

Naudia Bennett



I'm privileged to be able to introduce you to our next Courage Award Recipient – Naudia Bennett. Naudia is a junior at Marcos De Niza High School. She was nominated for this award by her art teacher, Reagan Guzman.

Ms. Guzman lights up when she talks about Naudia. Ms. Guzman shared Naudia has a medical condition called Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome, which is a rare form of epilepsy. At a young age, Naudia suffered many seizures which resulted in her having to learn to walk and speak again after having brain surgery in 2012. Naudia started the beginning of this last school year in a wheelchair with a paraprofessional by her side. Even though Naudia's days would be exhausting, she always came into art class with a smile on her face and attitude that let everyone know she was ready to learn.

This year has been like no other, especially for Naudia. Her resiliency shined through it all as evidenced by her ability to adapt to the circumstances of online learning. Naudia did not have a paraprofessional or an instructor by her side at home and had to navigate everything online independently. Naudia quickly started working toward understanding what she needed to do to complete her school tasks and continue participating in her classes. Not only did Naudia adapt with grace, she went above and beyond by requesting to meet with her teachers during office hours and lunch. She never shut down and she never gave up. Naudia had her challenges this school year, however, she never used her struggles as an excuse and always used her abilities to do her best on her assignments. Besides her work ethic, Naudia is a kind and considerate

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person to her peers and teachers. She is known for her thoughtfulness and compassion in the classroom.

Naudia had challenges that many of us will never understand. Even with those challenges, Naudia excelled in art class and created works of art that required extreme attention and focus to detail. She consistently demonstrated that her physical or intellectual disability were no match to her desire to learn and grow. Her drive is one of no other and with that drive she was able to grow as an artist.

Naudia shared she is very proud of her accomplishments and stated that she feels motivated by waking up every day and getting good grades. Outside of art, Naudia loves to color, practice her make up skills, and watch other make artist and their skill set. Naudia's goals are to become a model, go to college, continue learning how to do make up.

Naudia is inspired by her mother who is her biggest supporter in everything that she does. She would like to thank Ms. Guzman keeping her inspired through such tough times and for the nomination. Naudia is extremely happy to be Ms. Guzman's student and looks forward to art class every day. Naudia's resilient spirit, positive attitude and kindness toward others is truly inspiring. We can't wait to see what she achieves next – and we are so honored to present her with a 2021 Courage Award tonight.