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EXCELLENCE

2022

Michael A. Strembitsky

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Honouring Student Excellence

Michael A. Strembitsky Award of Excellence

Honouring Student Excellence

On June 21, 2022, the Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees had the honour of recognizing 18 outstanding nominees for the Michael A. Strembitsky Award of Excellence.

A gold (\$2,000), silver (\$1,500) and bronze (\$1,000) medal and cash award was presented to three Grade 12 students who are completing their schooling and who best exemplify:

- excellence in personal, social and academic endeavours
- keen interest in a broad selection of subjects and activities
- willingness to seek meaningful change
- initiative, courage, confidence and a commitment to excellence
- co-operation with other students, staff and community members
- potential to provide leadership throughout life
- responsible participation in society

Michael A. Strembitsky Award Nominees

Dustin Edgi
amiskwaciy Academy

Laiba Shaikh
J. Percy Page

Sarah Salami
Millwoods Christian

Grace Tunski
Victoria

Reda Alamari
Centre High Campus

Karina Banerji
Jasper Place

Helen Pan
Old Scona

Nicole Li
Vimy Ridge Academy

Gustavo Marin Trejo
Eastglen

Hannah Liu
Lillian Osborne

Ayesha Irfan
Queen Elizabeth

Jasmine Virk
W.P. Wagner

Ioana Dascalu
Edmonton Christian

Macy Armstrong
M.E. LaZerte

Jonah Zwaigenbaum
Ross Sheppard

Cheney Cai
Harry Ainlay

Jonathan Afowork
McNally

Juliana Concini
Strathcona

GOLD Medal



Juliana Concini
Strathcona

“Juliana has modelled inclusivity and compassion, all while demonstrating excellence in so many different areas of our school,” says Principal Hans Van Ginhoven.

“She is a well-rounded student who has had a great influence on our school culture. Her personal discipline and time management skills are outstanding.”

In Grade 11, Juliana represented the school on the Division’s Student Senate where she led a team of students in amplifying the voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) individuals. She helped create educational resources and collected stories from BIPOC teachers, staff and students to highlight their voices and support the project.

Juliana is an executive member of the school’s Model United Nations Club, Social Justice Club and Student’s Union. In everything she is involved with, she mentors peers, leads by example and helps organize and run numerous initiatives.

She plays the tuba and is also an accomplished flute player and is a member of the Strathcona advanced wind ensemble. During the pandemic, she hosted a virtual community flute concert and participated in fundraising concerts with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. She was an integral member of the school’s championship winning flag football team.

Through her experience in Alberta Innovates High School Youth Researcher Summer (HYRS) Program, she discovered the gender disparity in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). She says this “led her to the goal to inspire young women to pursue careers in STEM and to work toward decreasing the gender disparity in medical research.” As a result, she started volunteering at Telus World of Science so she could encourage young girls to interact with the science exhibits. She also tutors math and science in hopes of making the subjects less daunting.

In addition to everything else she is involved with, Juliana also spends four to eight hours a week as a Page Peer Mentor with the Legislative Assembly Page Program when session is in. She worked with Inclusion Alberta to mentor an associate page with a developmental disability. Juliana spent a significant amount of time over many months creating study materials and running study sessions with the individual. All her efforts paid off and after six years as an associate page, the individual finally passed their exam to be able to work in the Chamber. Juliana also volunteered to speak to elementary students attending School at the Legislature.

Juliana was recently named a 2022 University of Toronto National Scholar, which recognizes original and creative thinkers, community leaders and high academic achievers.

SILVER Medal



Jonathan Afowork
McNally

“Jonathan is a socially conscious and thoughtful young man,” says Principal Krista Mulder. “He is committed to not just doing well but rather to doing good.”

Jonathan was actively engaged in the school’s Social Justice Club, where he participated in many initiatives like anti-bullying week and the Alliance of Black Employee Experience and Leadership’s (ABEEL) anti-racism sponsorship program. He was a member of the Student Activities group and was actively involved in athletics as a lead member of the cross country team. Jonathan was a contributor to the Tiger Times publication and was responsible for setting deadlines and topics of interest, including pieces on science-related issues and developments. He helped anchor the school’s weekly news and announcements and his peers look forward to his humour and approach. He also published an op-ed in the Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald, addressing poor educational outcomes among Black Canadian youth and how to improve the outcomes.

Since Grade 4, Jonathan has competed in regional, national and international science competitions. In 2018, he presented his research on skin cancer at the Carleton University Canada-wide science fair. In 2019, he presented his research on wireless vital sign monitoring in Abu Dhabi as a member of Team Canada at the Movement for Leisure Activities in Science and Technology (MILSET) Exp-Sciences International—an event focusing exclusively on the scientific creativity of young aspirant scientists from all over the world. Jonathan shared that being the only Black Canadian student left him feeling like a fish out of water.

As a first generation Canadian, Jonathan didn’t grow up in a family with professional connections or knowledge of the opportunities available to him. As a result of noticing the gap with other family and friends, he created the CoCurriculum guide. This guide provides information about internships, summer programs, conferences and other opportunities for high school students. He worked to make the resource available to the school’s Learning Services department as well as community groups like the ELITE Program for Black Youth. In fact, ABEEL gave Jonathan a Community Service Award for his creation of CoCurriculum. Jonathan and a classmate are working on creating an app that functions like the CoCurriculum guide.

As the youngest researcher at the University of Alberta’s stem cell biology lab, he works alongside PhD and undergraduate students in regenerative medicine, researching ways to repair human tissue.

Jonathan shared that through working with many different people on many initiatives, “This helped me understand the idea of collective efficacy—how we need to trust each other, believing in our shared capacity.”

Jonathan has received various awards and scholarships, and is McNally’s valedictorian.

BRONZE Medal



Ayesha Irfan
Queen Elizabeth

In reference to a quote by social justice advocate Bryan Stevenson, Principal Brent McKeown says, “She is a standing voice in our school. She does not sit and she is not quiet.” He further said, “She sees her work, in all she does, as not being about her, but about creating a more equitable world.”

Ayesha says her passion for policy and law stems from experiencing systemic barriers such as accessibility, racism and Islamophobia. She has spent the past three years focusing on making policies more inclusive and accessible to youth. She believes that it is important for youth to know and understand their educational and legal rights.

As a board member on the Youth Restorative Action Project, she worked directly with Indigenous youth. In her role, she mentored youth, provided resources and tried to make the justice system less intimidating. Ayesha was the policy chair on the City of Edmonton Youth Council. She had the opportunity to work with Mayor Amarjeet Sohi and the anti-racist advisory committee, helping to write Edmonton’s anti-racism strategy. During the process, Ayesha collaborated with various youth groups to ensure their experience and perspective was incorporated. This past fall she also worked on a report, sponsored by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, on how youth can be better equipped to affect change in the world. When compiling information for the report, she worked with the National Council of Muslims to capture how Islamophobia affects youth in Canada.

Ayesha served on Edmonton Public Schools’ Student Senate this past year, where she created anti-racism presentations for elementary, junior high and high schools throughout the Division. This past year, she has also been a Page with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and an ambassador with Youth Leaders in Law.

Ayesha plans to major in political science and study law afterwards. Principal McKeown says, “I have every confidence that Ayesha will be one of the drivers of enduring change in our society as she moves on with her education.”