



Smyrna School District

Essay Contest

2001-02

Adult and Student Winners

A decorative border of pencils surrounds the text. At the top, three pencils are arranged horizontally. On the left and right sides, pencils are arranged vertically. At the bottom, three pencils are arranged horizontally. In the bottom right corner, a pencil holder contains several pencils.

I ♥ the Smyrna School District

The second essay contest to support the five Smyrna School District core values of *Respect, Responsibility, Perseverance, Integrity, and Compassion* was held during the month of January 2002. There were two categories of winners: adults (18 and over) and students (K through Grade 12). First, second, and third place winners received medals and certificates noting their accomplishments during "I Love the Smyrna School District" day, February 23, 2002.

The 2002 writing contest focused on the value of *Perseverance*. Hundreds of touching and heartfelt essays were submitted. This booklet contains the essays of first, second, and third place winners at all levels.

I hope this booklet is a source of inspiration for both the readers and the writers.

I extend my sincere appreciate to all who contributed their time and effort to enter this contest and share their thoughts.

Hebbie Weeks

Superintendent

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At the direction of the 2002 "I Love the Smyrna School District" committee, the Smyrna School District Essay Contest was initiated for a two-fold purpose: to emphasize the importance of writing in the district and to encourage student and adult discussion about *Perseverance*, a core district value. Contest rules and a writing prompt were developed and published to guide both adult and student entrants. The writing prompt, in particular, was created to mirror the type of prompt students might encounter on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) writing tests given each spring.

Special thanks goes to our judges: Rev. Jim Hawkins, Asbury Methodist Church; Ruth Williams, Smyrna School District English teacher retired; and Valerie Lemoi, *Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times*. Thanks also goes to Smyrna School District Central Office secretary Karen Kennedy who assisted with the layout and editing of the final publication. Special thanks goes to Janet Garrett, business teacher and department chairperson at Smyrna High School. Without her typing effort and publications expertise this publication would not have been possible. Finally, thanks goes to the Smyrna School District teachers who encouraged their students to write and who helped select essays.*

ESSAY CONTEST

Contestants were asked to write a maximum 500-word essay on the following topic:

Perseverance means the inner strength to remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles. This includes dedication, consistency, and having a positive attitude.

Write about an experience in your life that exemplifies the value of perseverance. Discuss the goal you achieved by persevering, what you did to achieve it, and how you felt when you accomplished that goal. If you prefer, you may write about the experience of someone you admire, rather than your own personal experience.

ADULT WINNERS: First (gold), second (silver) and third (bronze) place winners received medals and certificates noting their accomplishments. Their essays have been published in the *Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times*. Winners and runners-up were recognized during the "I Love the Smyrna School District" day (February 23, 2002).

STUDENT WINNERS: First (gold), second (silver) and third (bronze) place winners were selected at each grade level (K-12) in each building. Winners received medals and certificates noting their accomplishments. First place winners at each grade level had their work published in the *Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times*. All winners were recognized during the "I Love the Smyrna School District" day (February 23, 2002).

* In some cases we have not published student work due to the personal nature of the essay.



In September of 1996, I resigned from my secretarial job to pursue my dream of becoming a teacher. After working at my job, marriage, and being a parent, with some degree of success, I thought why not college? I entered Wilmington College (WC) as a full time student. This in itself was daunting, considering I had always been an average student during my younger years. Entering college as a middle-aged woman was terrifying.

After the first semester grades came out, I was starting to feel better; I even made the Dean's list. Several semesters went by with even more success. As each course was completed, my vision of becoming a teacher seemed more obtainable. After my second year at WC, I was inducted into the Honor Society. I've never felt as though I had a lot to offer academically; but, to my surprise, I was not only learning how to become a teacher, I was also learning a great deal about myself.

In order to become a certified teacher in the State of Delaware you must complete college courses, pass a state-mandated test, and complete several weeks of student teaching. This test consists of three parts. I took the test for the first time after my second year at WC. I felt confident about the writing and reading/grammar sections, but had real concerns regarding the math section. My concerns were confirmed after receiving the results of my test. I passed the language arts section, but failed the math section. Initially I was upset, but I quickly got over it. I still had plenty of time and opportunities to take it since I had two years of college left. I started to see a math tutor on a weekly basis. After months of tutoring, I signed up for the test. Unfortunately, I was met with failure again. My husband encouraged me to take the test every time it was offered; but with the cost of tuition, books, tutors, and testing fees, I felt so guilty for failing it again!

Tutoring sessions continued along with my regular classes. To make a long story short, it took me a total of 13 tries before I finally passed this test. It took so long to pass this math test that it has actually delayed my graduation by a year and a half.

My son, Neal, opened the test results shortly after Christmas hoping he'd bring me good luck, and that he did! He screamed that I passed it. We both literally cried tears of joy. Neal hugged me, and exclaimed how proud he was that I never gave up. That's not to say there were times when I did want to throw in the towel, but I knew deep down I had to see it through. Now I'm at the last phase of my degree program—student teaching. If all goes well, I'll be graduating May 5, 2002, with honors. I'm proof that perseverance does pay off, and what a wonderful feeling it is!

Maureen Faries

First Place, Adult

In April 2001, my daughter and I decided to come to Milford, Delaware, to live with her father. Two-weeks after we arrived we were homeless, and I had to tell my daughter we had to go to a shelter. We ended up at Whatcoat Shelter where we started looking for housing with assistance from the caseworkers there. They were so supportive. As for myself, I was a wreck because my health wasn't very good. I'm a diabetic, my insurance was from Baltimore, and I couldn't use it in the state of Delaware. Whatcoat Shelter paid for my medicine.

My fiancé, William, was my rock. He wouldn't let me succumb to defeat, but I felt so lost and sad. Then a friend of William's called the shelter and told us he had a house in Smyrna, Delaware, that he would let us rent if we came up with \$1,000. William and I went to the James William Building and they helped us with the rent. At that time I seemed to come to life because I saw William, Ja'Mese, and Bria being a family. There was a Bible at the shelter so I began to read Psalms 27 and other scriptures that dealt with what we were going through. It gave me strength and peace within my heart and mind.

In June our time was up at the shelter so William's friend decided we could stay in his home in Dover. We paid him rent and moved in. The latter part of June this friend wanted rent money for July, but we refused and ended up in a hotel in Dover. We went to the James William Building, and they told us that we should have been living in the house because this friend had received the check in June. We eventually got the house. I never stopped praying and asking God for help, strength, and guidance. I believed with all my heart that things were going to get better.

Bria was attending Smyrna Elementary, William was working, and I took care of the house. In August, the utilities were shut-off at the house and we ended up in a hotel again, this time in Smyrna. We got some legal help and filed a complaint. I still prayed sometimes when I lost faith. I wanted to give up but couldn't because we wanted to be a family. And God makes all things possible if you only believe. We ended up winning our court case by the grace of God. We now have an apartment.

This experience has made me strong and a witness that if you can't do something, ask God. He will give you hope and peace. We are at peace with all that has happened. I pray for those who do wrong to others. The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, and the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. William, Ja'Mese, and Bria are a family today because we believed.

Ja'Mese Parker

Second Place, Adult

One of Smyrna School District's core values, Perseverance – “the inner strength to remain to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles,” is a very important value. Without perseverance, nothing great can ever be achieved. Perseverance is a core value that should be taught in each and every home in the USA.

Perseverance was a key component to the foundation of our country, and is a key component to the preservation of its strength. Great men who were able to focus on a cause—not the price that they may have to pay in order to achieve their cause—founded the United States of America. They were focused enough on their dream to disregard all obstacles in their way. Their cause was religious freedom, and freedom from the taxation of their homelands. Many of the founders of the United States of America sacrificed their families, their homes, and their lives, in the process of securing a free country for future generations. Each of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence had the inner-strength to stand up for what they believed in, and hold true to their ideals no matter what consequences were forced upon them. This simple value of perseverance, inherent to the foundation of our country, is a dwindling—but necessary—component to the character of U.S. citizens today.

In order for the United States of America to remain steadfast and true to our constitution, to the strength that we have been able to boast in the past, and to provide for our future generations the freedoms that we have today, perseverance must be taught to each of our children. I believe that the value of perseverance has been slipping out of the character of our newer generations at a swift rate. It is very evident in our society today that commitment to a purpose, task or idea in the face of obstacles is not being taught, enforced, or even seriously considered. People are dropping out of school and college, are having children without parental or spousal commitment, and are getting divorced at phenomenal rates. If our children were growing up with this one value alone it would make our country so much stronger, because we would be building stronger individuals, stronger families, and stronger communities which would create a stronger foundation on which our country could continue to stand.

Perseverance to perform great tasks for great causes, for the betterment of all, is essential to the future growth of our country. During the 1700s, as individuals came to our land from various countries and parts of the world, they each set aside their differences (in language, in religion, or in tradition) in order to unite for the joint cause of freedom. Perseverance is a character trait that is inherent in all great leaders and all great people.

Let's ensure the success of our children—and generations to come!

Coleen Fink
Third Place, Adult



Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4

It was hard to ride a bike. But I never gave up. When I got it I was glad. My mommy helped me. It was fun. I fell off sometimes. It was scary. It was very, very, very hard. I think it's important to never give up.

The End

Jacqueline Holford

First Place, Grade 1

I couldn't ride my bike when I was little. But I can now. I kept trying and one day I did it. My dad helped me. I never gave up. And I felt happy.

Alex Reuben

Second Place, Grade 1

I was five years old. I wanted to sled. I tried and tried. I tried by myself. It was fun. I liked it and then one day I could do it. Now I'm good at it. I feel good.

Ian Lantzy

Third Place, Grade 1



I didn't feel easy at all to take a test. If it was a math test, I still didn't know how to add. If it was a reading test, I still didn't know how to read. I felt like I just had to give up! But I knew that wouldn't help at all. So I read some more so I asked my mom to help me. So we read for one hour a day. By the end of three months I had no trouble with reading. Now I would start trying to get better at math. So first I started with the easy math like two plus two and five plus five. When I got better at the ones, I started with the tens. When I got stuck on a problem, I would count the tens and then one ten at a time. The adding got pretty easy after a few weeks. Then when we went to school on Friday and had a math test, I was still a little nervous about it but when we got the score I found out I got a one hundred! That day I couldn't wait to get home and show my score to my family. I was sure they would be proud. Ever since then I've felt better about reading and adding.

A. J. Miles

First Place, Grade 2

Building trophies was difficult for me. One day I was building at Dr. Andrus and Ms. Satterfield picked me to build at Smyrna Elementary School. I had trouble because I had to think about it. Use the tools to help do the work. Use nails to attach stuff. Use the paint to color. Use the wood to make the stuff. Use your long sleeves to cover your arms. Use the brush to smear on the color. Use gloves to keep your hands safe. I felt like giving up but I kept trying. I got splinters but I never gave up. My hands were tired but I never gave up. My throat was dry but I never gave up. I was tired but I never gave up. I kept on trying until I got done.

Evan Tracy

Second Place, Grade 2

When I was in ice skating class they made me jump. It was hard at first but I did not give up. I wanted to be really good at it but I kept falling. It hurt but I got back up and tried again. When I was done jumping my teacher would say to ice skate backward and that was really, really hard!!! You had to skate across the rink. When we had to do the rocking horse, you had to stand on your tip toes and rock back and forth. It was hard but I did it good. Now I am better at it.

Amanda Jarman

Third Place, Grade 2

Do you know what it means to persevere? Perseverance is something that you do and never give up—such as learning to read. I persevere in several things. The one that was most difficult was to write my name. I kept trying and trying. My brother would tease me. Then I would keep writing my name and never get it perfect. I just felt like giving up. I did give up for a day and then got back to it. I got so mad sometimes I'd cry and have a tizzy. At last I had succeeded. I was so cheerful and excited. I had just passed the hardest thing in my life! It was splendid. Finally I had succeeded. That difficult challenge was over, done with. I was very, very, delighted. Then I got a terrible thought. Next would be cursive.

Katie Price
First Place, Grade 3

Perseverance is an excellent thing to have. It is never giving up until you achieve your goal.

About a year ago, I saw my dad and sister playing a game. I watched them play until my sister won. Then I asked her what it was. She said it was chess, a complicated game that is hard to learn. I asked if she could teach me how to play it, and in a surprised voice she said, "Yes". She told me how the different chess pieces could move and kill each other. Then she told me about the king and what check and checkmate is. We played one round of it, but I couldn't realize how to move. So my sister wrote down the movements on a blank piece of paper. It was time for bed by the time she finished. I studied them for a month. I asked her for another round. She said, "Okay." I put the whole piece of paper in my mind and began to play. At the end I lost but asked for another couple of rounds. When we were at the tenth round however, I beat her at last.

So you see that was the most glorious perseverance I ever used. And it did me a great deed.

Noah Mebane
Second Place, Grade 3

Hello, do you know what perseverance means? Perseverance is when you try your best to do something you can't do. My friend Jennifer persevered by trying to ride her brother's bike.

A time I persevered is when I tried to climb a tree. Really the tree looked easy to climb, but it is as hard as a dog trying to climb a tree. I've got cuts and scrapes from trying to climb that tree, and it really hurt like somebody going to have surgery without getting put to sleep. I got better by trying, practicing, and believing in myself. After a week or two, I was able to climb the tree. I was able to do it because I tried, practiced, and believed.

After I did it, I felt as fantastic as winning all of the money in the world. I was so triumphant when I climbed the tree. When I still couldn't do it, I still felt proud because I knew one day I would be able to climb the tree.

In conclusion, perseverance is when you try something you can't do. My friend Jennifer persevered by trying to ride her brother's bike. A time I persevered was when I tried to climb a tree. I got better by trying, practicing, and believing. After I was done, I felt fantastic and triumphant.

Stephanie Phillips

Third Place, Grade 3



Hello!! Hello!! Hello!! I hope everyone is doing fine. Well, I was assigned a writing prompt at Smyrna Elementary School to choose what you have had trouble with but accomplished by persevering. I chose to give this speech about how I have trouble with getting a piece of thread through a small hole. (I know it sounds stupid) Well, I do have trouble. Furthermore, here is what I do with that problem.

Here is how I overcame my problem. First, I determine what I need to get done, in this case getting thread through a hole. Second, I begin the long process of doing it. So I take the thread and begin trying to get it through the hole the size of a period. It is so h-a-r-d. I feel stupid as I work on it for more than an hour and a half. During that time, I feel as if the job gets smaller and I am disheveled. The room seems to get like a desert and everything is dimly red. I sweat and feel dehydrated. Plus, my head hurts. Eventually the thread goes through and pricks in!

Once I've gotten the knot tied, it comes undone and I have to start over. When I finally get out of my rambunctious state, I take my sweatshirt off and put a t-shirt on. If a fan is nearby I use it and stand in front of it. Then I unsteadily make my way to the kitchen to get myself a glass of icy cold water.

That is what I do when I have to thread string!

Alex Marthaler

First Place, Grade 4

Hello my name is Robert Logan and today I will give a speech on one task that was hard for me but I got better and didn't give up.

The one task that was hard for me was learning to play basketball. That was hard for me because I had no one to teach me. But I never gave up on it. I asked my mom to buy me a basketball court and she did. Unfortunately, since we lived in a trailer park and our landlord was so bitter and unpleasant, we had to sell it. So when I could get a basketball I would dribble with both hands. Then my dad moved into town and he and I always went to parks to play. But I still had a problem because I didn't know much of the rules and I wasn't strong enough to make a basket. Then on my seventh birthday he bought me a weight set, and I got stronger and stronger until finally I could make a basket.

In 1999 I signed up for a league called Police Athletic League. My coach taught me all the basic things about basketball. Then he taught me how to get open and drive to the basket. My team got far but unfortunately we lost in the championship.

In conclusion, from that day on I got better and better and I hope to go to the NBA!

Robert Logan

Second Place, Grade 4

Have you ever thought you could never succeed to your task; then after a few weeks you have finished your task.

When I went to my neighbor's house, I always dreamed about being the best diver ever. One day in August my neighbors invited me to their house to swim. Then after we got there, my family, except for me, got in the shallow end. I went over on the deep side of the pool. Then I put my feet on the edge and stared into the water. I dreamed I was diving with the dolphins. After that I jumped and SPLASH! I did a belly flop instead of a dive. It hurt so bad I could barely swim up to the shallow end. Then our neighbor said, "Need some help there kid-o." I said, "Yes." What else was I to say? I mean I stunk!

He told me that you had to have your feet on the edge and head ducked. Also he told me to put my hands over my head (I already new that though). My neighbor told me he would show me first. Then he looked at me and got organized, and like lightning he was gone underwater. I thought to myself, "I've got to learn how to dive." After a while it got harder. It had been an hour and I only was a fourth of the way. I wanted to quit; I was all pruny. But I pictured that I won the best diver, and I knew I had to keep going. Finally, Mom said it was time to go because my sister was getting sleepy. I told her one more dive, and I tucked my head and put up my arms. I had done it (no belly flops)! Then every one told me "great job!"

In conclusion, I thought I could never dive but I did. You should never give up. Even if you don't get it the first time, try again. Like they say, "practice makes perfect."

Kasey Spadafino
Third Place, Grade 4





Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4

Perseverance means to try and try until you can do something. When I was little I tried to walk. It was hard but I kept trying. Then I could do it. I felt good.

Olivia Cahill

First Place, Pre-First

Perseverance is trying to do something again and again until you can do it. Trying to ice skate takes a lot of perseverance. You need to keep your skates on the ice. You have to use your legs to skate on the ice. You have to try not to fall. You need to balance yourself. Then you will get it. It was so hard and it made me sad. Then I tried again and again until I got the hang of it. It made me happy and it made me feel great.

Brandon Dunham

First Place, Grade 1

Perseverance means to try. I tried to get a special book from the bookshelf. I felt happy because, I'm trying. I tried it at my house. I'm trying my best to get that special book. That book is named "Fun Land Games." It is not down low. I have to get on my very tippy toes. I keep going, but I don't read the book. I will keep trying.

Ronald Postell

Second Place, Grade 1

Perseverance means to keep on trying to do something until you get it right. I really wanted to play soccer and my coach helped me. She was good. She made us work hard. She made us do drills and scrimmage. I'm glad she was a good coach.

Jacob Stoner

Third Place, Grade 1

A bike is very hard to ride. I felt very bad because I couldn't ride a bike. I kept on trying it, but I couldn't do it. I felt small inside. I was riding a blue and red bike. My dad kept on helping me. My Mom-Mom helped me to do it. We were trying and I did it. I had perseverance. I felt good and it was fun after I was done riding my bike. Riding a bike is hard but I can do it now.

Brian Chillas

First Place, Pre-Second

Do you know what perseverance means? Well, if you don't, I will tell you what perseverance means. When I was in karate class, I was learning how to kick and twist at the same time, but I never gave up.

When I was doing karate I was trying to kick and twist, but I'd just fall down. I could not do it. I could not keep myself up. I couldn't twist and kick at the same time. I felt like giving up. But when my mom saw me at karate class, my mom told me to persevere.

I discovered that I was leaning back instead of forward. My coach told me I was supposed to lean forward when I twisted. When I tried leaning forward I could do the exercise! I used perseverance like my mom told me. I kept practicing every day. When I could kick and twist I reached my goal. My mom was happy for me. I got my white belt. I was happy for getting my white belt. I was proud of myself.

Now do you know what perseverance means? Perseverance means when you keep trying and never give up. I never gave up so now I can kick and twist in karate class.

Elizabeth Lageman

First Place, Grade 2

I've learned to never give up. It's hard to do tricks and ride on a skateboard. You are going to fall a lot of times. Don't think of people who keep on teasing you; just imagine you balancing and rolling. It was hard because when you fall it hurts so much you don't want to do it again. I didn't want to do it after I ran into a tree at Silver Lake. But then after falling a lot of times, I could finally balance for a couple of minutes; but then I fell. But I was still very proud of myself.

To skateboard you need to be in the middle of the board and bend your knees. And if you fall just get up and try it again. And after I did all that I finally could do it. My mom, dad, and sister kept cheering me on!

I finally felt like a Pro. And I feel like I can do everything on a skateboard. Now you are ready to skateboard.

Phillip Abremson

Second Place, Grade 2

Did you ever try and learn how to ride a bike? I did and boy was it ever hard. I thought I would never get it right! I could not do it the first time but I did it after trying.

When I was doing it I was gripping the handlebars very tight, steering as straight as I could, and looking up ahead for turns and other things I could bump into.

It was hard because I could not get my balance on two wheels, because they were too skinny. I was not used to it, and I was just not comfortable with it. It was also hard because I looked at my feet way too much. I could not turn on time so I either lost my balance and fell on my side or bumped into the curb. When I was riding and not falling as much, I was very wobbly.

When I finally did it, I was so proud of myself I wanted to hug myself so much. I was not the only one who was happy about it. My dad was very amazed by me too. My dad and I told my mom when she got home and when we did she was glad about it. She gave me a big hug and kiss. She wanted to see me ride my bike so much, so I went and put on my coat then I went outside and showed her. That's how I learned to ride a bike.

Julie Sipple

Third Place, Grade 2

Have you ever tried and tried to do something? That's called perseverance. I'm going to tell you about a time I persevered. It was when I learned how to ride a bike.

It was hard to learn because I would crash and fall off the bike. Most every time I got on, I would fall off. It is hard to keep your balance, which is why I fell off most of the time. I would get scrapes and blood would leak out of my knees. Blood, scrapes, and all, I would get up and try again. I would take many breaks because I was bleeding.

Sometimes I felt like giving up. I would stop for months but I would go back and try again. It was hard because I knew I was going to fall. That is one of the reasons why I felt like giving up I tried most everything to stay away from the bike. Sometimes I even tried hiding it. That didn't work!

I tried putting my bike against a tree and getting on the bike; but, when I got on, the bike would fall the other way. I would run with the bike and then jump up. I would either land on the bike or jump over it. Sometimes I got caught on the bike. Once my shoelace got caught in the chain and the bike fell sideways. When I knew the bike was going to fall or loose balance, I would jump off.

When I saw everybody riding bikes it made me want to ride a bike more. Sometimes I tried so hard and so many times it felt like my bones were all broken. My body would hurt so much, but I still tried. When my sister rode her bike it made me work twice as hard because I couldn't keep up with her.

All that crashing finally paid off! I finally learned how to ride a bike. And it felt great! I'm glad I persevered, because I found out you can do most anything if you persevere. I hope you never give up, and, if you did, go back and try it again.

Adam Alberts

First Place, Grade 3

Do you know what perseverance is? Well I am going to tell you! I will convey to you a time when I had to persevere. I had to persevere when I was riding a bike. I will also inform you who supported me, and what it was like to ride without training wheels.

I had to persevere when riding a bike. It was very difficult. I tried and tried, but I could not stay on the bike. One time I felt like quitting because I had red marks all over me. Then one person said that he believed in me, so I got back on my bike once again and I rode. I did not fall or crash! In my next paragraph you will learn about that person who supported me.

There was a person in my life that supported me the most. That person was my brother. When I fell off my bike, he told me that if I loved him I would get back on my bike. Of course I love

him, so I got back on my bike. One time he said that he did not have time to teach me anymore. That made me mad, so I got back on my bike and rode all by myself!

Riding without training wheels was extremely difficult. I kept falling and falling. One day my dad played a trick on me. The trick was he took my training wheels when I was not looking. I thought I was riding with them but I was not. I could not believe it! I kept my balance, and I was riding!

I hope you liked my story. I told you how I persevered when riding a bike. I informed you who supported me, and what it was like riding without training wheels. So now you know my troubles about riding a bike. I hope you learned from them. What I really wanted you to learn most of all was to persevere to help you achieve your goals.

Lerissa Tallamer

Second Place, Third Grade

Have you ever watched someone doing something and it looked like they were having so much fun? Well I have. Last summer I saw someone doing a back dive. I wanted to do one too, but I did not know how. Every time I stood on the diving board to try, I was too afraid to actually jump. I had to come up with a plan to learn how to do a back dive without really hurting myself.

Doing a back dive is very dangerous. You have to stand on the end of the diving board with your back facing the water. You cannot ever see what is in the water as you are jumping off the diving board. If you don't jump just right you can smack your head on the side of the pool or slam your back flat down on the water and that really stings. The first time my mom saw me trying to do this she really got scared and did not want me to keep trying to do this by myself. The next thing I knew my mom was asking the boy I saw doing the back dive to help me learn to do one too. I was so excited! Rob was going to help me do a back dive, and I was going to have as much fun as he was having.

Rob showed me how to stand on the board. We practiced how I should bend my knees and put my arms back when I jumped off the board. We practiced until I thought I was ready to try. I was really starting to sweat. All I wanted to do was jump in the water, but I didn't until Rob told me it was time. My knees were shaking and I was so nervous, but I counted to three, held my breath, and dove in. SMACK! I landed flat on my back. I hurt so bad that for one second I wanted to give up. Buy I didn't. I knew if I just kept trying I was going to have so much fun.

For the next two days I practiced and practiced and practiced some more. Sometimes I hit my back; and sometimes I just chickened out and jumped straight in the water. But I never gave up! Then when my mom was telling me it was time to get out of the pool, I asked for one

more try. Finally! I did it! I did a back dive! I was so happy and so proud of myself! Now I was going to be able to do back dives with my friends.

I still remember the way I felt the first time I saw Rob doing back dives. I knew it was hard work to do one. I wasn't sure if I was ever going to be able to do a back dive, but I didn't give up. I tried and tried until I could do one just like Rob. Hard work really pays off when you want to do something bad enough.

Tony Latavitz
Third Place, Third Grade



When I was younger, I was in a wheelchair because I have a problem with my hip. That makes my legs turn in, which makes it harder for me to walk. It was hard being in a wheelchair because I did not go to a school for handicapped students.

Life was hard because I could not make any friends. I had to sit at a table in the back of my classroom. I could not even play at recess. Sometimes I tried, but my teacher held my wheelchair back as I watched everyone play.

It was also hard at home. On hot days I could not swim or go outside. I stayed inside dreaming of having a friend to play with and running around.

Some people still made fun of me, but I did have some friends. I can play and have more friends now, though.

That is my story of how I tried to survive being handicapped and live a normal life at the same time. But, when I got out of my cast I felt relieved and restless. Now I can run, play, and sit with my friends but I'm getting another cast this summer.

Katelyn Folker

First Place, Grade 4

A while back I persevered and finally learned how to ride my bike. It was hard because I kept getting hurt. I had many feelings in the time it took me to ride my bike.

To ride my bike there were many tasks to accomplish. I could never turn, because I was scared to fall off my bike. I kept trying and I actually turned; I actually surprised myself. I went to a parking lot and actually turned. Well really balancing is hard but I learned by going to a church and other places. This is what I persevered trying to ride my bike.

This is what and why it was difficult to ride my bike. It was hard because I kept on falling. It was also hard because I could not turn. The biggest problem was not falling; it was hard because I could not balance. That was what and why it was difficult to ride my bike.

This is how I was feeling when I tried riding my bike. I was frustrated when I couldn't ride my bike. I was scared when I was getting better. I was gleeful to ride my bike. I had many different feelings trying to ride my bike.

This is the way it turned out. I did the tasks; I persevered. I accomplished the minor difficulties, and the frustration and scares went away. This is how I once persevered.

Shane Morris

Second Place, Grade 4

Hello! Let me tell you about my experience with horses. I will tell you about the trying, failing, and learning something in the process. Then after many tries I succeed.

It all started off with my father and me riding horses. We were loping in the pasture on a hot September day about noon. When all of a sudden my two-year-old horse started to buck and go crazy. I was thrown off my horse onto the hard ground. It had happened so fast that I thought it was a dream.

Dad came to the conclusion that I needed riding lessons from someone other than him. The only problem was that I failed to bring up my courage and ride a horse again. My riding instructor had well-trained horses, unlike ours. I had just enough courage to ride one of hers. Once a week for a year I took my western horseback riding lessons. Also every Sunday I went horseback riding with my Dad. I had plenty of courage by now. Then one Sunday my horse bucked and bucked and I stayed on. Instead of being bucked off this time, I jumped off.

A year later we purchased a paint pony named Charlie. The good things about him are that he is quiet and loves people. The bad qualities about him are that he will back up if you let him. He will also hit me with his head time to time. A few months after we bought him, I was on a trail ride with my Dad. When we came to a plowed field, all of a sudden Charlie layed down to roll and crushed my leg. It would've been my body if I had not gotten away from the saddle. The scariest part was having to get back on Charlie to finish the ride. Boy! I was terrified!

In conclusion, I've been bucked off two horses and I've been rolled on. I am not scared of horses anymore and I love to ride.

Ethan Weston Hughes

Third Place, Grade 4





Grades 5 and 6

“Everybody needs to take this paragraph home and work on it. You have until Friday to hand it in.” Then our teacher, Mrs. Stevenson, said, “You have to write about how you felt about returning to school.” Since this was only the second week of school, I was afraid.

When I got home, I told my mom about it and she said, “You should work on it.” So I did. Come Friday, I turned it back in. When I got back from the weekend I got my grade. I got a 64%. Then I knew I needed help in writing.

Later, Mrs. Stevenson told us about the second paragraph. When I got home, I showed my mom my grade and told her, “I need help on this week’s paragraph.”

My mom said, “Yes, you do.” So my mom and I worked really hard until Friday when I turned it in.

When I came back after the weekend, we got our paragraphs back. My mom and I got a 100%! We kept working on them together for four months until I got better at putting interesting words in place of ordinary words.

So then I did a paragraph by myself. It was a letter to someone who helped you to do something. I picked my dad to write about.

When I got home, I worked on my prewriting. Then on Tuesday I worked on my rough draft. Next, on Wednesday I took a break. On Thursday I did my final draft.

Finally the day came to turn my paragraph in on Friday. Over the weekend I couldn’t concentrate on anything but Monday when I’d be getting my paragraph back.

In every subject we did, up until Mrs. Stevenson called on people to pass out the paragraph, I couldn’t pay attention. I was overwhelmed with fear and excitement to get my paper! Then finally I got it back.

I looked at it and saw I had gotten a 94%! I was so happy to get a great grade when I worked on it all by myself. I even saw I got better at my sentences flowing smoothly. That was another thing I needed help on.

For the rest of the day I thought about nothing except my paragraph. When I showed my mom she was excited too, because now she doesn’t have to help me anymore.

Now that I’ve gotten better at writing, I just hope I can keep it up.

Travis W. Ford
First Place, Grade 5

When I was born, I was very sick. I only weighed one and a half pounds. I was on a breathing machine, medications, and IV fluid for a long time. I had an opening in part of my heart, so I had surgery at the age of four weeks. I was in the hospital for five months. I was born prematurely, three months earlier than I was supposed to be.

I am glad to be alive to celebrate life. My mother has shown me pictures of myself when I was first born. It brings tears to my eyes. I feel lucky to have come this far. I may be a little slow in learning, but I don't look at it as a handicap. I am willing to learn as much as I can.

Because I was a sick baby, and God let me live to be 11 and one-half years old, I am thankful. After going through my birth experience and looking at the pictures, it has made me persevere and be the best that I can be.

Latifah Sullivan

Third Place, Grade 5



When I was in the 5th grade, I wanted to join the band. The school sent home a paper for a band meeting with parents and students. We went to the meeting and met the band teacher who seemed very nice. I decided to play the alto saxophone because I like its sound. The sax is an instrument that my mom played when she was in school. Although I knew that I wanted to play the saxophone, I didn't know it would be so difficult.

Learning to play the saxophone was one of the hardest things I've ever done. In the beginning it was difficult because I didn't know how to play or read music. For me to learn to play, I would have to practice a lot. Being part of the band and playing with other students also worried me. Playing the sax takes a lot of lung capacity, which I didn't have at first. This was a hard decision for me because I was afraid to fail at something.

There were a lot of times I felt like giving up. The music that I was playing didn't sound very good and I had a hard time playing the notes. Many nights that I wanted to go out and play, my parents made me practice instead. The worst thing was that I was losing out on my playtime and it did not seem like I was getting any better. I had to overcome these feelings.

I made the decision that my fears would stop me. I was really encouraged when my mom played the sax with me. She taught me that if I try I could be the best sax player. At my first concert, the audience gave the band a standing ovation. I was beginning to see that my perseverance was paying off.

My family used to close the door on me while I was practicing. Now they open the door just to hear me play. They say I sound very good. The band teacher has asked me to join the jazz band in the spring. This is a great honor for me. What was hard, and made me want to quit, now is fun. I learned that perseverance could be a valuable lesson.

Kevin Radcliffe

First Place, Grade 6

The principle of my personal goal is to *persevere* in academics and athletics. With each of my experiences, I strive even harder to succeed. By watching the role models in my life, I strive to never give up.

In my first years of elementary school, I only focused on good grades. It wasn't until I joined Pop Warner Pee Wee Football that I truly learned the challenge of balancing home life, school, and sports without complete success.

By fourth grade, class work became more difficult. I played in baseball and soccer during the school year. As I became frustrated, I decided to focus harder and finish the school year with honors.

After being promoted to the fifth grade and before starting the next school year at North Elementary, I decided to add football to my already-busy schedule. During the summer of 2000

in hot temperatures, I tried football conditioning and soccer camp at the same time. With blistered feet and aching muscles, I felt like quitting but actually pushed myself to finish both. By September I had gotten in the routine of schoolwork, practice three nights a week, and Saturday games.

With a lot of practice and persistence, I managed to reach my goals and more. I now have honors in school and have played in the Pop Warner State Championship two years in a row.

All this could not have happened without drive and determination. It also takes a good “Team.” My family is always there for support. Coaches help teach me the game of football and sportsmanship. And my teachers give me extra guidance and reassurance in school.

A little motto I would use to sum it would be, “*Respect* the past but *persevere* in the future.”

William Carter
Second Place, Grade 6

Hockey is one of my favorite sports. It is very hard to learn. I had to go through hockey school before I could start playing. It took a lot of perseverance to get through hockey school.

The first thing I had to do was the hardest of all—learn to ice skate. It was pretty easy just skating. Stopping and turning was the problem. Every time I tried to stop, I fell. After a couple of classes I got the hang of turning, but I still couldn’t stop. I was about to quit but everyone told me to persevere. I kept trying to learn to stop. I still can’t stop properly.

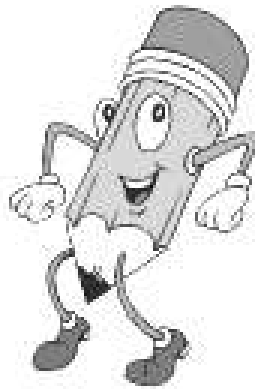
The next thing I had to learn how to do was use a stick. First, I had to learn how to take shots. There are three different kinds of shots: wrist shots, slap shots, and snap shots. I learned the shot quickly. I had trouble getting my shots accurate, but I eventually learned how. After that I had to learn how to control the puck. That was hard to do. I had to move the puck back and forth on my stick without looking down. It took me awhile to learn how to do that, but I got the hang of it.

Finally, I had to learn how to play a position. There are six players in hockey: two defense, three offense, and a goalie. In my case, because I was big and couldn’t hit well, I was chosen for defense. Defense is a difficult position to play. I had to learn how to skate backwards so I could see the guy with the puck. I also had to chase the puck when it’s in our end. I have to cover an offense man. I also have to stop the puck from coming out of the other team’s zone. After that I had to learn to check and take a check. A check is when you hit someone into the boards. I could check really well, but taking a check hurt. I can now endure some of the pain. That’s what I had to do to become a defenseman.

In conclusion, I want to tell you hockey school was fun but hard. My essay may lead you to think hockey is all hard work. You do have to work, but hockey is really a lot of fun..

Daniel Delcoglin

Third Place, Grade 6





Grades 7 and 8

We all go through the same thing—wanting to get good grades. I myself go through this challenge every year. I've always wanted to be the class's best student. So here's my story of perseverance.

It all started the first week of the sixth grade. I wanted to get straight A's for four marking periods. I made this my first goal. I did all of my homework and had it handed in on time. I turned in all class work. Paid attention in class and answered all oral questions. This helped to bring me my first set of A's.

I continued with my strategy to get A's. One day my class had a test in math and I ran out of time to finish the test. I started to cry in class because I thought I had just messed up my whole goal, but then I thought to myself that I could fix the test when I got it back. I fixed the test and got an eighty-nine on it. The marking period ended and I once again had achieved A honors.

The next marking period began and I started to have trouble in science. I got help and bought my grade up but not enough. That marking period seemed to end quickly and I had achieved B honors. I was crushed; I thought I had improved my grades. I then knew I had ruined my goal, but even so I continued going for my goal. At the end of the school year I had received three sets of A honors and one set of B honors.

Then that summer it hit me, I said I wanted four marking periods with A honors. I never said I wanted straight A's for four marking periods in the sixth grade. I still had a chance in the seventh grade to reach my goal. In the seventh grade I received A honors and achieved my goal.

When I achieved my goal I felt so happy and proud of myself. I then realized I had made an act of perseverance. I had tried, thought I failed, but reached my goal. This is one goal I know I will remember forever.

Jennifer Schrader

Second Place, Grade 7

I experienced perseverance while buying Christmas presents for my family. I achieved one of my goals during this time—being responsible.

For Christmas I wanted to buy presents for my brother, mom, and dad like I do every year. This year was going to be different though. I wanted to give them something nicer or different than I had in the past.

In previous years my gifts were okay, but I never felt they were truly what I wanted for them. My mom's gifts were very similar from year to year and sometimes the dollar store was my only option. My brother, being older than me, knew to save more so he always had what seemed to be nicer gifts than mine. My parents always said the gifts I gave them were great because they

did like them. I still felt they needed to be nicer. I decided that I would save more money for the presents for the following Christmas.

When I stated saving, I felt better about myself. I would take the money I earned from chores and other things I did and would put about 75% of it into an envelope for Christmas presents. Then it stated getting closer to the time to start shopping. I counted my money and found out I had a decent amount for each one of my family members. I made a list of what I would like for each family member and an estimate of the prices. I was very surprised to see how many more options I had for the gifts because I had saved. I felt more responsible because of how I stayed true to saving.

On Christmas morning when my mom, dad, and brother opened their presents I was cheerful because of the quality of the gifts. My family members' surprised faces made me feel good inside. I was very proud.

During this time I learned I was capable of saving a decent amount in a short period of time. I learned it all paid off in the end. It felt so great I decided to do it for their birthdays too.

While I learned about perseverance in buying Christmas presents for my family members, I also learned a lot about responsibility and myself.

Dana Doughton

Third Place, Grade 7



After my surgery, perseverance was the only thing that kept me going and thinking about my goals. In the sixth grade I was diagnosed with scoliosis. At the time being a deeply devoted swimmer, I didn't think scoliosis would have an effect on my sport or me. I was wrong. It turned out my scoliosis turned aggressive and I would have to face the consequences of death if I didn't have it taken care of. So I had the surgery (I had metal bars put in my spine to make my scoliosis stop).

That was over nine months ago. I have just recently started up swimming two months ago. That was nine months of my life doing nothing except kicking on a kickboard to keep the strength in my legs. As soon as my doctor said I could swim, I began training as hard as I could because I had a meet coming up. I never missed a swim practice because I was determined to perform well at the meet. Upon arriving at the meet I was very doubtful; I hadn't been training for a while and this was my first meet back. I'm not trying to brag but before my surgery I was usually more gifted than others in these kind of meets and usually won by a lot. So as you can imagine I was nervous because I didn't want my reputation to diminish and I wanted to do well.

I was getting ready for my first race (in the slow lane) and everyone had told me that it didn't matter how I placed, they just wanted me to have fun. I stepped up to the block, the starter announced "girls, take your marks" and then he signaled the beep to start the race. I dove in, and after swimming a couple of strokes I noticed something—nobody else was around. I thought maybe there was a false start, or they were so far ahead of me I couldn't see them. As I came upon the wall to make my turn, I saw the other girls. They were at least seven body lengths behind! I was so happy and I couldn't believe it. I finished and won the race. I had won the race by at least six seconds. I now knew I could do anything if I set my mind to it. It turned out I won the rest of my races that day by a lot.

Nothing, ever, could make me forget my first race back, and the feeling of joy that came along with it. I tried my hardest and it paid off. So, that is what perseverance got me in swimming—my goal. This experience will make me always try harder for what I want, and I will always remember the feeling I had when I overcame one of my hardest obstacles in life.

Katelyn Baker
First Place, Grade 8

Perseverance. What does it mean? It is the act of trying, failing, learning, and trying again until you achieve your goal. I have a story of perseverance. In fact, I'm still going through it.

I have been a martial artist since fifth grade. I started out a white belt, and everything was so cool! I was a "karate kid"! Well, not really, but I was learning. When I got to about green stripe, Taekwon-do got a little boring. I was doing the same old thing, and with all the new white belts, the class was running slowly.

Then, I got sick. I would go to class all pumped up, and then I would have to sit out. I was suddenly getting aches and pains, and I felt dizzy. What was happening to me? This had never happened before. My parents took me to the A.I. Dupont Hospital to get help. Dr. Atrea couldn't figure out what was wrong. Finally, on the last blood test we found out. I had Lyme's Disease.

Now that I was sick, I really wanted to quit Taekwon-do, but I got through. I made green belt that summer, and my Lyme's Disease was clearing. There are times when I want to quit because I can't get my pattern just right, or I'm not advancing as fast as everyone else; but my parents won't let me quit. I love Taekwon-do too much.

Today, I'm a red belt, which means "danger." Sometime soon, I'll test for black stripe and by this summer I should be testing for black belt. I will have achieved my goal, and then I can keep advancing. One of my instructors, Mr. Pareesi, told my mom after class, "Emily can't quit, she has a lot of potential. She could be on junior team if she wanted. I can't wait until she's a black belt." Perseverance is all I needed, and that's what I did.

Emily Broome

Second Place, Grade 8

Everything happened when I was in sixth grade. Most of the pupils in my old school thought it would always be "cool" to be in a gang and this also included me. But I would have to find out the hard way that being in a gang is not so "cool."

I used to hang around with some children who were always into some kind of trouble down on Lake Street. The kids down on that street were what I thought to be "cool." They were always fighting or running their mouths like a bad talk show. Everyone knew though that no one could mess with them because they were in a gang. I always thought that I always wanted to be like that and had no one to tell me different. But I was wrong.

Around the summer of 1999, I got into a lot of trouble with the gang from Lake Street. I ended up joining them. I noticed though that when I went to school no one would really talk to me—not even my best friend. It was as if everyone knew who I was and whom I had behind me. A couple of weeks later after I had joined the Lake Street gang, I also noticed I was starting to fail; I wasn't coming home when I was supposed to. I was even getting into fights. I had no respect for anyone or myself. But what I didn't know was going to hit me right in the face.

I was on my way home when my best friend told me that I was trouble and she didn't want anything to do with me. After she told me I got to thinking about the whole gang thing. I wanted to go to college but the way I was going I wouldn't make it.

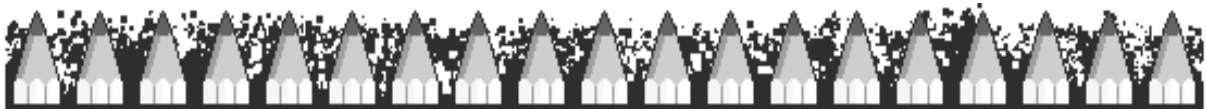
The following day my neighbor stopped me and asked why I was I doing what I was doing. I told him I was being cool. He explained to me that being in a gang was bad news. So I decided to get out.

I thought it would be easy but I was wrong once again. Sure the first few weeks were easy to stay away. But after a month or so I was bored and went right back to trouble. But one night I was talking to the same neighbor and he told me I needed to get out while I could. So I tried again. Even though I failed the first time I promised that I would make it out this time.

About a year later I did just that. I got back into my schoolwork and lived my life with my best friend and all the respect I was suppose to get and give. I was what my friends thought to be a nerd, but I felt free. Free from trouble and free from all the bad things that were causing me to have less respect for everyone. I was finally “cool.”

Patricia Bowman

Third Place, Grade 8





Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12

So, you want to hear a story about perseverance? Try learning how to fly! Of course I don't mean flying literally. I'm talking about cheerleading. A flyer is the girl that goes up in the air during stunts.

I have been a cheerleader for three years now, and I have always wanted to be a flyer. The thing is, I couldn't, and there were lots of reasons why I couldn't be one in the past.

In seventh grade, I tried out for the cheerleading squad for the first time. I didn't do well at all. You could say that I halfway made the squad. I was an alternate. Alternates took the place of a cheerleader that wasn't at the game. We alternates didn't get to do much when it came to stunts, but one time the coach let us all try to do stunts. When she asked what I wanted to do, I said I wanted to try flying. They put together a stunt group and tried to get me up. That didn't go well at all. Since it was my first time, I was really scared and I fell countless times. Once I finally got up, the coach said we needed to move and work on cheers. I was a little disappointed, but I knew sometime I would get another chance.

By the time eighth grade rolled around I had practiced a lot, and I had become much better at cheerleading. I tried out for the squad and easily made it with one of the highest scores. However, having a high score doesn't make you any better at flying. In fact, I didn't even try flying in eighth grade because I was taller and heavier than the girls we used as our flyers. Still, I hoped I could become one in high school. This year my wish came true. Again, I tried out and made the basketball cheerleading squad. I was one of the girls who was told I was going to be a flyer. Although my body hadn't changed much from the previous year, I was still smaller than the other girls because most were upperclassmen. When I first tried flying, I kept shaking and falling; but the coaches wouldn't let me give up and neither would I. After numerous tries and lots of shaking, I finally got the stunts. We also tried lots of other stunts that I easily picked up. I even became one of the main flyers.

It took me three years, lots of practice, and unbelievable perseverance but I finally did it. I had become a flyer. I've had a lot of fun doing it and I'm extremely happy I learned how. I knew I would get it someday.

Samantha Hall

First Place, Grade 9

It was a rainy afternoon, my mom had just made dinner, and my dad had just pulled into the driveway in his shiny green Saturn. I was sitting on our purple and green couch doing my algebra homework. Suddenly I felt the soft brush of something on my leg. I looked down quickly to make sure that there were no spiders; and by my feet lay my cat, a black and white tabby, fat, fluffy, and very cute. I reached down to pet him and he licked my hand. Then he jumped up and lay on my lap, covering my algebra book. I looked at him as he lie there purring, all scrunched up in a little ball. As I stroked his back I thought back to a time, not so long ago, when he was a sick and not so fluffy kitten.

It was windy and cold for such a bright July day. My sister's cat had just given birth to six little fur balls, all "mewing" like little birds. They were adorable. As my sister and I sat there watching them waddle around and bump into each other, we noticed there were five kittens with one little runt sitting in the corner all alone. The mother had rejected him and wouldn't let him eat with, or even be near, the other kittens. She had basically left him there to die.

About a week of feeding him with an eyedropper had passed. The mother had not changed; she was still determined to keep this kitten away from her and her other kittens. We continued to nurse him for another month; and, although he was alive, he wasn't growing, or showing sign of progress. My mother and I took him to the vet that day. We took a seat in the blue plastic chairs where we waited for almost two hours for the doctor to come out and give us the results of the exam. Finally he came out of the exam room shaking his head. He explained to us the problem and told us there was no hope and, no matter what we did, the kitten would die. As he continued to explain the diagnosis to my mom, I felt my heart sink to the floor. I heard my kitten's pathetic little whine and decided I would not let him go that easily. I committed myself day and night to make sure he would one day be a big, strong, healthy cat.

Before long the kitten started to grow; he got bigger and stronger. He could eat hard food now; he was going to be all right!

I heard the click of a camera and saw the flash go off; my mom was standing in front of me saying, "Oh, how cute." I looked down in my lap and found my cat, still curled up in a little ball. I guess we had both fallen asleep. My mom told me dinner was ready and I needed to come out to the table. I picked up my sleeping cat and set him in the chair beside the couch. As I sat down at the table, and said my prayer, I thanked God for giving me the strength and perseverance to help me save my kitten's life.

Nycole Conlon

Second Place, Grade 9

Perseverance is that act of trying unbelievably hard, failing, learning from your mistakes, and then trying even harder until one has achieved his goal. Perseverance is one of the best qualities a person may hold. If they have this magnificent quality, they will overcome even the most challenging tasks. I know this because it showed on June 6, 2001, when I accomplished a year-long goal. I, Kajal Dilip Patel, received a 102% in an exceptionally difficult class that was taught by a tough teacher.

I began my freshman year in high school on September 3, 2000. That year was very important to me because it was my first in high school. I wanted to do extremely well in all of my classes. That year, I was to take a course with a teacher that I had heard ugly rumors about. I was informed that the class was going to be hard because of the instructor. They were absolutely correct! The first quarter, I thought I was doing well until I received my report card. I had

gotten a 69%. The low test scores really effected my grade. I was devastated. I had never before in my life received such a terrible grade. From the moment I saw my grade, I knew I needed to work harder. Therefore, I set a goal for myself for each of the three remaining quarters. I told myself that I would attain an 80% for my second quarter grade. At the end of quarter three, I should have accomplished a 90% grade. The last goal was to be achieved by the end of the year. At the end of quarter four, my report card should read a high grade of a 100% for this class. For the next 27 weeks, I worked tremendously hard to reach my three goals.

At the end of the first quarter, I had to raise my grade eleven points in order to achieve my quarter two goal. I did even better. I received an 84% on my report card that marking period. I received an 84% not by sitting around and doing nothing, but by being prepared for class, asking questions, studying, and paying attention in class. Those four points helped my grade out a lot. Every morning when I came into class, I was seated before the bell rang, had my textbook and notebook out on my desk, and had all of the other necessities that I needed for class. If we had homework from the night before, it was out on my desk and ready to hand in. I always studied the night before whether I had a test the next day or not. I set aside at least half an hour to review my class notes or to start on my homework. If I needed more time, I made it available. If a test was coming up in the week, I started to slowly study for it. That helped me because I found that I didn't try to cram for the test the night before. My test scores were much higher. Paying attention in class was a huge step forward. Instead of daydreaming or talking while the teacher explained the lesson, I listened to what she said. If I didn't understand the work, I asked the teacher for help. Asking questions was a marvelous idea. I am sure that part of the reason I got an 84% for my second quarter grade was because I asked many questions when others were afraid to. For the third quarter, I got a 92%! My goal was a 90%. I practiced the same habits I had during the second quarter to achieve this grade. Finally, the last marking period came rolling around. Instead of slacking on my schoolwork, I kept up my good study habits. For that, I received a fabulous grade. For the fourth quarter in my class, I got a 102%! All of my hard work definitely paid off!

In conclusion, a time in my life when perseverance paid off and I reached an important goal was when I received a 102% in this course. By setting three mini-achievements, I reached my goal. Once I met my goal, I felt unbelievably proud of myself. I also felt that if I reached this goal, then I could do anything. I learned a valuable piece of knowledge from the process of getting to my goal. I learned no to give up and you will succeed. In the words of the late R&B singer Aaliyah, "If at first you don't succeed, dust yourself off, and try again."

Kajal Patel

Second Place, Grade 10

In my lifetime, I have attempted many daunting tasks, often to fail several times before emerging the victor. One such task occurred during the time I spent as a cross country runner. In August 2001, I began the cross country season with a cold forcing me to miss a week of practice. I was able to recover, but my lack of practice impeded me from being good competition for the other runners. In our first six meets I was able to continually cut back on my time, and I was maintaining a rank in the top seven on the team. Unfortunately, in the next meet my knees and ankles gave out—the searing pain stopping me from running. My goal for the season, to break my best time from the previous year, still hadn't been reached.

The next several races I was unable to compete. The light of hope slowly dimmed from my eyes as I realized that the chance of breaking my best time was very slim. Negativity flooded through my body threatening to sweep me away. The realization came to me that the only way to achieve my goal was to reinstate in my mind a positive outlook on life. I made it my goal to break through my pessimism.

The glass glistened with beads of dew refracting the sunlight shining down on them. Anticipation gleamed in their eyes as the countdown to the start of the race narrowed. Suddenly, the gun shot a small plume of smoke into the air and the runners burst forward reveling in their speed and grace. I was oblivious to everything around me, the adrenaline pumping through my veins allowing me to run faster than I ever had before. I began to understand that to truly do well in a sport you have to enjoy yourself, otherwise your accomplishments are just an empty shell with nothing meaningful inside. As I viewed the road ahead, I saw that it was not filled with negative views and lack of hope, but with optimism I had never before experienced.

At the end of the season, I had not broken my time from the previous year, but I had still achieved my goal for the season. By realizing that one has to see the cup as being half full—not half empty—I found a welcoming sense of joy that surged through my entire body. By looking at life in this new light, I quickly began enjoying it to the fullest. I had stopped the negative side of me being active in my life. I had learned to persevere.

Nate Merritt

Second Place, Grade 11

A wise person once said, “The race is not always to the swift but to those who keep on running.” This concept can be applied to all aspects of one's life. The human race is not perfect; that is what makes each and every creature unique. Although we have individuality, we are the same because we all make mistakes and we have experienced failure in our lifetime. We overcome our failures to reach a goal; this process of trial and error displays our perseverance.

Think back to your elementary school years and try to remember your favorite possession. I can tell you that my favorite toy was—my bicycle. I was probably six years old the summer my friend Jeannie taught me how to ride a bike. It was and remains to be the hardest thing I have ever learned. It also remains to be the most rewarding.

I can recall it like it was yesterday. I still feel the frustration and embarrassment I felt back then. To this day I have a scar on my left knee to remind me of how far I've come. Every day with eternal patience Jeannie pushed the bike while I pedaled and she would never let me fall. I repeatedly became so frustrated that I had to stop. My self-esteem was extremely low. There were times that I would just cry because I felt that there was nothing else that I could do.

There came the day when I stopped feeling sorry for myself. I would no longer pity my inability to ride a bicycle. I was determined to make my final attempt. I pushed on the pedals faster and harder than ever before. At first it was a little shaky, but I grew accustomed to it. I did it! I had finally learned how to ride a bike. My level of self-confidence was restored. I had faith in my abilities again. My parents made a big deal of me being able to finally take the training wheels off my bike. I was finally considered a "big kid."

It was not as important that I learned how to ride a bicycle, as that I persevered over my many failed attempts. I set a goal for myself, I knew it was going to be hard, I knew that I would want to give up, and I knew that I would want it to come easily. But the overwhelming sense of pride in my accomplishment made everything worth the trouble.

Annie Doun
Third Place, Grade 11



Someone once said, “ Every great achievement once seemed impossible.” Perseverance is the act of trying, failing, learning, and trying again until success is achieved. I have witnessed perseverance throughout my life. I’ve been through trials and tribulations that I couldn’t have accomplished if I didn’t have the frame of mind to persevere.

I have had so much success in my academics. I’ve had the good fortune to be taught by good teachers and nurtured by excellent parents. I knew that I was a person that could do well, but things in my life have been hectic which meant I had to try even harder to do well in school. In the year of 1995 my mother passed away. I was eleven years old and in the fifth grade. I really didn’t understand the situation at that time, but for some reason I couldn’t focus on anything in school. I failed tests, didn’t study, and really (to be honest) didn’t care about school. My mother’s death was too heavy on my heart. Then a week or maybe more after my mother’s death, I realized that my mom wouldn’t want a stupid daughter. She would want someone that she could brag about to her friends. So I stepped out and said that’s what I am going to do. I made that oath to her and myself.

What I had to do to achieve this goal was to stay focused and pray often to get me through the years with honors. I paid attention in class and asked many questions if I didn’t understand. I didn’t let one person discourage me from the goal I was trying to accomplish. It was difficult in the beginning because I didn’t know how to really prepare myself for the work. I kept encouraging myself everyday upon awakening; it was like my special prayer. So the school year went on; and of course I expected to get bad grades sometimes, but I would make sure that I understood why I had received the grade. Once I broke out of this “BANDAGE” that I had, I was free to become a model student. That was my ultimate goal I had to accomplish. I became a tutor and then I was asked to be in the Gifted and Talented program. I really then thanked God and my father because I knew they were on my side. They were guiding me on the path of success along with my parents and my teachers.

In conclusion, I think my life’s situation was meant for a purpose. The purpose was to show me, through perseverance and faith, that I could do all things I put my mind to. I had to learn not to let the little things get the best of me. Yes, I felt like giving up and just throwing in the towel; but that wasn’t going to solve any problem.

Altina Dupree
First Place, Grade 12

As humans, we often encounter situations in our lives that seem impossible to beat. Our natural tendency is to give up on a task that we dub too hard to surmount, even before we have attempted to begin. It takes great courage and persistence to repeatedly face a trial and not quit until we are victorious. This quality is called perseverance.

I have had many challenges in my life. Some were easy, while others proved to be very difficult. The one challenge that took the most perseverance was learning how to pole-vault. It was not

only challenging to my physical self, but also my mind. Although I'm in my fourth year of vaulting, I am still learning, failing and trying harder every time I put the pole in my hand.

Pole-vaulting was an athletic event that never entered my mind as something I wanted to participate in during my high school years. I can honestly say I never watched the sport up until this point in my life. As a freshman my thoughts were on baseball and basketball. I had played both sports in the past and enjoyed the participation and interaction of both sports.

I knew the indoor track coach and he convinced me to come and watch his team practice. I had nothing better to do, so I went to the practices. As I watched the sprinters race around the track, my eyes were drawn to an athlete running with a long pole in his hands. As I watched him fly up and over the crossbar my thoughts were, "This guy is crazy!" I knew I could never get the nerve to go that high in the air.

The next thing I remember was the coach taking me over to the runway and putting the pole in my hand. He showed me the proper way to hold it and how to run. After several attempts running with this long pole in my hands, the coach showed me how to plant the pole in this box and push off. The vision of me running, pushing off, and becoming airborne was one of the scariest moments of my life. I really did think I was going to kill myself. Out of nowhere I had this overwhelming urge to see if I could do this crazy event. I picked up the pole and ran as fast as I could. What seemed like an eternity down the runway ended up with me landing on a huge mat. I went up a short distance and landed like a rock. It must have been the funniest looking vault anyone had ever seen. I picked myself up and told the coach to find another fool.

The coach convinced me that the vault was really not that bad. He told me if I practiced hard everyday, I had the potential to be a good vaulter. Other than being totally unsure of trying this again, my other reason for not vaulting was a huge obstacle. I was afraid of heights. This was definitely going to be an issue when I could go at least twelve feet, upside down, in the air. I decided to put my fears in the back of my mind and try again. I did enjoy the feeling of going up, and landing didn't bother me as much as I thought it would. So with some anticipation I put the pole in my hand and ran down the runway. For several weeks I ran, jumped and landed. Everyday I got a little better. I practiced hard, my hands would bleed, and my legs hurt very much. Many times I wanted to give up but my coach kept me going.

My weeks of practice were finally going to show just how good I had become. Competition had started, and it was time for me to vault against other athletes just like myself. I'll never forget that feeling. It all seemed like it was in slow motion, and my heart raced and my nerves were jumping. I started down the runway and everything seemed to disappear but the crossbar in front of me. I planted the pole and felt my body fly. The crossbar was under me, and I threw my pole out and away. It almost felt like I was gliding down to the mat. For a second I closed my eyes; and I remember opening them, seeing the crossbar still up, and praying for it to stay that way. Suddenly, I heard everyone cheering. I knew then I had done well, and I jumped off the mat. I met the challenge and won. Perseverance had really paid off.

Vaulting today is just as challenging as it was three years ago. I have my good days and my bad days but I never give up. Staying focused and practicing prepares me for every meet I participate in. My goal was to be a state indoor track champion. That dream was fulfilled last year. My

goal now is to beat my own state record. If I do, that will be a great feeling. If I fall short of that goal this year, I'll just keep trying. I will persevere.

Randy Faulkner
Second Place, Grade 12

Perseverance is a tool everybody uses one way or another. Whether perseverance involves obtaining a passing grade in English to graduate, or trying to maintain a steady relationship with friends and loved ones, perseverance is always present. Perseverance is having a feeling of infinite pleasure because you know you have achieved something you have worked for. You've watched it develop, checked every possibility, and finally ended with results you're proud of. I persevere. I believe perseverance is the key to all success and in the paragraphs below I will demonstrate a way I've used this mental tool in challenges I've been presented with. Perseverance has helped me throughout my era, and I've seen how my goals are achieved with work ethic and drive.

Family affairs need perseverance. We all have problems that circulate in our homes. Without these problems, relationships would be commercial and obviously false. There is no such thing as the perfect home. Every family has issues whether it's between siblings or parents; they all occur. One of my biggest problems is my relationship with my older brother. We've had our share of disagreements over the years. Some were his fault and some were mine; yet no matter who is the cause of the problem they always seem to distance us relationship-wise as we aged. Our biggest problem was the fact that we each felt rejected, and we were not wanted around each other. I hung out with my friends; he hung out with his. When our paths crossed we wouldn't even talk to each other. We'd just stare into each other's eyes and say to ourselves, "What is he doing here?" Only after my brother moved out did we realize the mistakes we'd made. The hours we spent together as children and the hours we spend apart as young adults killed each of us inside and there was need for redemption.

A few months after he moved, we had a talk about why things were the way they were and thought of a solution—a very simple solution that we felt would heal most of the mental strain we both encountered in our years of isolation. The solution was to simply hang out again. Of course we knew things would never be like they were when we were younger. We had completely different lives now. I had my crowd and he had his, but we felt we had to make an attempt for rejuvenation and try and go back to the way things were. To insure that we spend time together, we set time aside just so we could hang out. Thus we persevered to make things better, and I feel we are getting results in our battle to retrieve the lost treasure, which was companionship and respect for each other.

It's been a few months of participating in our agreement, and we've found it hard sometimes; but we still strive to be brothers again. That admiration keeps us persevering and we will prosper.

Shawn Thomas
Third Place, Grade 12

Kindergarten Poster Winners*



First Place Winner, *Tosha Health* Pre-K
Second Place Winner, *Daniel Gott* Pre-K
Third Place Winner, *Nikki Collier* Pre-K

First Place Winner, *Kerstin Vinyard* A.M. Kindergarten
Second Place Winner, *Joyce Morris* A.M. Kindergarten
Third Place Winner, *Kayla Radford* A.M. Kindergarten

First Place Winner, *Emily Sponseller* P.M. Kindergarten
Second Place Winner, *Jeb Hunt* P.M. Kindergarten
Third Place Winner, *Billy Jack Moulton* P.M. Kindergarten

* The posters were on display during "I Love the Smyrna School District" day, as well as at the kindergarten. The posters are too large for reproduction in this book.

Honorable Mention

Students

Freddie Lawrence Kindergarten Center
Courtney Cox Kindergarten Center
Lacey Steele Kindergarten Center
Stacey Staley Kindergarten Center
Casey Polasko Kindergarten Center
Vance Clymer Kindergarten Center
Storm Clampit Kindergarten Center

Sam Cahall Clayton Elementary School
Megan Dawson Clayton Elementary School
Michael Gardner Clayton Elementary School
Jimmy Underwood Clayton Elementary School

Brooke Dixon Smyrna High School
Dan Long Smyrna High School