

Compilation of Jack Owens' Recommendations for the Remy Johnston IDA Award

Included are comments from several IDA members including Dr. Kelly Krug (APS Supervisor of the Arlington Tiered System of Supports), Nancy Butt Packard, Debby and Bob Davis and Deborah Baptiste. I have also included comments from several members of our community including our APS Director of Special Education - Dr. Kristi Murphy, Jack's Special Education teacher and advisor Robert Farrell, Linda Arnsbarger, Lara Sullivan, Kate Carey and Paul A. Vogel and Lourdes Gonzalez.

I would like to nominate Jack Owens for the Remy Johnston award. He embodies the many qualities we admire about children with dyslexia. I have only known Jack for about 2 years and he has had a tremendous effect on me and my family. When I first learned my son was dyslexic, I was scared. I didn't know what this meant for him and his future. Reading is so critical and necessary to access information and succeed in school. Then I met Jack. Jack is now a rising senior and for years he has mastered the use of technology to assist him throughout his day at school. He is an outstanding student and more importantly an outstanding person. Not only has he navigated Learning Ally, Evernote and many other assistive technology, he has made it his mission to help others do the same.

For the last two years Jack has participated in the Arlington Public Schools Dyslexia Workshop by discussing his use of assistive technology. While Jack's reading abilities are at about a 6th grade level, he is one of the most charismatic and articulate people I have ever met. In addition, he was asked to participate in the Arlington School board technology work session to discuss how he uses technology throughout the day. Without a doubt, he was the most impressive part of both the workshops and school board work session.

I work closely with Jack's mother, Donna Owens, and we have had numerous dyslexia parent support meetings through DDVA. Jack and his sister Sara Jane decided to start their own dyslexia support group for students, More than Dyslexics. At first they opened it up to secondary school students to find their peers. They hosted two events and then decided to invite elementary aged students to an event last year as well, realizing they also needed support. Their most recent meeting had over 50 people in attendance. Jack is proud of being dyslexic. He knows his strengths are attributed to his "disability". Yes, he sees the world in a different way and rather seeing it as a disadvantage he turns it into his advantage. He has learned to advocate for himself and most definitely helped his teachers understand dyslexia for both its strengths and weaknesses.

I am so thankful to have met Jack and especially for my son to have met Jack. It is all too easy to focus on the weaknesses of our dyslexic students. We obsess about their ability to read, write, improve their working memory, math facts and the list goes on. The reality is that all these amazing qualities Jack Owens embodies are the reminder of how special our kids. It reminds us of how resourceful and determined they are. They have

BIG ideas and compensate for their weaknesses. Please consider awarding Jack Owens the Remy Johnston award. He truly deserves it.

Cloe Chin

IDA Member Number: 150213

DDVA member- Arlington Contact person

Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee- Secretary Moderator of Arlington Reading Parent Support list serve

I would also like to nominate Jack Owens for the Remy Johnston award. Over the past two years Jack has helped the Office of Special Education work with families to understand what means to have Dyslexia and how assistive technology can be used to assist students with Dyslexia.

Our office has offered a few parent workshops over the years that have focused on Dyslexia and Jack has volunteered his time to educate parents on the role of assistive technology, modeled particular apps and strategies he has used and how these features have made a difference for him. Jack presents with confidence and truly engages his audience. Parents were eager with questions and Jack was able to support the families in their knowledge of what is available and how it might be applicable to their child. In fact he was the highlight of the entire workshop and truly served as a role model for how successful someone with Dyslexia can be.

Jack spoke poignantly about his struggle with Dyslexia and the challenges he has had to overcome. He described how he continually advocates for his learning needs in school and how important it is for students and families to advocate for their needs. This was truly inspiring for families to hear and gave them hope and direction for some of their next steps.

I would highly recommend that Jack Owens be considered for this award as he embodies a truly remarkable individual through his determination, courage, perseverance, advocacy, exuberance, and openness for others to learn from his experiences.

Kelly A. Krug, Ed.D

Supervisor of the Arlington Tiered System of Supports (ATSS) Arlington Public Schools

IDA Member # 150916

I am writing to support the nomination of Jack Owens as a recipient for the Remy Johnston Award. Jack is a deserving nominee for several reasons, but my comments will focus on his creation of a youth group for kids who live with dyslexia. The group is called More Than Dyslexics. The kids who participate in this group meet to have fun and talk about issues surrounding life as a dyslexic. Some of the group activities have been paint ball and pizza in the park, sharing lunch while listening to a local dyslexic author tells his life-story, ice skating, bowling and hanging out together. This type of group demystifies dyslexia for kids, and it allows them to share their own stories, make new friends and find hope for their future.

Jack has reached out to many youth in our community. He created a website for More Than Dyslexic, and he and his younger sister have attended many local parent meetings to spread the word about their group. Jack also set up a table at the June 2015 Decoding Dyslexia meeting in Fairfax County that had over 150 parents and kids in attendance.

Jack maintains an upbeat attitude toward dyslexia. He shares lots of great information about how he uses technology to support his learning. Next year he will be a senior at Yorktown High School, and I am confident that he will be a friend to my dyslexic son, who will be a freshman at the same school. Jack's leadership and role as a mentor to younger students is unusual. Usually parents are so busy finding ways to support their kids that we often overlook the need for our kids to connect with other kids. Thanks to Jack Owens, dyslexic kids in northern Virginia are finding new and healthy ways of connecting with other youths like themselves. Way to go, Jack!

Submitted by

Nancy Butt Packard, IDA member since July 2015 IDA Member Number 148396

I would like to nominate Jack Owens, a student at Yorktown High School in Arlington, VA for the Remy Johnston Award. Although Jack is only in high school, the impact he has had on our dyslexic community is immeasurable. He is a model student and advocate.

I found out my daughter was dyslexic about two years ago. I threw myself into researching dyslexia and it's impact on children. I attended a workshop at my local Parent Resource Center. It was there, that I met Jack. I could not believe how poised and articulate this student was. I could not believe he was dyslexic. Jack presented his "technology tips for dyslexic students". Trust me when I say this document changed my daughter's life. He introduced us to Learning Ally, an audio book service for dyslexic students, which allowed my daughter to "read" for pure enjoyment. Jack also showed us how he utilized his iPad during the school day and made the most of assistive technology. I immediately went out that week and purchased an iPad for my daughter and we are working on incorporating his strategies to get through the day. These are real life current examples from a student that I did not find in a book.

I actually think Jack should write a book for young students. He and his sister Sara Jane, co-founded More than Dyslexics, a dynamic organization for young people in Northern Virginia who either live with or support their friends with dyslexia. They have hosted fun events and continue to attend parent meetings to support the needs of our community. In addition to parents and students, Jack has spent countless hours educating the staff and administration of our public school system, advocating on behalf of our dyslexic students. We are so fortunate to have Jack as the “face” of the dyslexia movement in Arlington.

Lastly, as the Head of North American College Recruiting for SapienNitro, a global digital agency employing over 7,000 people, I interact with the best and brightest students from around the world. I would put Jack Owens in the top tier of all students I have met. I give Jack Owens my highest recommendation for the Remy Johnson Award.

Deborah Baptiste- IDA member number 159645

I first heard Jack Owens speak during an APSVA Dyslexia Workshop in 2013. At the time we were just beginning to recognize the extent of our son's disabilities, who was 8 at the time and in 2nd grade, and we were terrified for his future.

Our son was first diagnosed with a very severe form of dyslexia with other deficits at age 6. As he has grown older and moved up in grades, and as his peers began to pass him at first slowly but then exponentially, we wondered HOW... How is he ever going to get through school?... How will he go to college and have a successful career? How will he ever be independent?... And most importantly - How will he ever be happy again? and how will he have the self- esteem and confidence to do anything and everything we know he is highly capable of and have dreamed about for him?

And then we met Jack Owens. The future wasn't dire... But full of HOPE and enlightenment! Here was a teenager who has been where our son was and, despite his own struggles with dyslexia, was not only successful but has excelled! In school and in life. He is an amazing role model for all children and teens with dyslexia - and for their parents, too. Jack has a bright future; and even though we don't know him very well, I am positive he will accomplish and do anything he sets his sights on in college and beyond!

What's even more impressive, though, is Jack's ability to connect with people and his desire to help others - especially other kids like him as well as their parents - to inform, educate, give encouragement and offer genuine interest and support. He has an amazing knowledge of a vast array of technologies and the different ways they can help kids with dyslexia. He is not shy about talking about his own struggles and ways he has overcome and bypassed challenges. He talks of how he uses his strengths and other assets; and how everyone has those things inside them and at their fingertips that they, also, can use to their advantage and success. Jack has also shown great initiative and ingenuity along with entrepreneurship having started the Dyslexic teen support group,

More than Dyslexics, in our area. In the short time we've known him, Jack is clearly one of those who give beyond themselves (like his parents, I might add! :)

Which brings me to the second time we had the pleasure of watching Jack (and his sister) speak before a group this past winter at a fun event they hosted which included the younger kids, too. The look of awe and hope on my sons face said it all. He really connected to the things Jack and the others were talking about - it seemed he was speaking right to him. Afterwards, our son, although a little shy, eagerly waited in line to talk with Jack and ask questions. Just as I was a year prior when I waited in line to talk with Jack after the Dyslexia Workshop, I was again struck by his patience, genuineness, interest, and how he really listened to understand the unique needs of each person he was speaking with.

Jack recommend some technologies for our son, specifically, that he thought he would find most helpful for him for different things and showed him a few things he had with him. Jack's words of encouragement and advice were priceless.

Our son was so happy that day with a smile ear to ear... It was like a little ray of sunshine beaming from him where he was mostly down, dark, and discouraged. Jack flipped on that little switch inside him that still to this day shines when things get really tough and some days are really dark. As we embark on the next phase and direction of our son's scholastic undertakings, we know Jack will always be a source of inspiration for him. In short, Jack is his superhero!

Debby and Bob Davis - IDA member no. 160269

Community comments

I am very pleased to nominate Jack Owens for the Remy Johnson award. We all have our own areas of strength and weakness, of success, and of failure. We all have areas in which we need to push ourselves harder to achieve our dreams and potential. Seldom in my twenty-eight years as an educator have I met a student for whom this is truer than for Jack. Yet never have I seen anyone handle his own issues with such grace and dignity.

As Jack's teacher/advisor for the past three years, I have had the pleasure of working with a student who shows complete ownership of his own successes and failures, unique abilities, and deficits. Jack does not play his disabilities for pity. He turns them into strengths. Rather than using his weaknesses as a way to do less or take longer, Jack somehow always finds an inner resolve, a strategy, and the necessary accommodations to finish well up in the pack.

Now, what makes Jack special is far more than just the honor and integrity with which he dispatches his own responsibilities. Rather than focusing primarily on himself, Jack finds the time, energy, and innate altruism to volunteer his own strategies and self-

discoveries so that others may benefit. The courage needed for a high school age person to do this - to bare the kind of vulnerabilities that most of us keep well-hidden throughout life – so that others may benefit, is incalculable.

With Great Respect, Robert Farrell, M.Ed. Special Education Teacher Yorktown HS,
Arlington, VA

My son is a 9th grader who has always felt that dyslexia was a failing that he wanted to keep secret, so he resisted accommodations that might make it obvious to others, such as read aloud or dictation. I dragged him (against his will) to Jack's first gathering for dyslexic kids, and he was thrilled that there were other kids like him. Now he asks when their next event is. He now self- identifies as dyslexic to his teachers and asks for accommodations, a huge step toward self-advocacy. Jack told him about the many technology accommodations that he uses, and my son now thinks they are cool and not embarrassing. Jack and his family introduced us to Learning Ally (a significant improvement over prior services), and now my son reads for recreation - a first. I could not be more grateful -- Jack achieved what we and many teachers could not achieve in modeling for our son how to live with dyslexia.

Linda Arnsbarger

Nomination from Lara Sullivan, mother of a struggling Arlington public school reader. I was impressed with Jack the first time I met him--he gave a presentation at an Arlington county school board dyslexia awareness session-- it was at the very end of a 2 hour session-- in the evening after a long day (I think it was near 9 pm), but he captured my attention and kept it. He whizzed through a visual presentation of a flyer he'd created of resources for kids, it was fantastic! He brought to life how dyslexic kids can take control of the challenges they face and do well in school; but even more than the content he presented, jack's dynamic personality demonstrated that my son (age 7) can succeed. Jack was an instant inspiration-- I saw him present a few months later in the support organization he started to get dyslexic kids together and he taught me new things, opened up new possibilities. Having a dyslexic kid is tough, lonely and frustrating--even today when it is a well known, well documented thing, but Jack has brought us into his experiences and helped us more than he knows.

Lara Sullivan

I write today in support of the nomination of Jack Owens. About two years ago, I attended a seminar organized by our county's special educational services focusing on dyslexia, and the final speaker was Jack Owens. His presentation was about using technology to help with his learning disability.

Jack made a huge impression on me for multiple reasons. First, he was an excellent and charismatic speaker. Here was a student speaking to a room of perhaps 200 adults who were all fairly tired after 1.5 hours of administrative presentations, and he reenergized the room. Second, he was completely at ease speaking about his disability, and I thought how much I'd like all dyslexic students to hear Jack speak and to feel empowered about their accommodations, not to feel shy or embarrassed in middle school and high school when surely this must be an additional burden. Third, his presentation was impeccable organized and his handout was an invaluable resource. In fact, as soon as I went home that evening, I sent a copy of Jack's presentation to everyone in my family. He had good tips for any student and obviously invaluable tips for dyslexic ones. I also sent his presentation to numerous friends with dyslexic children. At the meeting many parents who were well-educated about dyslexia commented that they never knew these educational resources were available many of which were free. I can't speak for everyone at the meeting but based on the reaction in the room, I think most adults learned more from Jack's portion of the presentation than any other component of it.

I thought about Jack's dynamic personality after the presentation and again considered that he'd be a great role model for many students in our community and country. I was thrilled to hear soon after, that Jack was setting up a middle school and high school organization to help dyslexic students find one another, compare stories and just be social with one another. Jack is a perfect ambassador to help these kids assert themselves with teachers and school administrators who are often resistant to giving them accommodations. Jack is also able to bluntly speak to nondyslexic peers to describe his and other dyslexic students' unique struggles with learning while showing that many of these students also have great personal gifts.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information about Jack's nomination.

Respectfully, Kate Carey

We are writing in support of the nomination of Jack Owen for the Remy Johnston Certificate of Merit. We have a rising third grader who is dyslexic. Because we had never dealt with this condition in our family before, we struggled to understand how best to help our son and more importantly, whether our son could succeed despite being dyslexic.

We attended one of Jack's technology presentations at a time when we were very discouraged about how to help our son. We also saw his presentation for the new social group for dyslexic older students. He showed us options that we did not know existed and would have been hard pressed to find on our own.

To parents like us who are struggling to give the support our children need to succeed, Jack is a model of a student who has confronted this issue head on with courage and

poise. We are grateful that he has so willingly shared his knowledge and experience with parents like us. He is a model for what is possible for our son.

Paul A. Vogel and Lourdes Gonzalez



**Arlington
Public
Schools**

Office of Special Education 1426 N. Quincy Street ♦ Arlington, Virginia 22207

August 12, 2015

To whom it may concern:

I'm excited to support Jack Owen's nomination of The Remy Johnson Award of Merit. I've had the pleasure of knowing Jack for the last three years. I met Jack when he, without hesitation, offered to speak to our special education parent community regarding being a student with a disability, specifically dyslexia. Jack shared his struggles and supports but most importantly he shared how he has not limited himself or the expectations of others that he could and would achieve at high standards regardless of his learning difference.

Jack is an intelligent, warm-hearted young man who clearly understands the dynamics of learning differences and is gifted in being able to share his experience with others regardless of their position in relationship to the education system. He easily engages others and extends himself without hesitation. A recent example of his unselfishness occurred this summer when he offered to speak to our rising middle school students with reading disabilities to encourage them as they transition to the next level but also share how to advocate for their individual needs. This exemplifies Jack's dedication and support of his peers and helping others with learning differences.

Jack has been a role model in our division by sharing with teachers, school and central office staff, and his peers multiple methods he uses with the support of his individualized education program to access the curriculum and achieve at high standards. Thus, it is without hesitation that I support Jack's nomination.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kristi Murphy
Director of Special Education
Arlington Public Schools