

REMEMBER
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EXCELLENCE

2023

Michael A. Strembitsky

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Honouring Student Excellence

Michael A. Strembitsky Award of Excellence

Honouring Student Excellence

On June 6, 2023, the Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees had the honour of recognizing 19 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 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

Victoria Silva-Veltkamp
Academy at King Edward

Jack Bates
Harry Ainlay

Ansh Chavda
McNally

Maria Ngan
Strathcona

Samantha Macatangay
Centre High Campus

Tessa Pratt
J. Percy Page

Kaitlyn Riesen
Millwoods Christian

Maria Morin
Victoria

Harsehaj Kaur
Dr. Anne Anderson

Alyssa Shen
Jasper Place

Aurora Shi
Old Scona

Angela Corsaro
Vimy Ridge Academy

Alexander Callas
Eastglen

Sandy Iligan
Lillian Osborne

Yousra Berih
Queen Elizabeth

Abinash Saravanan
W.P. Wagner

Elise VandenBorn
Edmonton Christian High

Tran Nguyen
M.E. LaZerte

Sofia Sejutee
Ross Sheppard

GOLD Medal



Abinash Saravanan
W.P. Wagner

Principal Tim Boan says, “Abinash is an exceptional role model for fellow students. His positivity, kindness, humility and understanding of the world make him stand out amongst his peers.”

For the 2022–23 school year, Abinash was elected as one of three student Trustees on Edmonton Public Schools Student Senate. On the Senate, he worked on anti-racism and mental health initiatives. He was able to engage and coach students of all ages related to their understanding and practices related to anti-racism.

He was part of Wagner’s Student Warriors Action Team, where he helped plan and execute extra-curricular activities. In addition, he was president of the school’s Rotary Interact Club. In this club, he helped organise a ravine clean-up, a winter coat drive and several fundraisers for the Stollery Children’s Hospital. He also guided the development of a legacy project that led to the collection of 2,000 pounds of food for the Edmonton Food Bank.

“Abinash has a deep desire to give back to his community, and his leadership within these initiatives ensures people in his community know they are valued, appreciated and respected,” says Principal Boan.

Abinash believes understanding leadership is a long term endeavour and that people grow when they go through uncomfortable experiences. He reflects on the things he loves and remembers as “lollipop moments” and prioritises those things in his very busy schedule.

He is also a swim instructor and enjoys working with children from varied ages and backgrounds.

Abinash will be attending the University of Alberta, doing his bachelor of physiology, with a goal of being involved with biomedical ethics.

SILVER Medal



Sofia Sejutee
Ross Sheppard

“Sofia leads by example,” says Principal Rick Stanley. “She values leadership as a journey.”

Sofia loves STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). In junior high, she won the national Student Spaceflight Experiments Program Mission 14 Competition and had an experiment she designed sent to the International Space Station. Sofia has proved that regardless of where you come from “hard work and perseverance leads to achievement, academic excellence and future leaders from all types of status.”

Sofia joined the WISEST (Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science & Technology) Youth Council where she helped expand youth involvement. She was the project team lead on the STEM Profiles project, which will help showcase women and gender-diverse individuals excelling in their STEM field within Alberta. She was also responsible for introducing STEM to elementary students, and speaking and sharing her passion for STEM to over 600 female Grade 6 students.

At Ross Sheppard, she set up a STEM branch of the school’s principal council, Speak up Shep. In addition to regularly meeting with school administration to discuss and implement ideas, she offered one-on-one sessions to any student who had questions about STEM. Through Speak up Shep, Sofia was also involved with numerous initiatives and activities that promoted diversity, inclusion and school spirit—such as gender neutral washrooms, the creation of murals and the rejuvenation of display cases. Sofia was also a TeamUP science ambassador and served on the Interact Club-Rotary International Club where she helped with numerous fundraisers.

When she was younger, she was chosen to participate in the Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta - Sistema (YONA-Sistema) program, which provides free music lessons to children. She now plays in the Edmonton Youth Orchestra and pays it forward by volunteering to teach violin, assist with choir classes and provide academic support in the YONA-Sistema program.

Principal Stanley says, “She believes in taking on the challenges you face to create opportunities for others.”

Sofia is the first student in the history of Ross Sheppard School to receive the prestigious University of Alberta Schulich Leader undergraduate STEM scholarship. She will be pursuing a career in STEM.

BRONZE Medal



Victoria
Silva-Veltkamp
*Academy at
King Edward*

Victoria is very organized, has excellent time-management skills and has been a great leader and mentor.

Victoria was initially diagnosed with learning challenges specific to reading and mathematics. In Grade 7, she transitioned to the Strategies program. Victoria thrived in the new school setting and the program helped close her learning gap. Victoria says, “The staff at my school have helped me overcome obstacles and provide me with the power and courage to succeed at anything I do.” Principal Joleen Kitt says, “Victoria worked diligently to overcome challenges, and her strong work ethic and drive to succeed has piloted her through to graduation. Her passion for reading and writing is truly inspiring.”

She has strived to learn more about and maintain a strong grasp of her Cree culture and language. Victoria says, “Staying connected to my Indigenous culture has become a way of life for me.” She has taken several Cree language courses and has shown leadership by sharing her knowledge and skills with other students. She teaches students Cree words and phrases over student announcements, and she has also shared her own unique land acknowledgements at school assemblies.

Victoria has also led Indigenous crafting and beading workshops for other students. Working within an assigned budget, she planned projects, ordered supplies and used her knowledge to guide students, while sharing and explaining the cultural significance of each project. “I have found my voice in teaching and advocating,” says Victoria. “I’m on a journey to reclamation and self-determination. I have so much to learn and give back to my community.”

Outside of the school, Victoria volunteers at the Boyle Street Community Centre where she helps prepare meals for people experiencing houselessness. She also volunteers at the Edmonton Food Bank and at community powwows and Indigenous workshops.

Victoria plans to complete a bachelor of arts in Native Studies with the combined bachelor of education. Her goal is to ultimately become a liaison and mentor for other Indigenous students who may struggle with learning. She plans to use her own experiences to connect with them and model how to effectively overcome challenges.