

**DATE:** May 22, 2012  
**TO:** Board of Trustees  
**FROM:** Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools  
**SUBJECT:** Margaret T. Stevenson Award  
**ORIGINATOR:** Tanni Parker, Assistant Superintendent  
**RESOURCE STAFF:** Sandy Forster, Valerie Hesse  
**REFERENCE:** n/a

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### **ISSUE**

There are limited opportunities in Edmonton Public Schools to acknowledge student writing in Grade 8. The Margaret T. Stevenson Award was created to promote the annual recognition of a talented young writer completing Grade 8 in Edmonton Public Schools.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Margaret T. Stevenson Award is named after Margaret Stevenson who served as a supervisor of Language Arts for Edmonton Public Schools. During this time, she was best known for her encouragement of young writers and promotion of quality children's literature.

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

The portfolios of all of the applicants are impressive demonstrations of the District's vision that all students will learn to their full potential and develop the ability, passion and imagination to pursue their dreams and contribute to their community.

Jasmine Wang from Grandview Heights School is the 2012 recipient of the Margaret T. Stevenson Talented Young Writer Award. Samples of Jasmine's writing demonstrated evidence of her personal growth as a writer, her ability to handle all styles of writing in a masterful way and her strong personal voice (Attachment I).

### **KEY POINTS**

Criteria for selecting - the winner must:

- show a range of writing for different purposes, situations and audiences
- show persistence with complex writing tasks
- display a strong personal style and sense of voice
- demonstrate excellence in content, organization, word choice, syntax, and control of writing conventions
- show evidence of reading a wide variety of literature
- show evidence of valuing the work of other authors

### **ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES**

ATTACHMENT I Excerpts from Jasmine Wang's Writing

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**Excerpts from Jasmine Wang's Writing**

**A Reflection of My Work, "Butterfly"  
BY Jasmine Wang**

The poem, "Butterfly", is an important piece of work to me. I wrote it to express myself, for my own personal reasons. It represents a time in my life when I was feeling rebellious against my family, feeling that they did not understand who I was and what I wished to accomplish. For me at that time, freedom seemed almost holy, yet unreachable. I tried to bridge that gap with this poem. In this poem, I also utilized a writing tool unfamiliar to me at that time; avoiding punctuation and capitalization. I was inspired by the likes of e. e. Cummings, Guillaume Apollinaire, and even Stefan George to take such a risk. I was also inspired by my Speech Arts teacher, Shirley Konrad, who first led me to these poets and told me why they chose not to use conventional punctuation and capitalization. I enjoy using this format when I want the reader to think about how to "read" it, and even "perform" it in their brain. I edited out the punctuation and capitalization for the purpose of performance. My intended audience was an experienced poetry performer. I feel like this unique format, as well as the free verse style, allows the performer to be creatively challenged in terms of emphasis and expression. This is a experimental work that I love to read.

**Butterfly**  
**BY Jasmine Wang**  
**Grandview Heights, 2012**

You came too late  
To home me back  
You came too late  
To make me cry  
I was freed not long ago  
From the chains that bound me tight  
Too tight  
They hurt me  
They hurt you too  
Do you know that they hurt, the chains  
That you created  
Those chains are in your mind  
Not mine  
And now I fly  
Free  
With big hopes and beautiful dreams  
And I will never be caught  
Not here  
Not now  
Not ever again  
I look up at the sky  
And let myself dance  
On butterfly wings

**A Reflection of My Work, “Finding a Voice”**  
**BY Jasmine Wang**

This is very personal narrative. It was written in my spare time for my personal enjoyment. It is inspired by a boy (who had autism) in a similar situation in my school. It is not meant to be written in any particular dictated format. I wrote it in part because I am continually amazed by the inner strength and virtue of people generally regarded to be weaker in some aspect than the ‘rest’ of us. I love writing about people standing up for themselves. Motivational writing makes me feel like I should get up and do something good for the world. I feel like that is the purpose of writing, to convey a feeling to the reader, to transport them away from the world then back, and finally to make them feel empowered. This piece is about the strength and courage of one solitary, bullied girl with Aspergers. It inspired me. I hope it inspires you.

**Finding a Voice**  
**BY Jasmine Wang**  
**Grandview Heights, 2012**

The girl shivers at the microphone, papers fluttering in her hand nervously like caged birds. Whispers shoot around the school auditorium.

“Who is she?”

“The Aspergers girl?”

“Why is *she* up there?”

“One dollar says she’ll mess up.”

The girl pretends not to hear the whispers. She clears her throat nervously. Then she takes a deep breath, tucking in a stray blond hair behind her ear.

*She remembers.*

*The day that she became different.*

It was a chilly day. She was five. Mom had pulled her off the playground where she had been sitting on the swings alone. She was happy that she wasn’t at school. She didn’t really like the other kids. They were mean, especially Mandy, the girl with brown eyes and brown hair.

A quiet car ride later, she was sitting in a chair while a man smiled at her. The smile told her to call him Trey.

“Your name is Cassie, right?” Smile.

“Yes.” Cassie thought Trey’s smile looked fake.

“You have very pretty green eyes, Cassie.” Big smile.

“Thank you, Trey.” Mom has told her to be polite.

“Okay, Cassie. I’m just going to ask you a few questions. Just relax.” Even bigger smile now. She wondered if his face could crack from smiling.

Smiley Man led her out of the room after the tests, but he isn’t smiling anymore. Mom stood as Cassie ran to her.

That was the day she first heard the word.

*Aspergers.*

Mom told her it wasn’t anything to be scared of. It was just something that made her special.

Cassie believed her at first.

But no one seemed to feel the same way.

Mandy, who lived close to Cassie, often ganged up on her. At first, Cassie thought that Mandy was trying to be friendly. After a while, she realized that this was bullying. Cassie had often heard the word in school but she never believed that such a horrid thing could happen to anyone. She realized with a terrible shock she was wrong.

Sometimes Mandy brought along friends to join in the ‘fun,’ or boys she wanted to impress. They surrounded Cassie and laughed as she tried to stutter her way out of the situation. They called her retarded. Disabled. Cruel words that made Cassie want to throw up, but she kept it inside, along with all her feelings. Then after the tormenting was over, she shuffled home and cried her heart out.

At first she didn’t understand. Mom had said she was special, in a good way. After a while Cassie realized that Mom was wrong. She was a bad kind of special, the kind that everyone avoided and mocked. Hateful looks and cruel, biting laughter haunted Cassie everywhere.

At school, Cassie learned not to open her mouth for fear that she would be ridiculed. She learned that she deserved to be made fun of for who she was. She learned that the world was a harsh, desolate place for someone like her to live.

The only warm place was her mom’s arms. Mom would never make fun of her. Cassie’s mom built her up every time she came home feeling like nothing, and she was the reason Cassie was making the most important speech of her life.

The girl called Cassie stands at the microphone and clears her throat again. She knew this was a last ditch effort to stop the hate in its tracks. All of the cruel laughter, needle sharp jokes, she would stop it. All of it.

“Um, excuse me.” Her voice creaks from lack of use. Still, everyone quiets. They look at her expectantly.

“Hi. I mean, hello everyone. Good afternoon.” Her voice sounds stilted. She has practiced these lines countless times before, yet she sounds flustered and awkward.

“My name is Cassie. But you probably know me as the girl with Aspergers.”

I was diagnosed with Aspergers at the age of five. In a way, I’m glad I was diagnosed so early. At least after the diagnosis, people had a word for what was...wrong...about me,” Cassie says slowly. “But I believe Aspergers is not a disease or disorder.” The audience rustled in disbelief. Someone in the back of the room snorted.

“I...I... th-think we should quiet down,” Cassie stuttered. The principal gave everyone a hard stare and a loaded silence filled the room. Nervous, Cassie stares down at her paper.

“I am different, yes. Unique, yes. But sick? No. But some don’t seem to feel the same way.” Cassie glances at Mandy, a pretty brunette who is sitting with her friends. They glare at her, but Mandy looks away, cheeks flushing.

“No. We are not different. I am like you. I shouldn’t be treated differently. I am not disabled.” Cassie does not look at her paper now. All the years of frustration are pouring out, finally given release. The audience does not move. Frozen in time, suspended in air like raindrops that never touch the ground. Transfixed.

“I should not be bullied for who I am. I admit to having flaws. Sometimes I cry when I can’t help it. Sometimes I reach for my worn teddy bear I loved when I was little. Don’t you?” Cassie does not appear angry, but a sharp glint in her eyes tells another story. She speaks slowly. “I am sick of being pitied; sick of being pushed around. What made you treat me differently? Just because I have Aspergers and you don’t? We are all different, all special and unique, and yet only the weak are bullied.”

Cassie blinked away a hint of tears. “None of you knows how it feels being bullied every day. Everything I say is passed on and laughed at as a joke. You don’t know what it is like, knowing that people laugh at you every day, that you’re the butt of every single joke they make.”

Cassie whispers now, trying to get a grip on her emotions. “Please stop. We are not enemies.”

Silence.

Cassie’s heart pounds in her ears.

Then, to her utter astonishment, the audience begins to clap. It starts at the front, by a little Asian boy no more than seven years old. All of the teachers join in and soon there is a huge roar, even from the back, where the older kids sit.

Cassie sees some people mouthing, “Sorry.” She sees Mandy with tears in her eyes. Cassie smiles shyly at her. She smiles at all of them and they cheer for her. She accepts it all as thirstily as a desert would accept rain.

For Cassie, the rest of the day is perfect. People talk to her. It is hard to smile at strangers and past bullies, but Cassie tries. She tries so hard. Mandy walks Cassie to her locker and asks if they can go shopping sometime, looping her arm around Cassie’s as she chatters away. Mandy’s face turns serious after Cassie nods. Mandy whispers in Cassie’s ear two words that are completely different from each other, yet they make Cassie’s face glow. “Thanks. Sorry.”

It is perfect, but all Cassie wants to do is go home.

Cassie's mom waits outside their car, arms wide open as Cassie runs to her like she did so many years ago. Mom's arms fold around Cassie's, holding her tight.

"Did you see me in the audience?" Mom sounds choked, but happy.

"No, I didn't!" You didn't tell me you would come," Cassie smiles.

"When you start speaking, I had tears in my eyes. My baby had grown up. I saw people laughing at me, the crazy lady," her mom laughs. Then she says firmly, "I am so proud of you."

"Me too."

Cassie stands back and grins again, although tears threaten to drip out onto her cheeks. She repeats the words. They make her feel strong inside.

"Me too."