

Clare Kirwan
221 Dixie Avenue
Harrisonburg VA, 22801
(540) 746-6608
claremadelin@gmail.com

February 6, 2023

Dear JEA Virginia Journalist of the Year selection committee members:

I first realized Kasey was unlike any other journalist or person I had met during the fall of my sophomore year. After a year of online school, I was nervous. I didn't know anyone in the program besides what their icons on the google meet screen looked like. When going to a pep rally early in the year, everyone in my class - most of whom were upperclassmen, got up and left. I was logging off my computer concerned who I would sit with at the gathering when I looked up and saw Kasey waiting for me with a smile. Kasey was the first to make me feel at home in the Newsstreak room. She never failed to make me feel like I had a purpose, a place there. I credit Kasey with making me feel welcome enough to be able to truly shine and reach my full potential in the program.

Every staff member on our team would have a similar story about Kasey. She is not only an incredibly talented writer, photographer and designer, but a strong leader. She tackles stress with more patience and compassion than any other person I know. She takes the time to meticulously edit work or offer feedback even if she has things to do herself. She has been the backbone of our program and the epitome of what we stand for as a journalism program over the past four years.

Just two weeks ago, Kasey stayed in the Newspaper room from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. editing and finishing every single page in our print issue due that week. She did so without uttering one complaint. She did not have to pick up the slack of other students and leaders in the class, or take five hours out of her day to edit making sure our special feature was up to par. She did so because that is who she is. Kasey is a hard worker. She has a passion for journalism and believes in what the students in our program are capable of.

Her work ethic is admirable, but I think her greatest strength lies in her ability to delegate. As a leader, I've struggled to ask for help. As a perfectionist, I've struggled to delegate tasks. Kasey does it effortlessly. She is responsive and always communicates deadlines or coverage opportunities on our editorial board group chat. She has spreadsheets full of content and design aspects to be split up among her mentees in ways she knows will fit their strengths. She provides support to anyone who asks, but asks for support herself when the work becomes overwhelming.

Even though I've only worked with Kasey for three years now, I consider her one of my closest friends. This past year, I've had the privilege of working under her as the managing editor of the yearbook. Through the late nights and early mornings of editing and designing, she has graciously offered me insights into the world of journalism. She doesn't complain when I ask her a question about a basic InDesign technique I've forgotten and never fails to acknowledge good work. It's one of the things I value about her the most. As an editor in chief and leader in the program, Kasey does not view herself as superior to her peers, but rather a mentor. She provides each student with advice unique to the qualities they possess and never fails to give a shout out to someone who does work she may not have thought to produce.

Last year I watched as Kasey wrote stories on the experience of trans students at our school, students whose families were fleeing Ukraine amidst the war and a tribute to a student who lost her four year battle with leukemia. Not only does her work inspire me to seek out the important stories, but it has restored my faith in the future of journalism. Anywhere her future takes her, they will be lucky to have someone with as much passion, dedication and kindness as Kasey.

I wholeheartedly recommend Kasey Thompson as the 2023 Virginia Student Journalist of the Year.

Sincerely,

Clare Kirwan