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Dear Virginia Student Journalist of the Year selection committee member:

It took me three years to tell these identical twins apart (virtual learning with COVID didn't help). But when we came back to face to face school last year, it didn't take me long to learn that Kasey and Riley Thompson were incredibly different individuals. Kasey is a little more quiet and inquisitive while Riley is a tad sassier and outspoken, but in a good way. Together, they have made a tremendous leadership team in the HHS Media publications room this year. Kasey has made it her mission to continue her education in search of a journalism career and I enthusiastically recommend Kasey be selected as the 2023 Virginia Student Journalist of the Year.

Kasey simply thrives in the journalism classroom. She leads others by her example. Even through COVID, she was quick to adapt to all the changes we had to make. With the best interests of our HHS Media always in the forefront of her mind, she has continued to work hard to bring our level of journalism back to where it was prior to the pandemic. And she's done that with grace and passion, leading our staff back to Pacemaker and Crown nominations as well as First Amendment Press Freedom Awards.

I have known her for four years and have had her in five different classes and as a teacher's assistant in two others. She joined the Newsstreak staff (our high school newspaper) as a freshman. We quickly learned she was one of our most responsible journalists in that she always did a thorough job and consistently met deadlines. Her writing was really strong and she developed her own style at an early age, something that many writers never find.

As a junior, Kasey was a managing editor and her leadership there made our decision to name her editor-in-chief this year an easy one. She has been one of the most responsible and dedicated leaders with whom I've ever worked. She agreed to work last year on planning and developing our yearbook, a task we added to our comprehensive journalism classroom. Her affinity for design has made her the best person to have as editor in chief of this year's yearbook, and she's determined to make it one of our best ever.

She also challenged herself by taking my AP English Language and Composition course as a junior, one she was admittedly nervous about taking. She ended up passing the exam and her writing grew tremendously as a result.

She has attended national JEA/NSPA conventions over her four years, working hard on her own to pay for these trips and save her parents the expense. She has also held multiple jobs during high school. She has a knack for planning and organizing so she can manage her time effectively. She carries a journal with her all the time and is constantly taking notes and making lists of things to do. She has planned and led our middle school journalism workshop as well as our elementary workshops. She goes to the middle schools to recruit students for our journalism class. She plans staff outings so that kids on our staff will bond and buy-in more to what we're doing as journalists. She plans ahead and that makes her successful.

Her success has also been recognized nationally as she was chosen to serve on the Quill and Scroll International Journalism Honor Society's student advisory board both her junior and senior years.

What amazes me about Kasey is the calmness with which she approaches her job when she's working with younger students. She thrives in stressful situations. She takes the time to patiently teach them what they need to do to improve their writing. Because of her incredibly challenging academic course load, she has also signed up to be a teacher assistant with me during two other journalism blocks. She doesn't use that time as a study hall. It's like she has multiple journalism courses during her senior year, frankly! A student run staff, our HHS Media has worked hard to achieve much success both on the state and national level. The majority of this success is because of great leaders like Kasey.

I am inspired by the way she interacts with other people. She has never appeared to be condescending to her fellow students. She is so respected by her peers and adults for that matter because she is capable of relating to everybody. Much of her ability to get along so well with others I attribute to the unique way in which she has been raised by two wonderful parents. They have trusted their children to make sound decisions and somewhere along the line have instilled in them a love of learning that is rare in kids these days. They have enjoyed learning multiple InDesign tips and tricks from their father who works professionally with the software at James Madison University. And they've been inspired by their mother who also worked on the journalism staff when she attended HHS.

Kasey will make the perfect addition to any college campus. She is one of the most intellectually curious people I've ever known. Working on a publication staff is one of the toughest things a high school student can do. A publication staff most closely resembles real life in that you have to work well with other people and deal with problems as they arise if you're going to be successful.

Kasey has proven time and time again that she can thrive in any type of environment, but she really handles stress more maturely than most adults I know. I have no doubt she will thrive equally as well in college. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to call me at home (540) 533-8775 or at school (540) 433-2651. I thank you in advance for your careful consideration of Kasey Thompson as the 2023 Virginia Student Journalist of the Year.

Sincerely,

Valerie P. Kibler