one day becoming a doctor in the United States.

“I want to learn about doctors and [take] medical classes,” he said.

Gebremikael was one of nine Harrisonburg High School students who have recently immigrated to the United States, and is a member of Voices, a school club.

Voices is a program of On the Road Collaborative, a Harrisonburg after-school program that is helping the students learn English.

He also said he wanted to be able to travel to struggling countries to volunteer as an aid worker for those who cannot afford medical attention.

“I want to be a general doctor because we have a lot of people who have problems — they need to get medicine or doctors — but they don't even have money and then they don't go,” he said. “I want to help them.”

Gebremikael moved to Harrisonburg from the Tigray region, the northernmost part of Ethiopia, which borders Eritrea, in 2018.

Eritrea and Ethiopia fought each other between 1998 and 2000, but a long-standing peace agreement was not signed until just last year, according to Associated Press reports. Abiy Ahmed, the prime minister of Ethiopia, won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in formally ending the conflict, according to AP reports.

About half of Gebremikael's family is split between Ethiopia and America, he said. And his longing to see them also made it into the poem, alongside his future aspirations.

Gebremikael's poem will be included in the third annual publication of the writings of the members of Voices, said Anu Beheraj, an English as a second language teacher at Harrisonburg High School.

Gebremikael said ESL teachers like Beheraj are helping students like him to succeed at city schools.

"They every day smile for students," he said. "When they're like that, I'm hopeful — I have a chance to learn.

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