



## **Debra Pakaluk Award (Presented by Jay Carter): Wyatt H.**

The Debra Pakaluk Award was established in May 1991 in honor of former Topeka Collegiate Science teacher Debra Pakaluk. The recipient of this award is chosen each year by a majority vote of the Middle School Faculty and the Head of School. Although this group selects the recipient, they welcome input from the Board of Trustees, parents, and other teachers.

The Pakaluk Award recipient will be a Middle School student who:

- Takes pride in his/her work.
- Demonstrates curiosity about both the humanities (literature, history, languages, and the fine arts) and the sciences (science and mathematics.)
- Acts on academic curiosity by participating in class discussions and activities.

Demonstrates academic interest by:

- Asking questions.
- Doing research.
- Going beyond the required elements of an assignment.
- Doing outside reading and investigation.

Appears to be enjoying life by demonstrating:

- Cheer and humor.
- Warmth and kindness.
- Acceptance and tolerance.

The recipient of this year's Debra Pakaluk award doesn't give 100% to everything they do, because what they do doesn't even fit on the X-axis. Instead—considering the number of questions this student asks daily, their effortless charm, wit, personality, intensity of thought, talent paired with dedicated practice, and all around human goodness they shed on their immediate surroundings at all times—what this student has to give extends into the Y- and probably even the Z-axis. If the fourth dimension of our chart is time, this student is probably giving 100% to the past and future as we speak.

In fact, at some point in the future, this student is even now graphing this word problem of a compliment. Suffice it to say, they are incredibly bright.

When I first met this student, I might have described them as bookish and shy, but over the years they have learned a clever-yet-sly demeanor from their peers that I would call a puckish orneriness. I am glad to see that the important things in their life now include bringing their light and laughter into the lives of their many friends.

When this student makes a mistake, they fix it, no extra credit needed. Their reward is to really understand what they're learning. This is my 14th year as an educator and I've felt for most of that time that those students who want the good grade don't need it. I'm proud to say that for this student this could not be more true.

This student's presence in a classroom is a catalyst for conversation, with their curiosity pulling nuanced threads out of a topic that might otherwise be overlooked. This student loves to make connections between what they have already learned, what they are now learning, and make predictions about what they have yet to learn that lead them to novel and innovative topics.

They regularly ask about the distinction between Spanish tenses and perspectives and have thrived in my Latin class for two years. This student loves to dig into the origins of words, the alphabet, even the history of how language migrated from one place to another, eventually to integrate into English itself. When I asked my Latin students to check out a book from our classroom library, he grabbed one of the thickest tomes of mythology I had on hand.

He is fascinated by science, particularly particle physics, and often plies Mr. Simons with questions well beyond the class curriculum. In his spare time, he attempts extra credit physics problems that require trigonometry to solve. Mr. Simons comments: "I certainly didn't teach him all of that."

He plays the guitar with joy and an easy skill which he has been eager to share with his classmates on more than one occasion. In 7th grade, he requested to play his mandolin for a classroom game of musical chairs, and this year he chose to learn about the Kent State shootings when he chose Neil Young's "Ohio" for his protest song.

Always respectful and considerate of others, he advocates for the value of every human on a level so thorough it could be considered procedural—he wants no corner of humanity left feeling unaccepted.

This award goes to a marvelous mind, a model human being, and a pun craftsman to rival every dad in the audience today. We call him Whumphrey. Please join me in congratulating the recipient of this year's Debra Pakaluk award, Wyatt H.