



Educational Assistants Association

The Front Line



Year End Edition 2025

Honouring Success: A Collective Effort

Each year, our union proudly presents student and member awards to recognize exceptional achievements within our school communities. However, we continue to face a familiar challenge—receiving enough nominations directly from our members. As frontline education workers, our members spend every moment of their day working directly with students and have no scheduled prep time to complete additional paperwork like award nominations.

That's why we are especially grateful for the support of other school staff who step in to help make these nominations possible. Whether it's a teacher, administrator, or guidance counselor lending their time to identify and support a nomination, their contributions ensure we can honour the students and members who deserve to be recognized.

This year, as in previous years, some nominations came through with the help of school staff outside of our membership—such as guidance counselors or teachers—who identified deserving students and partnered with EAs to submit the official nomination. These kinds of collaborations reflect the spirit of the awards: recognizing student success through the collective efforts of the entire school community. Without this teamwork, many incredible students might not have the chance to

be celebrated. We encourage all members to consider nominating a student or fellow EA/CYW next year. New Awards Committee members are always welcome to help us enhance the process—and your voice can help shine a spotlight on someone who truly deserves it.

Grade 6 Elementary Student Award - recognizing a Grade 6 student with an IEP



We are thrilled to recognize Owen, a Grade 6 student from Country Hills Public School, as this year's recipient of the Grade 6 Student Award. Nominated by Kyla Martin, Owen stands out not just for his impressive academic improvements, but also for his self-advocacy, emotional growth, and positive impact on his school community.

in reading and math. His fluency in multiplication and division has increased by 37% in just two months, and his reading level has risen by two full grades. Despite a learning disability in both reading and writing, Owen uses tools like voice dictation and seeks out quiet spaces to support his learning—showing both determination and resourcefulness.

Beyond the classroom, Owen's personal development has been equally inspiring. He now recognizes when he's feeling dysregulated and takes appropriate steps to manage it. He has become more independent in problem-solving and is actively building friendships within his class.

Owen is also a vibrant part of his school and broader community. He leads intramurals through the school's Sports Crew, takes karate in the community, works with kindergarten buddies, participates in the drama club, and even helps with morning announcements. In all of these roles, he consistently sets a strong example for younger students.

As Kyla shared, "Owen has made leaps and strides over the past two years, and it has been a privilege to watch him grow." We couldn't agree more. Congratulations, Owen, on your well-deserved Award!

Secondary Achievement Award - recognizing a Secondary Graduating Student with an IEP

We are proud to announce Jeremi from Grand River Collegiate Institute as the recipient of this year's Secondary Achievement Award, nominated by Darlene Crawley. Jeremi's story is a powerful testament to perseverance,



Jeremi, who has an IEP, has made incredible academic progress throughout high school—most notably in math, where he went from struggling to leading his peers with an impressive 80%+ in Grade 12 math. Known for his dedication, Jeremi regularly seeks extra help during lunch and after school to strengthen his skills in all subject areas. His determination is fueled by his dream of becoming an airplane mechanic—a goal that requires strong marks and a hands-on mindset.

Jeremi has also grown tremendously on a personal level. Recognizing the need to push past his comfort zone, he took part in Job Skills training through Sunbeam Developmental Services, which led to successful part-time employment at Centre in the Square. His work ethic and willingness to engage socially have grown by leaps and bounds.

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supportive member of both his school and broader community. He devoted a week of his time as a Leader in Training at Woodland Christian High School, mentoring younger students at camp. He's also completed co-op placements at the Region of Waterloo Airport and a local car dealership, gaining real-world experience in mechanics while solidifying his passion for aviation.

Jeremi's journey began early, with support from KidsAbility starting before age two. Diagnosed with autism and ADHD at age six, he worked through speech and occupational therapy to build essential skills that would serve him well into his teen years. His story is not just one of overcoming, but one of thriving—academically, socially, and personally.

Today, Jeremi stands ready to take the next step, having been accepted into the Aviation Technology – Aircraft Mechanics and Avionics program at Fanshawe College. He is a shining example of what it means to set goals, work hard, and advocate for yourself every step of the way.

Congratulations, Jeremi! Your determination and leadership are an inspiration to us all.

Member Memorial Award - ACE Secondary Graduating Student

We are proud to recognize Fouzy of Laurel Heights Secondary School as the recipient of this year's Member Memorial Award, which honours a graduating secondary ACE student who embodies compassion, leadership, and community spirit. Nominated by Julie Reynolds, Fouzy has become a beloved and



Fouzy is a core member of the ACE program, and while traditional academics are not his focus, his dedication to his work responsibilities and helping others is unmatched. He consistently takes the lead on in-school tasks like the annual poppy envelope stuffing and AIM work contracts, always the first to step up and get started with a positive attitude.

In the classroom, Fouzy is a quiet leader and a generous peer. He helps classmates unpack bags, open snacks, and interpret for friends who are Deaf or have communication challenges. He creates an inclusive and supportive environment, always inviting others to join in games and activities. Staff describe him as the heart of the classroom, someone who makes everyone feel welcome and appreciated with his bright spirit and daily cheer.

Fouzy's involvement extends well beyond the classroom. Over the years, he has taken part in in-school and community-based work experiences, including helping the custodial team keep the school clean—an opportunity that became a highlight for staff who worked with him. He also assisted football coaches with game-day setup, helped organize school events like the Polar Plunge, and delivered coffee

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and color-coding merchandise and currently works at University Gates Retirement Home, folding and organizing laundry with care and pride.

As one of his supervisors said, *“Fouzy is one of a kind. He made our jobs more enjoyable just by being himself—funny, kind, and respectful. Everyone in the school has a soft spot for him.”*

Fouzy may be graduating, but his joyful presence, generosity, and big-hearted nature will leave a lasting legacy at Laurel Heights. Congratulations, Fouzy, on this well-deserved recognition. You truly are a friend to all, and a light wherever you go.

CYW - Member Appreciation Award

We are proud to honour Beth Petersen, a Child and Youth Worker at UTurn Cambridge, as the recipient of this year’s CYW Member Award, nominated by Laura Parker. Beth’s quiet leadership, tireless advocacy, and radiant spirit have made a profound impact on both students and staff alike.

Working with high school students who face complex mental health challenges, behavioural needs, and difficult home lives, Beth approaches each day—and each student—with kindness, humour, and hope. Whether she’s cooking a warm meal in the student kitchen, breaking into a spontaneous dance, laughing through student pranks, or spiking a volleyball during break, Beth creates a space where students feel safe, seen, and supported.

But beyond the smiles and warmth is a fierce, compassionate advocate. Beth doesn’t just care—she acts. She holds students to high

conversations when they’re needed most. She teaches youth how to use their own voices to change their lives, all while modelling how to stand tall, be kind, and stay grounded.

Colleagues describe her as “the best person in every room she enters,” a teammate who leads by example and lifts everyone around her. One supporting letter reads: *“Beth can carry the weight of her home life with her and still do her job with grace and stoicism—never too busy to laugh, play, or lift someone else up.”* Another affectionately likens her to “a soft yellow—like sunshine or buttery popcorn”—radiant, warm, and never overpowering.

While Beth quietly supports union efforts behind the scenes, her loudest legacy is the love, stability, and strength she brings to her school community every day.

Congratulations, Beth, on this well-deserved recognition. Your unwavering dedication and gentle leadership change lives—and remind us all what it truly means to serve with heart.



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We are thrilled to recognize Phyllis Gropp of Waterloo Collegiate Institute as the recipient of this year's EA Member Appreciation Award, nominated by Pamela Geringer. After beginning her career in 1991, Phyllis has spent over three decades transforming the lives of students and colleagues alike—offering not only unwavering support, but also heart, humour, and a deeply human touch to everything she does.

Phyllis joined the ACE program at WCI during a particularly challenging time, with major staff transitions and complex student needs. She jumped in without hesitation—bringing a positive attitude, a willingness to learn, and an eagerness to contribute. Her experience, empathy, and firm-but-loving presence quickly made her an essential part of the team. As one colleague shared, *"Her heart was always on her sleeve, and the students knew it."*

Phyllis's impact is felt in countless ways: she stayed late to plan and reflect, she initiated Friday afternoon crafts, became the classroom piano player and music teacher, and organized a holiday luncheon complete with homemade chicken and rice and a fully decorated, formal setting—often giving students their very first experience with table manners and celebration.

leading weekly volunteer shifts at Mission Thrift Store—where staff were so impressed that they requested only her group's return. She went above and beyond for students dealing with hardship, providing clothing, hygiene items, and even baking cookies with a former student during March Break. Phyllis's reach goes far beyond the school bell—her care continues long after graduation.

Colleagues describe her as the glue that held the team together, someone who could de-escalate a student, lead a sing-along, decorate a classroom, and check in on a friend—all before lunch. Her presence has inspired staff, comforted families, and, most importantly, changed lives.

As she approaches retirement, her absence will be deeply felt—but her legacy of laughter, compassion, and consistency will live on in every student, staff member, and classroom she touched.

Congratulations, Phyllis Gropp, on this richly deserved recognition. Your career has been a masterclass in what it means to care with both strength and soul. We are so grateful for you.

Here are just a few highlights of the incredible contributions from this year's student nominees:

This year, two exceptional students were also nominated for the Grade 6 EAA Award, and we're proud to recognize their inspiring contributions to their schools and communities.

At Wilson Avenue, Luciana has made incredible progress as a newcomer to Canada. With an EPP to support her language

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responsibilities of helping care for an ill family member. She is a kind, thoughtful peer, an advocate for herself and others, and an active member of her community through weekly soccer and basketball clubs. Her courage and kindness make her a true role model.

At Driftwood Park, Nolan stands out for his leadership, compassion, and drive. With an IEP, Nolan continues to excel academically and athletically—he’s a Triple-A hockey player, a team player in the classroom, and a dedicated volunteer in the ACE program. Each week, he spends time with students in the ACE class, forming genuine friendships and helping with activities, from games to BINGO to snack time. Nolan’s inclusive spirit and big heart leave a lasting impact on everyone around him.

Congratulations to Luciana and Nolan for being shining examples of resilience, leadership, and empathy. We’re honoured to celebrate your achievements!

We are proud to celebrate two exceptional students nominated for the Secondary Achievement Award who exemplify dedication, advocacy, and community spirit.

At Laurel Heights Secondary School, Ava has excelled academically in the Fast Forward Program with an IEP, earning high 80s and 90s while maintaining near-perfect attendance. Ava has volunteered tirelessly in the school library, created a news hub for Fast Forward students, and advocated for fair representation. Her passion for inclusion and her kindness have earned glowing praise from staff who describe

At Grand River Collegiate Institute, Madison has overcome significant physical challenges, including eight spinal surgeries, while maintaining strong academic performance and completing over 250 volunteer hours. Madison has raised over \$85,000 for Make-A-Wish through her “Ice Cream for Breakfast” fundraisers and has been a dedicated camp leader and community volunteer for years. Accepted into university and college programs, Madison’s perseverance, generosity, and positive spirit inspire all who know her.

Both Ava and Madison demonstrate how strength, heart, and leadership create lasting change—inside and outside the classroom. We congratulate them on their remarkable achievements!

Celebrating Our EA and CYW Member Appreciation Award Nominees:

The Educational Assistants’ Association is proud to recognize an exceptional group of nominees for this year’s EA and CYW Member Appreciation Awards. These dedicated individuals bring their hearts, hands, and voices to the work of uplifting students and colleagues every single day.

Chua Lee(CYW) – CHCI/WCI
Chua has gone above and beyond in her dual role supporting students at both Cameron Heights and Waterloo Collegiate. A true safe haven for BIPOC students and those who have faced significant life challenges, Chua’s presence is both healing and empowering. With a heart of gold and a commitment to equity, she uplifts the entire school community. Her impact on the WRDSB is profound, and she deserves

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Charlene Proulx – Chalmers P.S.

Charlene is a longtime supporter of the EAA, regularly attending meetings, participating in committees, and serving as her school's Key Member. Always the first to lend a hand, she is known for her dependability and generosity. Whether supporting staff or students, Charlene's presence is a calm, consistent force of good, making her a trusted and beloved part of her school.

Karen Grubb – Queensmount

With years of experience, knowledge, and energy, Karen exemplifies what it means to be an excellent EA. Her passion and unwavering commitment to student success have made a lasting impact. Karen is a role model of professional excellence, always bringing a positive spirit to her work.

Sue MacLeod – Stewart Avenue

Sue is a pillar of communication and encouragement at Stewart Avenue. She started a group chat to keep her EA team informed and connected, encouraging open dialogue, questions, and advocacy. Her leadership and kindness have made her a trusted voice and support for her colleagues.

Hope Neves – Stewart Avenue

Hope is known for her calm, caring demeanor and dedication to both students and colleagues. Always ready to assist and problem-solve, she's a team player whose resourcefulness and patience stand out. Her compassionate support uplifts everyone around her, and her drive to help students succeed never goes unnoticed.

the team and is known for her infectious positivity and strong work ethic. Each day, she shows up ready to take on challenges with a smile. Her presence is reassuring and motivating, making her an indispensable teammate and a bright light in her school.

Lisa Floto – Stewart Avenue

For over a decade, Lisa has brought compassion, dedication, and professionalism to Stewart Avenue. Her unwavering support of vulnerable students, her willingness to jump in wherever needed, and her nurturing approach have transformed countless lives. Staff deeply appreciate her collaborative nature and warm presence, and students thrive under her care.

Cristen Ulat – Stewart Avenue

Cristen consistently excels in every role she takes on. With a cheerful attitude and steady professionalism, she uplifts students and colleagues alike. Her kindness, patience, and skill make her a valued team member and an excellent role model.

These nominees are the heart of our schools—mentors, advocates, caregivers, and collaborators. We are proud to celebrate each of them for their tireless contributions and the lasting impact they make every day.

Enjoy your summer!

Chantelle Zurbrigg

EAA Secretary 23-25

