

# Young Girl with *Big Dreams*



*"Optimist Club of West St. Paul's 2014 Essay Winners" photo by West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools. Reprinted with permission. Cassie Furlong, senior at Henry Sibley High School, 1st Place; Hayden Zeleny, 4th grader at Somerset Elementary School, 3rd place; Nick Footh, senior at Henry Sibley High School, 2nd place.*

Hayden Zeleny is a fourth grader from West St. Paul, Minnesota with a dream. She wants to be treated like a typical nine year old. Hayden was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and is committed to teaching others that people with disabilities should be treated just like everyone else. While her cerebral palsy is very mild on the scale, she has gross and fine motor delays and has undergone seven surgeries in her young life.

**"We taught her that you can't feel sorry for yourself. You just have to live your life and try your hardest,"** said Hayden's mother, Melissa Zeleny.

The Optimist Club of West St. Paul's annual essay contest provided a perfect chance for Hayden to share her message. Her family found the contest on a Facebook post from a reporter at a local newspaper.

Initially her mother was concerned about the number of rules involved, but Hayden was determined to enter an essay on **"How Dreams Lead to Success."**

"Her teacher told her she was a good writer and that gave her confidence," said Melissa. "She went into her room with her iPad and came back 45 minutes later. Within three days, she had her essay completely written."

Hayden received third place in the Club competition. The first and second place winners were both seniors in high school. She is the youngest contestant to be awarded a prize in the four years that the Optimist Club of West St. Paul has held the essay contest.

The Club conducted a student recognition night and invited the first, second and third place winners of their scholarship contest. The winners were encouraged to invite friends and family. In addition to her mother, brother and grandfather, Hayden invited her Special Education teacher and her best friend.