MINNESOTA
Charter Public Schools
Writing Contest

2014

Winning Entries

Presented at the
Minnesota State Capitol Building

MAY 7, 2014

In conjunction with National Charter Schools Week

Sponsored by

TCF Foundation
and
Center for School Change
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Describe the best day you’ve had at school.
What made it the best day?

That’s the question that more than 2,600 Minnesota charter school students wrote about this spring. We deeply appreciate their insights. We also appreciate the faculty of the approximately 50 Minnesota charter public schools whose students submitted essays. We take a little space here to explain this booklet and the annual Minnesota Charter Public School Writing Contest.

This is the tenth year that the Center for School Change has run this writing contest, and the eighth year that TCF has been a co-sponsor. We deeply appreciate the support and encouragement from TCF, including Bill Cooper and Beth Topoluk.

We run the contest because we believe in the value of writing, and believe that students need more opportunities to share their work. We also believe it’s vital to honor strong student work.

In February we sent the “prompt” listed above to all of Minnesota’s charter public schools. As noted above, about 50 schools responded, with more essays than we’ve ever received before. (About 2,200 essays were submitted in 2013).

Macalester College student volunteers, led by Eura Chang, helped to review these essays. They were divided into four major categories, students in grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12. After the Macalester students’ review, a second review was conducted by CSC staff. We selected what we considered the best and have published them here.

During National Charter Schools week in May, we gather at the Minnesota State Capitol to hear from and honor the winners. We’ve learned a great deal from reading these essays. We hope you will too.

Again, our thanks to TCF, the volunteer Macalester students, and to all participating schools, educators, families and most importantly, the students.

Congratulations to the worthy winners!

- Center for School Change Staff
  May, 2014
K-2 WINNING ESSAYS

~1ST PLACE~
AYAN, LEARNING FOR LEADERSHIP, GRADE 2

~2ND PLACE~
RUBY DERRICK, NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY SCHOOL, GRADE 2
LADD BRUESKE, SEVEN HILLS CLASSICAL ACADEMY, KINDERGARTEN
NAWAL, LEARNING FOR LEADERSHIP, GRADE 2

~3RD PLACE~
FATIMA, ST. PAUL CITY SCHOOL, GRADE 1
SURER HARBI, DUGSI ACADEMY, GRADE 2
SABRIN KHALIF, HENNEPIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, GRADE 1
MASON NEITZEL, COLOGNE ACADEMY, GRADE 2
Name: Ayan

Grade: 2

School: Learning for Leadership Charter School

Date: March 28, 2014

Title: My Best Day in School

My best day in school was when I learned what I wanted to do with my life. On April 10th, 2012, my mother called me at school to tell me that my cousin had died from a brain tumor. She was only 23 years old. I was shocked because I did not know that people could die so young. I always admired her because she was very wise and funny. I miss her laughter, but she lives on in my heart. She has inspired me to become a doctor. I want to find a cure for her disease. My dream is to see her again in heaven someday and tell her I cured the world of her disease.
My Favorite Day
By Ruby Derrick
Gr. 2
North Shore Community School

My favorite day is the Iditarod. It's fun and gets you moving. I liked how we were leashed up as a team! I felt nervous and excited at the same time. The wind was blowing in my face. I felt free. The mushers knew their commands. They said gee and haw and all the other commands. And we were not the only ones on the trail. Parents were on the trail. The path was not too short or too long, and we practiced. So we knew what to do. So on the day of the Iditarod we were ready! We raced off and there we were alone in the woods. Well, the parents were there. I smelled pine trees. And when we crossed the finish line everybody was cheering!

The end.

*******************************************************************************
My best day of school was when I got my VIP award. What was great about it was that I was very happy to get a VIP award. I was so happy that I was ecstatic. Earlier that day I had a feeling that I was going to win because I had been doing very well in school. It meant a lot to me that Mrs. Ellingson chose me. Because I enjoyed challenging
myself in all academic areas. I felt so good getting it, I still have it now. This award always makes me smile and feel good.

by Ladd Brueske

Seven Hills Classical Academy

Kindergarten
Name: Nawal

Grade: 2

School: Learning for Leadership Charter School

Date: March 28, 2014

Title: My Best Day in School

My best day in school was my first day in school in the USA. I came from another country where my school there was very different. My school there was a wooden shack with dirt floors. Rain would leak through the ceiling. Snakes and insects crawled around. Restrooms were huts with holes dug in the ground. We wrote on pieces of wood. School was from sunrise to sunset with no recess and no snacks. The teachers would tie us up and hit us with rulers when we did not obey. Here, schools are big and clean. We have books, paper, pencils, and computers. Best of all, the teachers are fun and kind.

My best day in school was when I came to school here because it is like heaven compared to the school in my country.
My name is Fatima and I go to Saint Paul City School and I am in first grade. I think every day is the best day of school because of my teachers. My friends and we learn a lot. My teachers are the
Best teachers in the whole world
because they are so sweet
and they are kind.

My friends are the best friends
because I love them.

We learn a lot in school.
So our brains can be strong
and so healthy. That's is

Why I think everyday is the
best day of school. School is good for me and will help me go to college when I pass all of the grades I have in college I will learn so so so many more new things than I ever have in my whole life.
My Best Day at School

My best day of school is what I make it. On my best day I listen to the teacher. I do my respectful work. I tryed hard. Another thing I do is help my frends and make good choies. The choies I make turn every day into my best day!
My best day at school was when we did a test. The test was reading but to read big hard words! But I passed the reading test. I yelled, "Hurray!" I jumped up and yelling, "Whew!" When I was finish with the test, I made another test. I read a book from the library. That's the day I like.
School: Cologne Academy
Name: Mason Neitzel
Grade: Second

Describe your best day in school. Why was it your best day? My favorite day of school was a beautiful day and I was happy.
going on a field trip and I thought it was a place where you play shoots and ladders. But when I got there it was a giant park of awesome stuff. I tried to keep my jaw from falling
thought it would
but it didn't because
it was awesome. I
played because it
looked fun and I
hour later we left.
But I'm a lucky boy
That was fun and it
was a great time I
made tons of
friends, I'll probably come back. When I was on the bus and my friend said did you have a good time I said are you kidding, yes!
3-5 WINNING ESSAYS

~1ST PLACE~
Sridhatri Guntipally, Eagle Ridge Academy, Grade 5

~2ND PLACE~
Ibrahima Diagne, College Prep Elementary, Grade 5
Emma, International Spanish Language Academy, Grade 4
Kennedy Jendro, Beacon Academy, Grade 4

~3RD PLACE~
Sahra Hashim, Higher Ground Academy, Grade 4
Damien Schmulske, New Heights School, Grade 5
Ayan Mohamed, Twin Cities International Elementary, Grade 4
Alaina Sherman, Lakes International Language Academy, Grade 5
Arely Garcia Gregorio, Partnership Academy, Grade 3
An Unforgettable Day
By Sridhatri Guptapally, Eagle Ridge Academy 5th grade

I cherish everyday I go to school because I learn important lessons for life during the day. Still, I have a day that stands out. It is the day I competed in the school spelling bee. This day included everything I've ever wanted, family, friends, and education.

On that day, I learned to be more confident. It can be hard to stand in front of so many parents and spell all those challenging words. Facing the crowd is something I've struggled to do, and getting a step higher in conquering this fear is a big achievement for me. I also learned to be a good sport. My best friend, Serena, competed longer than me, but I learned to feel happy for her and be proud of her rather than being jealous. These two lessons are very valuable to me, and Serena and I are looking forward to learning more lessons together.

The End
My favorite day of school

I think New Years Around the World was the best day of school at CPE because of all the diverse ways people embraced their culture by dancing and singing. It was also an opportunity for all the students to learn about other cultures around the world.

One of the reasons why I liked cultural day was because I was able to see my friends dance and have fun. This event was fun for the whole school because for the people that are not Hmong or Karen it was interesting seeing a new way people dance or sing.

Another reason why I think cultural day was the best day of school is because it was also fun for individual classes. For example my class did an event called “all around the world”. In this event my class went around the school into different classes learning about the country they were given. For example sixth grade did Syria, so there were two students who were dressed in Syrian clothes talking about Syria. Then after the presentation, my class tried food samples. My class represented Brazil and we learned that Brazilians paint big flowers on walls as a New Year celebration ritual.

I also enjoyed that day because the food was really delicious. On cultural day we had chicken with sticky rice and for a drink we had milk. There were also egg rolls and roasted pork on the menu. What was really fun about this was how we were allowed to eat our food in our own classroom where we could move around and talk to our friends.

When it was time for the performers to perform the whole school walked to the gym and sat watching them sing & dance for us. The performers were dressed in their cultural clothes. There was even a cultural fashion where two students from each class show the cultural clothing of the country they were learning about. It was really beautiful to see the diversity and all the colors. While the students were sitting on the floor teachers and family also enjoyed the show. Then after the performances students went back to class and hangout until all the buses arrived for dismissal.

In conclusion, I think New Years Around the World was the best and most successful day at College Prep Elementary because it was fun and educational at the same time. It was like an open window to the world.
THE ART TEACHER

My favorite day at school was the day that I was praised by my art teacher. My art teacher's name is Mrs. Amezquita. She is by far the best art teacher in the world. She is creative, she is artistic and she is very kind.

One day when we were in art class, we had just finished an expressive art project and I had made a paper airplane with a drawing of an archery range and a flaming soccer ball. This expresses myself because I'm an archer and I really love soccer. The reason for the airplane was because I like being unique and just flat paper is boring. When she saw it she said, “Buen trabajo Emma,” (Good job Emma) and put it on the board.

Later, I asked if I could go get some water. On the way to the drinking fountain I stared at my hands in awe.

By Emma (10); International Spanish Language Academy (ISLA); Grade 4
Friends

Do you remember that one day you or someone else did something that brightened your day? I do! It was two days before the school talent show.

One of my friends, Jayna, was out on the playground, she looked bewildered. I couldn't figure out why, so I went to talk to her. "What's the matter?" I asked. "It's just Ally," her best friend, "Is mad at me and I don't know why." She answered. "I can go talk to her if you want." I suggested. "That would be great," she replied.

I came back after about ten minutes. "Ally says she's mad because you aren't singing the write notes for the talent show." I told her. "I'm trying," she said softly. "I know." I said. "Maybe you should write her a note." "Okay it might work, even if it doesn't, thanks anyway." She replied. Then the whistle blew, it was time to go inside.

The next day Jayna and Ally were back together again! I was so happy for them. I couldn't help but join in the fun. I felt so
proud! I'm glad I could help Jayna. I hope you can help someone when they need it too!
My best day at school.

My best day at school was the day I took my M.C.A. test. I was so happy because I knew I was going to pass the M.C.A. test. I was so proud when I started the test. I was nervous because I thought I was going to fail the test. When I got to the middle, it was a little bit hard, unlike the beginning. It was easy. Right now it was becoming easier. Then I got to the hardest question; it really mattered. I thought they were going to take away all the points I earned, but I was not sure. I finally got through the hardest question. Then, when I finished, the teacher had told me I had passed, and I said yay! That's how fun my test was. After that I started to skip and down, and then we had lots of fun. It was really fun.

Name: Sahira Hashim

School: Higher ground Academy
Grade: 4th Grade
Halofun

Most days it's work, work, work, work. But this day is candy, candy, candy, candy. On Halloween, we get to go trick or treating around the school and collect little toys. Before that, we watch half a movie, go to lunch, and finish the other half of the movie. This year, we watched Hotel Transylvania. Then, one of my favorite parts, is we can show off our costumes and scare our friends. After you check out the awesome costumes, we made our own monsters! Most of the boys made killer monsters that eat raw flesh, and the girls made cute monsters. I— one of the boys— made a cute werewolf with a smile, cute eyes, a poofy tail, and no claws. One of the best things of the day was everyone was happy and in a bright mood. Next year though, I hope the costumes are scarier.

By Damien Schmulske

New heights school (NHS)

5th Grade

trick or treating around the school and collect little toys. Before that, we watch half a movie, go to lunch, and finish the other half of the movie. This year, we watched Hotel Transylvania. Then, one of my favorite parts, is we can show off our costumes and scare our friends. After you check out the awesome costumes, we made our own monsters! Most of the boys made killer monsters that eat raw flesh, and the girls made cute monsters. I— one of the boys— made a cute werewolf with a smile, cute eyes, a poofy tail, and no claws. One of the best things of the day was everyone was happy and in a bright mood. Next year though, I hope the costumes are scarier.

By Damien Schmulske

New heights school (NHS)
I was in kindergarten. I was bullied by girls and boys. Their names were Hassan, John, Thaily and Lamiya. Everyday I would go to school and every single day they would talk about me behind my back. So one day I told my homeroom teacher and she gave them a consequence. I bought them a gift after a little while cause they stopped and they gave me a present cause they stopped talking to them. Then in first grade they started to bully me again. I did the same thing that I did in kindergarten but this time I did not buy them a gift. Finally in 2nd grade they became my friends not just that my best friends. That was the best day in school. I still remember the date. Here it is: 9/13/11. So, that's the best day in school I've ever had.

THE END.
The sound of my new shoes squeaking against the floor made me feel self conscious. My sister said goodbye and I didn't want to go into the classroom. All the other kids were taller and bigger than me. I had butterflies in my stomach as I walked into the classroom. The smell of freshly sharpened pencils and crayons made me feel a little better. The teacher came up to me and started talking gibberish I couldn't understand because she was speaking Spanish. I slinked to what looked like my chair. When I sat down I was still scared. I just wanted to disappear.

It seemed like everybody had already made a friend or two. I had no one.

The teacher started to read a book. I had no idea what she was
saying but I liked the sound of her voice.

She read until lunch time. I sat on the bench alone watching the boys play soccer. The whistle blew and everyone lined up I grabbed my lunch and started to eat, and finally went home. Some say my first day of school stunk and that it was pretty horrible but in my opinion it was the best day of school ever because although I didn't have any friends and I didn't know what my teacher was saying I finally knew where I was meant to be. LILA was my place to be because later on that year I had made friends and could understand almost anything the teacher said.
The day I went to the farm
By: Arely Garcia Gregorio
Partnership Academy 3rd Grade

It was fall when all second graders went to the farm. It was raining hard, we stayed outside because other students from other schools were inside the building. Then, we went to go feed goats. I got to feed a big black goat. I was kind of scared because I thought it was going to bite. I move fast so it won’t bite. I was still scared but then I did not know. I let it go, but than it turn out to be fun feeding the big black goat.

After that, we went to see horses. They were so soft and cute that I wanted to ride them, but it was raining so we couldn’t that time. On the farm I saw cute little bact horses.

Next, we went to see pigs. They were really loud and messy. The farmers clean them but then the pig got on the mud and the farmers had to clean them again.

Later that night, I learn a lot about farms. For example, horses don’t
hibernate they stay on the barn. So probley on January Right now they are in the barn.

As long as I live I will never forget my first time at the farm.
6-8 WINNING ESSAYS

~1ST PLACE~

PACHIA LOR, ACHIEVE LANGUAGE ACADEMY, GRADE 8

~2ND PLACE~

GINA BOICH, BEACON ACADEMY, GRADE 6

ROSALIE MCGOUGH-POSE, LAURA JEFFREY ACADEMY, GRADE 7

JAVON HENRY, COLLEGE PREP ELEMENTARY, GRADE 6

SHELLY, MTS MINNESOTA CONNECTIONS ACADEMY, GRADE 8

~3RD PLACE~

MAURESHA BIVINGS, COMMUNITY OF PEACE ACADEMY, GRADE 8

DALLAS CHUE, LIFE PREP, GRADE 6

KELLY XIONG, NOBLE ACADEMY, GRADE 6

VERDIS WEBB, LIFE PREP, GRADE 8
Best Day of School

It all started on the first day of fourth grade. I entered my homeroom I was assigned to and heard a faint tune playing. Ever since I entered the school building, I kept my head down, too shy, although I wasn’t new here. When the teacher saw me, she handed me a sheet of paper. 

“What is it?” I asked, confused.

“Lyrics” she said with a smile.

She was the kind of teacher who would smile just to show that she was happy to be here to teach us. Her smile was beautiful and shined as bright as the sun. When every student was seated, she introduced herself and told us a little bit about herself. I soon learned that her name is Ms. Tinawi.

“Today, we are going to sing.” she said.

“This is language arts class, not music class.” I thought to myself, too shy to say anything out loud. Singing seemed strange, but I focused on what she wanted us to do. I didn’t know what ‘singing’ was since I’d never really done it before.

After our little ‘singing session’, we continued on with class. Throughout the whole class, I thought about how much I loved singing and wanted to do it more often. Ms. Tinawi had us perform for the staff in the office when she knew we sounded great.

Ever since I learned how to sing that day, I loved singing along to songs that I knew. Ms. Tinawi helped me discover my musical voice. Today, I still sing. I practice everyday at home and in my choir group just to improve my singing skills. I would like to thank her since she is the reason I started my singing life.

That first day of fourth grade was the best day of school ever because that’s when I found my voice.
Giana Boich
Sixth Grade
Beacon Academy

My Best Day at School

During this year in school, I watched my mom’s cousin go through a hard time. Her name was Loni and she died of heart cancer; she was the first one to ever have a robotic heart following chemotherapy. We were blessed that Loni lived two years from when she was diagnosed. It was hard because her husband had died, and she had two young children. They were around four and two when she passed away.

I never had a specific day, but I learned how to believe in myself and to never give up. When I watched Loni have a positive attitude even when she was going through the hardest times. She showed me how to handle my frustrations and stress with homework. Also she demonstrated how to hold on and never give up. I was a stressed girl at home and at school due to my homework. Now I am learning to handle my stressful days better and I have more fantastic days instead. Although there is still homework, projects, and tests I now know that I can do it on my own and not be stressed about it anymore. Here is a quote what I learned about Loni and her cancer, “Adopting the right attitude can convert to a negative stress into a positive one,” –Hans Selye. Also I thank Loni, for teaching me how to have a positive attitude. You went through the hardest things. Thanks for being courage’s and a big influence on my life.
The Rosalie Method

"Everybody back to their seats," our Pre-Algebra teacher, Ms. Arden, called out.

"Wait, what's the pattern?!" My friend asked frantically, tugging on my shirt sleeve.

I was not sure of the answer, but wanted to help. Our challenge was to find the length of one triangle leg, using the other and the hypotenuse. I rushed to explain, "Take that side of the triangle, add it to the other, and multiply it by that side, the square root of the product is the remaining side length." As the formula came to me and the words spilled out of my mouth, I pointed to diagrams occasionally.

"Wait... What?" Neva weakly said, her eyes searching for sense in my words.

As our class discussed each problem, time crawled. Finally we went over the problem my friend and I had just discussed. We came up with two solutions. I hesitantly raised my hand and the worries I had of being wrong were realized; Ms. Arden said my method didn't work.

And, though that may not sound like a very good day, it was one of the best, because that day led to the next day when I stayed after class and went over my method with my teacher. Ms. Arden was as excited as I to discover my method worked and named it after me.

It's possible I wasn't the first to discover this, but I was the first at LJA, where we ask questions, make choices, and solve problems.
The Best Day Ever

The day I was on the grill was the best day that I have ever had in school. It was a beautiful fall day in St. Paul in September of 2013 at College Preparatory Elementary School. While everyone was playing football, I was prepping food for their empty stomachs. While I was on the grill I made patties and hotdogs. I received many compliments about how amazing the food was. I even had one of the burgers myself and I can say that I agreed with the compliments. It was fun because we were able to be free and do whatever we wanted for an hour. I got to be the master chef and to me a master chef is very helpful to others and I love helping people. It was also fun because I got to develop a skill at school, but outside of the classroom. I am always up for learning new things and bettering myself as a person. While I was on the grill, I learned the importance of safety, knowing when the food was done and how to flip patties without dropping them. The most valuable lesson that I learned was not a lesson, but rather a feeling. It made me feel good inside to know that I was helping out other people. And that is the reason that this was my best day at school, ever.
The Best Day of School

By Shelly

Grade 8

School MTSMCA

We day a concert filled with ideas on how to help the world and how to make a difference.

There were 10 thousand kids from all over Minnesota that were here to learn how to make a difference in not just our community but our world. We took are seats and watched the countdown to when the show would begin. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 the countdown buzzer went off and the whole crowd screamed. First we heard our governor tell us what an honor it was to be able to have so many kids that wanted to make a difference. We heard from actors, kids, the founders of Free the Children, inspirational speakers, and musicians. We heard them loud and clear tell us how we could make a difference.

This was the best day of school for me because I was taught how to start a fundraiser and to trust myself and set goals for what I want. We also learned about how free the children got started. “It doesn’t start with one of us it starts with all of us” Martin Luther King told us. We all want to reach our goals but there are few of us that will alone. Without connections academy I would have never had this opportunity. I would have never entered that stadium that changed my life. They gave me the power to listen and the encouragement to be heard.
Question: What was your best day in school? Why?

Thursday September 26th, 2013 was the best day at school for me because, I was getting along with everyone. It was my first day at Community of Peace Academy. It was the best day because I got a fresh new start at a different school and got to have another chance to have cool new friends.

I learned different reading skills, more interesting things in Global Studies, practicing MCA questions, SAT preparation, and cool experiments in Life Science. Everyday really wasn’t the best day because we didn’t do fun things every day, but this day was the best out of them all.

I became a Student Council member, and almost president of the Council too. I became a leader, a responsible teenager, independent, and confident in my classes. In my classes, I could focus. We played awesome learning games, challenged ourselves every day, and used big challenging words. It gave me a different view of school even though everyone knows I Love school.

It showed me that there’s more to it than learning; it is accomplishing your goals to meet the standards you have to succeed in life. Even if there’s obstacles blocking the key to success, I believe you should take the key and unlock it, because you won’t regret it in the mean time. You will accept it. The most important thing is, I became a peacebuilder, and I became successful in my work. I’m on my way to becoming a Freshman; I’m on my way to maturity.
My best day ever in this entire year is when I started being creative. I've been drawing for a long time, but it was just something about this year that hit my mind. I would normally draw animals or people even houses too, but in my mind I had to level my drawing. It looks up grading the old to the New version. All I'm doing is upgrading my old drawing to the better version, it may be difficult but at least try.

Drawing can only appear if you use your imagination, otherwise you're just stuck with a blank piece of paper and a pencil. Very time I draw I had to use my imagination and think what I want to draw. But it takes a long process. But either way you drew something, you either end with a beautiful drawing or a Failed drawing, but at least you drew a picture. I also go through the same thing too, I usually end with a drawing. So yea.
The Best Day in School

Kelly Xiong

Noble Academy

6th Grade

If I had to choose the best day of my 6th days, it would have to be the day I learned that my dad was going to be okay. He went to the hospital, because he had kidney failure. The days I didn’t know he was going to be alright I was always worried. I tried my best in the tests my class and I took, as he was in the hospital. On a school day my brother were talking to each other. When I see my dad, I pity him. I remember him as a cheerful man, helping my family and I.

Now that he’s okay, I feel calmer. With that, I was inspired by trying my very hardest. There are some days I worry about him, but knowing he’ll be okay makes me very cheerful. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays a nurse would come over to our house in the morning and check his blood presser and such. Sometimes my mom would stay home and help my dad. I would always think with relief, that he’s getting better every day. I don’t know how my family feels, but seem very happy by the looks of it.

It was a wonderful day for my family and I. A day where the sun was warm and bright. The cool wind touched my cheeks. He helped me. Now it’s my turn and I’ll try my best to do so.
MY BEST DAY EVER

My favorite day at Life Prep was when I entered the annual science fair. For my science project I decided to ask: do males and females play the same type of video games? I picked this one because I like to learn about video games and technology. At first I thought that the project was going to be easy, but I thought wrong.

Before I started I went to a website that showed me how to do science projects. I had to interview 50 males and 50 females about what genre of video games do they play. The genres were sports, shooting, racing, platform, adventure, strategy, fighting, role-playing, simulation, dance, and puzzles. The results showed that male’s prefer to play shooting, sports, and racing videos games. And that females prefered to play shooting, sports, and puzzle games. I thought that the male category was going to have a lot of shooting voters.

One big reason why boys are more attracted to video games than girls is because so many of the available games involved content that is usually considered “masculine.” A huge portion of video game content includes male-dominated sports (e.g., there are way more football games than there are, say, ice-skating games), warfare, racing, and the list goes on. These games are filled with masculine stereotypes that emphasize power, strength, competition, action, and sometimes violence. The reason why females play video games is because they want to enjoy themselves. Some girls use video games to socialize with others online. They mostly play video games like fighting and puzzles because those video games are easier to play. But females mostly play shooters because they are influenced by others playing the game.

At the science fair I set up shop at a table in the back of the cafeteria. I put up my red and black poster board that had all my information about my whole project. I added pictures from my Game Informer magazine to show examples of video games genres. When the judges came to my table I introduced myself and explained my whole project in about 7 minutes. At the end of my presentation they asked me questions like where did you interview the boys and girls and why did you choose this project out of all the others. When they moved on to the next contestants I was worried about my grades.

After two weeks of waiting I got my results in science class. I got a A for my project. When I got home my mom and step dad asked me about my grades from the science fair. I told them what I got and they were proud of me for sticking to my work and finishing it all the way. My mom told all my relatives what I got and they were also proud of me. Even though the project took my over two months of hard work and dedication it all came out in the end.
9-12 WINNING ESSAYS

~1ST PLACE~
HANNAH AASUM, RIVERBEND ACADEMY, GRADE 10

~2ND PLACE~
FARDOWSA IMAN, LINCOLN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11
ANNA WETERS, SPECTRUM HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11
NIKKI, ROCHESTER OFF CAMPUS, GRADE 9
RAHMO MOHAMED, LINCOLN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 12

~3RD PLACE~
KELSEY TALBOT, P.E.A.S.E. ACADEMY, GRADE 12
AMINA ABDI, LINCOLN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 12
TIAHIA AUNE, RIVERWAY LEARNING COMMUNITY, GRADE 12
VIOLET RICHARDSON, RIVERWAY LEARNING ACADEMY, GRADE 10
My best day is one of the worst days I could have experienced. Monday, March 18th, 2013, I had found out that my friend William had gone missing. At 9pm, the police announced that they had found the missing teen dead. The next day in school, everyone who knew William spent the day in the wrestling room. He would never be forgotten and he made us all realize how much we need each other. That’s what made that day, the best and worst day.

Monday morning, I saw a post on Facebook concerning the issue of William going missing. When I arrived at school, I notified my best friend, and people I knew who knew him. We all spent the day worrying, but we still managed to enjoy the warm spring day. I remember there were burritos for lunch, and burrito day is always a good day. We had hoped for the best for William to return home, but he never did.

Monday, March 18th, 2013, William was found dead in Riverfront Park along West Rock Street at about 9 p.m. There was no foul play, but self-inflicted injuries. The following day, the close friends of William spent the day in the wrestling room. Sharing good and bad memories they had with William in the past.

Even though it was such a bad day, it was also a good day. Realizing about how much someone means to you, makes you think about things more. William was a great person, and we all miss him greatly but if anything he taught us something. He taught us that you’re going to lose people close to you, no matter what. So you should spend every moment you have with them in happiness.
Fardowsa Iman  
3/28/14  
11th grade  
Lincoln International High School

The day my dreams came true

I remember the first day I started the fourth grade. I was new to the United States and I’ve never been to a school before. I watched the children in uniforms walking to school every morning in Kenya and I asked my dad “when will I start going to school?” he always gave the same answer. “Soon.” I hated hearing that because I wanted to start my education as soon as possible. I was eager to learn and better myself.

One day my dad told me that he’s going to the United States and that we’ll go shortly after him. I hated the idea of moving but he said I could get an education there and that the schools are free. When we were arrived at the United States my dad signed me up for a charter school called Dugsi Academy. The next day my dad and I went school shopping. We bought many notebooks and pencils and pens and a new backpack. When I got home I was still wearing the backpack and I was ecstatic. It was finally my turn to get an education. That night I slept with a huge smile on my face.

I remember walking into the school and the principal Mr. Osmon welcomed me. I was happy to finally be at a school. The school wasn’t that big but I was really anxious. I didn’t know any English and I barely knew any Somali so it was hard communicating with students. I was really nervous about that and I spoke to my dad in Swahili telling him to stay with me. I didn’t think the principal knew Swahili and he laughed. He told me many students here also speak Swahili so I shouldn’t be worried. He said I would have no problems with the students and he was right.
The thing that stood out to me at that school was how kind everyone was. They welcomed me and I felt at home. I was walking through the hallway and they kids were saying hi. It made me feel accepted and I felt like I was a part of their community. I felt like I belonged and I was very happy. Everybody seemed so kind and I love how well they got along. They weren’t fighting or bickering and they looked out for each other. Everyone mattered and there weren’t any popularity contests. Everyone was the same.

My first period was English with Ms. Melissa. Although I was happy about being in a classroom, I had a hard time understanding the teacher. I was shy to ask for help so I just sat there. Thankfully Mr. Osmon came in and he helped me understand. He cooperated with me. He brought me many books and he told me to read. The girl sitting at the table came and sat by me. Her name was Sulekha. She was my first friend. She was kind enough to take to me to all of my classes and help me. Although I didn’t really understand anything from any of the teachers, I was finally getting an education and that’s all that mattered.
A Simple Letter

About two years ago, I was in a community service group that focused on encouraging and learning about our country's military and servicemen. During one of those classes, we were given an assignment to write a letter encouraging someone in the army. I wrote my letter and, not expecting a response, promptly forgot about it. Several months later, a teacher gave me a postcard. I was confused. Why would someone send me a letter through my school? That question was quickly answered as I scanned the postcard. It seemed my letter had been received by a woman stationed in Kuwait. She had written me back thanking me for the letter of encouragement. I was delighted to hear that what I had written had been received and enjoyed by someone serving my country. It made me feel extremely special to have someone risking her life to personally write me to thank me for something so small as a simple letter. In her card, the servicewoman had mentioned her excitement to see her family again. My heart ached for her and for her family as they went through that type of separation. It reminded me to keep life in perspective and to be thankful for the things I have. I often take for granted those closest to me like my family and friends. Her postcard also showed me that a simple gesture can go a long way. It still amazes me that what I had sent to encourage someone else had touched my heart as well.
Nikki
Rochester Off Campus
Grade 9

Being here at ROC has pretty much saved me from myself. Before I came here I was suicidal, cutting, and on drugs. I came here from treatment on leave. At my interview with Jay Martini I told him what was going on; after that my whole day looked up, despite the fact that I was in treatment. I had hope, like “there was a light at the end of the tunnel.” There are hardly any good days for me in school, but if I had to pick one good day, I would pick my times here at ROC.

ROC has been a second chance for me; in my other schools I got picked on and fell behind. It was a second chance because now I keep up with all my school work, and the teachers help me out. In ROC I don’t get picked on because most of these kids have been through what I have.

The second reason why I have good days here at ROC and not at other schools is the environment, which is kind and welcoming. When you start your day you are scared and nervous but here when I first came the students were really nice and welcomed me into their school and their schedules. When you’re new people don’t know you and you are pretty much “putting a duck in a new pond.” It’s scary at first but then it’s like home.

Since I got accepted into ROC I have been clean of cutting and drugs. ROC has been my reason why I got nicer and why I changed. Now I do my school work and strive to get better grades in school. I feel like this school has helped me with not relapsing. I wouldn’t picture myself at any other school.
My Best Day in School

My best day in school was when we went on a field trip to The Feed My Starving Children organization. I felt like I needed to do a wonderful thing in my life. We worked there for two hours packing food for the children and a sad feeling came over me. The picture of those starving children will haunt me forever. I am aware that there are starving children all over the world, but coming so close to them was a wakeup call for me. I suddenly became aware of the huge amount of food that we waste. These children would gladly make a meal of that food.

We seldom spare a thought for children in need when we are feasting, having more than we need to eat. It’s only when we come face to face with hunger, that we realize the magnitude of the problem.

Since then my meals became a conscious act of gratitude. I recall my friends whom I left behind in Africa because I knew that they too were starving. I knew with a deep feeling of sadness that the food I took for granted here in the USA would have been a welcome sight for them, just as it had been for the children I saw at The Feed My Starving Children Organization.
That day at the Feed My Starving Children organization made me realize how quickly we fall into the trap of forgetting where we come from. I encourage you not to forget where you came from. In the 60 Minutes documentary, The Lost Boys of America, one sees from start to finish how boys from Kenya leave their local villages, leave the poverty and hunger behind and come to the USA. Some live good lives here, but others waste their time and fall into the traps of American delusions.
The best day of my life was on January 24th. This was a monumental day for me because I successfully graduated from residential treatment and got serious about my sobriety for good. I had multiple relapses before entering treatment along with days filled with unhappiness and pain. Completing my residential treatment at OmegaON helped me work through all my sorrow and despair, it also helped me find the want and passion to be sober and have a better life for myself. One of my major accomplishments while being at OmegaON that helped lead to my successful discharge, was the academic education and support I received while there. I took the school there very seriously, I also tried harder than I have ever tried before in school because I had finally found the motivation to want a career and successful future. Being at OmegaON and attending the OmegaON school taught me a lot about myself. Before entering that program I always felt like a quitter, I always felt hopeless and doubtful that things could ever get better. The reason my discharge date is the best day of my life was because I finally found hope, and finally found happiness within myself. I was able to finally successfully complete something for myself, while at the same time working though many problem areas in my life. January 24th of 2014, is a day that I will always remember and cherish for the rest of my life. It is a day that I will look back on when I am struggling and feeling down or useless, and remember how far I have came, as well as how much I have accomplished.
My Best Day in School

My best day in school was the first day I attended Lighthouse High School. That day was September 8th, 2011. It was the first day of the school year. It was a Monday, too. It was a day that I will remember for many years to come, or even forever, and there is a good reason for that. First, I met a great teacher, who I will never forget. Second, I met my dear friend, Ms. Fardowsa. Third, I learned a life-time lesson on that day.

First, Mrs. Mary Wilson was my ESL teacher. She was my first English teacher. I did not know any English at that time. She greeted me and asked me few things about my family and myself. She immediately noticed that I was not getting most of what she was saying. Mrs. Wilson called a female student to interpret for me. She introduced the student to me as Ms. Fardowsa from Somalia, but Fardowsa was not from Somalia. She was an Oromo student from Ethiopia. As soon as she realized her mistake, she started assuring me that everything will be alright. She was a kind intelligent woman. For the first quarter, we developed our own method communicating with each other. After that, I learned so much English from her, and of course from other teachers, too.

Second, another reason that my first day at Lighthouse was the best is Ms. Fardowsa. Before I met her, I did not know anything about Oromo Ethiopians. In fact, it was the first time about the word Oromo. She was a wonderful person and still is. She was kind, considerate, and dependable, and still is. She helped me with almost everything and anything I needed in school and outside the school.

Third, when I was preparing for school that Monday morning, I was very worried. I did not know what to expect, but that day turned out be a day I learned a life-time lesson. What made the day special and the best was the fact that good people and ‘goodness’ itself are everywhere. Good people do not have to be relatives, of your race or countrymen.

Finally, my first day at school in Lighthouse High School was the best day of all of my school days so far. It is the most memorable one for me, too. I will cherish the friendship and sisterhood of those two women I met that day. Good people come from all races and are found everywhere, as good days are found in every year.
As Far as I Remember

It was a sunny day, with a slight cold breeze. It was me and about eleven other guys from my school, and my teacher Jamie. We were outside on a break playing football. It was towards the end of the break when we were rushing to get the last play in before we had to go inside. Our main quarterback Joey, said "hut". All of us wide receivers went running towards the light pole. That’s where the end zone was. The football was coming right to me. I jumped up in the air to catch it. That is as much as I remember from that play. In this story I’ll be telling you what had happened and how my teachers, family, and friends were there to help me out.

I heard voices, matter of fact I heard my teacher Leslie say, "You don’t gotta fix your hair Tiahia there are no boys around." I was then drilled with about four questions. From what I was told, the questions were my age which I said was twelve but really I was fifteen. I was asked who my mom was had no clue, What my name was, I got that right, and What my step dads name was. I was told I smiled and said Neil. Hes one of best friends. Always picking on each other. I remember a couple things but its still a bit of blur today.

I woke up to a violent tug on my hair, it hurt so bad. They detached the velcro from my head and neck brace and my hair was stuck in the velcro. It felt like someone literally ripped my hair out. When I woke up all the way and finally was able to focus on things. The two people in the room was my Grandma Sue and one of my teachers, Karen. I sat up in
the bed and I instantly got super dizzy and extremely nauseous. Karen rubbed my back and told me I would be ok. A few minutes later two of my best friends walked into the room, Kelly and Brooke. They had a card for me and some Sour Patch Kids. To this day I don't remember what happened after that. I remember waking up on my couch at home. My mom wanted to take me to Gundersen Lutheran. She didn't think Winona sending me home was a good idea because how bad the accident was. It was about eleven o’clock at night when she took me there. I got an MRI, but didn’t remember the rest of the night.

When I woke up the next morning my dad told me what had happened. He told me I had gotten knocked down onto my head by another player on the other team. I was knocked out for seven minutes and started to have a grand mal seizure. I also had gotten 2 concussions. From the impact on my head hitting the ground, and the second concussion was from the impact of my head bouncing off the ground while I was having the seizure. They said I had an extremely bad head injury, and that I wasn’t able to go to school for a couple days. The worst part for me was not being able to play some sports for awhile. The sport that they did not want me to do and totally discluded was wrestling. Which was my favorite sport, and my dads also. He loved watching us wrestle.

Throughout the recovery I had a lot of support from family, friends, and teachers. Every Tuesday, my mom and I would take a trip to La Crosse to my physical therapist. I was so stubborn because even though I felt fine on the outside, my brain was not fully healed. Since I am a “go go go” person, as my mom would say, sitting down and giving time for my brain to heal was very hard.
After my recovery, I was totally recovered, but I came back to school. The stuff I learned in math before I did not remember at all. Math became a struggle for me and with the help of my math teachers, I started to understand and remember things. So many people were willing to help me no matter what it took. Like my family, friends, and teachers. It is now my senior year and I was cleared to be able to participate in the USA Girls Wrestling Folkstyle State. Without any training at all other than what I remembered from before my head injury, I ended up with third place. I was not mad at all that I came up with third because I went there to prove not that I could win, but that I was able to do the sport and not give up. I really wanted to make my dad the proudest dad ever.

This may sound kind of weird being my “Best Day of School,” but it made me realize how much my teachers, family, and friends that are in my life were there for me. It also showed how much they cared about my success. At the time it was the worse day of school, but now that I look back at it, Made me realize and overcome the roadblocks that were in my way and to never let anything get in my way to reach my goals and to be successful.
A Day I'll Remember

Everyone has different memories from high school. For some, it was a miserable time. They had no friends, felt alone, and ate lunch locked in a bathroom stall. This is what it started out like for me, but it changed pretty quickly thanks to a very smart decision, and a very, very, good school.

My first day of high school was bad from the start. Imagine a fourteen year old girl, cursed with an anxiety disorder, trying to calm herself down in the bathroom before getting on a bus and entering a world she knew nothing about. Yes, that was me, and it only went downhill from there.

The high school I started out in was roughly around the size of an airport. The hallways swarmed with thousands of kids, all rushing to their next class. Having just come from a school with only a couple hundred kids, I naturally felt out of place. The school counselors tried to help me, but it did no good. I was miserable.

It finally became clear what I had to do. I decided I needed to get out of that school and find one where I felt more at home. My mom was supportive of my decision, which helped me feel a little better. Now if only I could find the right school.

I did.

When I first saw Riverway, I wasn’t all that impressed. It certainly wasn’t as glamorous as the
school I'd just come from. At first, I honestly thought it might be a school for hippies. Luckily, it didn't
take long for them to prove me wrong. I quickly found that the teachers there were all extremely helpful
and supportive, and I found myself enjoying the school day again.

For the rest of my life, I will look back on the day I came to Riverway as my best day of school
ever. It was the day everything changed for me. Thanks to having the right learning environment, I've
made progress I never would have before. I've grown stronger and more confident, and the problems
that once seemed endless have all but faded away. My only hope that other kids my age can be as
lucky as I am.