

Issue four
2019-20

the torch



Juscenta Haligowski
Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

GOLD MEDALLIST



Laura Peters
River East Collegiate

SILVER MEDALLIST



Melody Hutton
Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

SILVER MEDALLIST



Dalton Reidke
Transcona Collegiate

SILVER MEDALLIST



Cedey Souriyavong
Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

SILVER MEDALLIST



Aira Arenas
Kildonan-East Collegiate

SILVER MEDALLIST

changed reality."

Part of the annual graduation celebrations are scholarship and awards announcements. Every year the trustees bestow six School Board Medal Awards on graduates who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership, contributions to their school and community, and positive relationships with school staff. The six senior years schools each nominate a student and a subcommittee of the board interviews the six students. One student is chosen as the Gold Medal Award recipient and five are Silver Medal Award winners.

The 2020 subcommittee interviewing the students included trustees Jerry Sodomlak (board vice-chair), Brianne Goertzen, and Michael West as well as superintendent/CEO Kelly Barkman and assistant superintendent Karen Boyd. The subcommittee met with each student by videoconference.

"I was impressed with how well the students were able to share their stories, their challenges, successes, and future aspirations even though it was done virtually," commented Brianne Goertzen. "All six students were enthusiastic, dedicated, and exceptional in their studies; all are worthy recipients of the Medal Award and it was inspiring to hear from them."

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Congrats to our grads and thank you to all staff!

Grade 12 students and staff across RETSD have shown their creativity and commitment to make the best of these extraordinary times. The restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic might have meant a change in graduation celebrations, but they didn't

dampen the enthusiasm of the staff to recognize this year's graduates.

"The board was impressed to see how the current challenges led to even stronger collaboration among the six senior years schools to

make the 2020 grads feel equally important and celebrated," said Jerry Sodomlak, board vice-chair.

"The trustees extend their appreciation to the staff and a big congratulations to the students who successfully completed their school year to graduate despite the



Board Medal Award Winner subcommittee, including Jerry Sodomlak in foreground, holds a virtual interview with medallist Cedey Souriyavong.

The board of trustees is pleased to announce the 2020 winners:

The board also presents four other annual awards. Named after former long-serving trustees, the awards recognize different strengths and contributions of the winners. In each case, the student must have a good academic record and provide school and/or community references.

The Mary Andree Humanitarian Award

Winners of this award are graduating students who have shown selfless support of others in school and in the community, including to help improve the life of others through organized activities or consistent, compassionate behaviour.

Baron Recio, Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Emma Boughen, Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

Sydney Bear, Kildonan-East Collegiate

Kirsten Yeryk, Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

Aveena Kumar, River East Collegiate

Juan Miguel Elegado, Transcona Collegiate

Jenna Cederwall, Adult & Continuing Education

The Robert Fraser Leadership Award

This award is presented to a graduating student who has shown leadership in school-based organizations or activities and in the community, has shown self-reliance and has helped launch new school activities.

Hannah Mac Gillivray, Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Julianna Kinley, Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

Matthew Dureault, Kildonan-East Collegiate

Alexandr Polovinka, Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

Ashleigh Laubstedt, River East Collegiate

Ethan Cripps, Transcona Collegiate

Allyssa Eyolfson, Adult & Continuing Education

The George Marshall Citizenship Award

This award is presented to a graduating student who has contributed to socially responsible activities in school and the community and whose school behaviour and attendance is exemplary.

Soundarya Raj, Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Simon Hallick, Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

Shanicia Ruddock, Kildonan-East Collegiate

Reese Lange, Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

Samantha Stoddart, River East Collegiate

Adam Hoes, Transcona Collegiate

Jeffery Currier, Adult & Continuing Education

Most Improved Student Award

This award is presented to a graduating student who shows significant improvement in the graduating year compared to previous years in at least two of the following: academic performance, school attendance, general behaviour and co-operation with school expectations and/or contributions to the school's extracurricular program.

Bayzhik Audy, Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Ryan Smith, Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

Johanna Garcia, Kildonan-East Collegiate

Tashtia Sujana, Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

Deyaneira Titanich, River East Collegiate

Brianna Betts, Transcona Collegiate

Denys Urquilla, Adult & Continuing Education

The board extends its congratulations to the following winners of the Governor General's Academic Award:

Lily Sanderson, Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Jack Melville, Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau

Avneet Sidhu, Kildonan-East Collegiate

Melody Hutton, Murdoch MacKay Collegiate

Laura Peters, River East Collegiate

Christine Kolbuck, Transcona Collegiate

Grade 12 graduation is a major step in a person's life. Students moving from early to middle years and from middle to senior years schools also are going through a big change. The trustees wish these students all the best as they move to the next stage of their school life in RETSD.

The board encourages everyone to help our grads feel special. Call out your congratulations to graduating students you know, give them a virtual high five or wave if you see them on the street!



Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Unique times call for innovative thinking and that's just what River East Transcona senior years schools did to celebrate their 1,350 Grade 12 graduates this year.

"In the face of pandemic-related restrictions, the senior years teams collaborated for the first time to create a unified celebration across the division to make sure the graduates felt equally recognized," said John Muller, principal at Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate. "All senior years schools made it a priority to show the graduates how important they are to us."

Typically, graduates look forward to

a big event with their classmates, teachers, families and friends. Not so this year. To help the grads feel special, the six senior years principals met (virtually) to create memorable recognition for every one of the division's graduates. When planning first began for the 2020 graduation events, the principals considered the idea of postponing activities until the fall. That was a short-lived thought when they realized the significance of graduation as a June rite of passage. Delaying by a few months would be anti-climactic, especially when many grads may have started careers, post-secondary education or possibly have left the province.



"We had to balance the significance of graduation with the reality of the pandemic and make our choices meaningful," commented Sandy Dzuba, principal of River East Collegiate. "We co-ordinated among all the senior years schools to make sure the celebrations were equal and not competitive. It's always about the students and this year, perhaps even more so."

The division has made a splash to honour its graduates. Take a drive around the RETSD community and you'll see lawn signs marking the homes of 2020 graduates. Every sign was delivered by a teacher from the graduate's school and all on the same day. Adding to this special, visible memento are the tree seedlings being given to every 2020 graduate in the division.

"The seedling is symbolic of the opportunities now before our grads," Muller said. "Just as we

hope to see the seedlings grow into strong and healthy trees, we know our graduates will flourish as they move into the next chapter of their lives."

In past years, students donned their cap and gown on the day of their graduation event. This year, the senior years team arranged to deliver them to all graduating students a week before their official graduation day. Since extended family and friends could not attend the graduation ceremony, students could wear the cap and gown for their own photo opportunities to help them—and their family and friends—remember this momentous event.

Just as graduating students hadn't expected their celebrations to take such a different turn, teachers and administrators had to adjust as well.

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Schools became almost silent and the usual sounds of laughter and excitement in anticipation of the year end disappeared suddenly.

“When I met with Grade 12 students in January and February, they talked about doing their last sporting event or the last time for a school gathering,” commented Christine Anderson, principal at Transcona Collegiate. “After March, graduating students became so accepting of the need for the change to protect their families and friends—they really were inspiring.”

This was Anderson’s first year as a principal and while she had looked forward to being involved for the first time in graduation plans, she was impressed by how supportive and flexible the whole school was—staff and students—in adjusting to a dramatic shift in plans.

In the end, pandemic restrictions didn’t stop schools from holding graduation. They just happened to be smaller events than in past years. Between June 24 and 26, every RETSD Grade 12 graduate had the chance to walk across the



stage at their school in cap and gown to receive their diploma. Although the audience was limited to four guests for each graduate, teachers also attended to congratulate the graduates.

“Being able to see their students graduate is really important for the teachers who often have been with the students throughout their high school years,” said Karen Boyd, assistant superintendent of schools. “We are thankful the senior years schools found a way to give the graduates a valued ceremony and the teachers a chance to wish their students the best.”

The collaboration among senior years schools this year has been so positive that even with hopes for a return to each school organizing their own events next year, the senior years teams plan to continue to work together to give their grads the send-off they deserve.

“The board of trustees commends the 2020 graduates for showing such resilience in the face of their changed final months in high school,” said Colleen Carswell, board chair. “Congratulations graduates, we wish you all the best.”

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