

Illinois Student Honored With International Award

Arlington, Va., March 1, 2020 — In February, **Jeremiah Morris** of Romeoville, Ill., received the **2020 Yes I Can Award** from the **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**.



Jeremiah is a 7-year-old who has mastered the use of an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device to communicate while dealing with autism.

At Robert C. Hill Elementary in the Valley View School District, he is part of a classroom with other kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade friends who have various abilities, ranging from minimally verbal to non-verbal, with diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorder, down syndrome, and physical impairments.

Kristen Anderson works with Jeremiah as his speech and language pathologist.

“Jeremiah is a very positive addition to his multi-needs special education classroom,” she says. “He came to us from another school district at the beginning of last year with a picture exchange communication book. Any high-tech AAC that had been tried at that point only proved to be a distraction for him.”

“As Jeremiah became more comfortable with our new school, staff, and academic setting, it became apparent that he had a lot he wanted to say but was unable to. This year, he came back ready to learn and participate fully, so we knew he would do well with a high-tech communication device. But, he completely exceeded everyone's expectations of just how well he would do.”

Jeremiah started using TouchChat on an iPad, even using other students' devices to communicate. This became apparent during community-based instruction, when Jeremiah took the iPad and began using it to supplement his speech when interacting with other community members while waiting to order his lunch.

“He was so excited to be able to communicate with others and be understood, and from there, he was off,” Anderson reports. “At the end of his device trial, Jeremiah was using his device to communicate over 80 percent of the time independently. We began to see a huge boom in his verbal output as well, which has led him to become a true leader in his classroom. He even lets his peers use his AAC device with him so they are learning right alongside him.”

Jeremiah also works hard at completing his daily school job, where he goes into classrooms in the building to talk with teachers and deliver their mail. According to Anderson, everyone eagerly awaits Jeremiah's daily mail delivery. In addition, he participated in his school's first annual Disability Awareness Fair, in which all third- through fifth-grade classrooms held rotations to simulate what it's like to live with various disabilities.



“Jeremiah is becoming a mini-celebrity around the school,” Anderson explains. “He wants to stop and talk with everyone he sees in the hallways. He also stands and says hello to every class that passes by and high fives every student, and they all return his greeting with a smile and his name.”

“His movement around the school has done wonders for other students as well, allowing them to become more comfortable and understanding of children who may be different than them. It has opened up the school to conversations about various abilities and what makes each person successful.”

CEC honored Jeremiah with this award in the Technology category. He received the award at the Yes I Can Award Ceremony on February 7, 2020, at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore., as part of the CEC 2020 Convention & Expo. The Yes I Can program recognizes the accomplishments of 12 students with exceptionalities in six categories: Academics, Arts, School & Community Activities, Self-Advocacy, Technology, and Transition.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the educational success of children and youth with exceptionalities that accomplishes its mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. Learn more about CEC at cec.sped.org.

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