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University of Michigan or Duke University, where he plans to study mathematics or physics.

His main academic accomplishments: National Merit Finalist; Michigan Mathematics Prize Competition silver award winner; Presidential Scholars candidate; American Invitation Mathematics Examination invitee; Who's Who Among American High School Students and earning an academic letter.

When naming his most influential teacher, Elsey's memory surfed back to third grade, when his teacher was Kelly Loniewski.

"She put me on an accelerated track in math and made math the most interesting and even fun part of my education," Elsey said.

To improve public education, Elsey said, "I would encourage students and their families to take a more active role in the educational process."

Elsey is the son of Terry and Joanne Elsey and younger brother of Teresa, 19.

Anne Lieberman North Farmington High School Farmington Hills

Anne Lieberman, a North Farmington senior, shows through her extensive list of activities – and stellar transcripts – that there is more to being an excellent high school student than just getting good grades.

As a co-captain in varsity gymnastics, she helped lead her team to a "Most Spirited Team" award; participated in varsity cross country, varsity track and field and was a scholar athlete in all three sports.

Lieberman plans to attend the University of Michigan, where she has been admitted to the Honors Program. She plans to study biology and the sciences.

Her academic awards include National Merit Finalist; first place, Chemistry Fair; Department Merit Awards in honors geometry, honors pre-calculus AP English and AP biology and Girls' State delegate.

Lieberman said her most influential teacher was Michael Horner, math.

"...[Horner] believes that calculus should always be accompanied by music, and pretends that even he is befuddled by the higher math. It's a humorous ruse, but his brilliance is too obvious for it to be believable."

Lieberman said that ensuring teacher

qualifications is key to improving public education.

"I would improve public education by producing better teachers to instruct non-honors courses, because the excellent teachers are almost always in the honors track. I would also make the honors track more accessible to students."

Lieberman is the daughter of Rochelle and Joel Lieberman, and the sister of Miriam, 19, and Michael, 15.

Tekla Bude Canton High School Plymouth

Canton High School senior Tekla Bude is a student who will be following her heart when she goes to college this fall – even if that means not having her pick of well-paying jobs after graduation.

She made this sentiment clear when she listed physics and medieval history as possible fields of study at the University of Michigan – where she has been accepted into an honors program.

"Can you think of anything to do with a major in medieval history and physics?" Bude said, showing that she has a sense of humor about pursuing her dreams.

Bude's after-school hours are quickly filled as Girls' Track and Field captain; Elementary basketball coach; State Honors Choir; Plymouth-Canton School Renewal Committee; tutoring; cross country; basketball; Madrigals women's ensemble; church choir; private voice lessons; National Honor Society; German Club officer and Science Olympiad.

Academically, Bude is a National Merit Finalist; Presidential Scholar nominee; AP Scholar with honors and STARS Award winner, and has won both the Dean's Merit Scholarship to the University of Michigan and an MEAP scholarship.

Bude looked back a few years when picking Kurt Hoyer as her most influential teacher in fifth and sixth grade.

"...[Hoyer] has had the most influence on me, not only because he was an excellent teacher, but because his dedication to his duties and responsibilities was a great example for all his students. His attitude has inspired me to pursue every interest and obligation to the best of my abilities."

The key to improving public education lies in the mind, not in technology, Bude says.

"Before we concentrate on how many computers, automated attendance systems and self-flushing toilets we have in our public schools, we should work on creating a love of learning in each individual student."

Bude is the daughter of Ronald and Lois Bude and the sister of Thea, 16.

Adam Z. Kogut Churchill High School Livonia

For Churchill senior Adam Kogut, being a math whiz may add up to success as a college student studying math or engineering.

Kogut, a summa cum laude student, has won several math-related awards, including an American Mathematics Competition medal; and a bronze award and honorable mention in the Michigan Mathematics Prize Competition. Other academic accomplishments include a SIGMA gold medal; Continental Computer Competition recognition; AIME qualifier; National Merit Scholar qualifier and honor roll.

College prospects: University of Michigan, where he has been accepted in the College of Engineering; Michigan State University and Michigan Technological University, where he plans to study engineering or mathematics for a possible career in materials engineering.

After school, Kogut's pursuits include the Spanish Club; SADD; PTSA; Spirit Club; Math Club; Student Council representative; junior varsity tennis; junior varsity cross country; varsity tennis; varsity cross country and scholar athlete.

As someone who both loves and excels in math, it wasn't surprising to learn that Kogut's most influential teacher was math teacher Mary Buda.

"[Buda] has taught me for six semesters of mathematics, Algebra 2 through AP Calculus BC. She is an excellent teacher and a wonderful person."

Overhauling the grading system is the first step toward improving public education, Kogut says.

"Education can only take someone so far, and a 4.0 (grade point average) not even that far, (so) the resolve to succeed and excel is what is most important."

Another change Kogut said he would like to implement is bringing recess back to middle and high school students.

Kogut is the son of Cathy and Jimmy Kogut and the brother of Derek, 19, and Trevor, 14.

Bethany Nestor North Farmington High School Farmington Hills

North Farmington senior Bethany Nestor is proof that working behind the scenes can be just as important as working in the spotlight.

Nestor has worked behind the scenes as a head sound technician and lighting technician for several of North Farmington's theatrical productions. Other after-school activities include Student Council; Humanitarian Club; National Honor Society and varsity tennis captain.

Nestor plans to attend the University of Michigan, to pursue an undetermined field of study.

Her high school academic awards include Merit Awards in biology, social studies, physical education, foreign language and English; WLAA Scholar Athlete; Girls State delegate and National Merit Finalist.

Nestor said her most influential teacher has been Beverly Schmitt, who taught her sophomore chemistry class and teaches her AP chemistry class.

"[Schmitt's] exuberant energy and genuine love of teaching make even the most disinterested students enjoy her class," Nestor said.

As for improving public education, Nestor said the focus should be on reducing class size and changing standardized testing formats.

"I believe that students perform better in an environment where they receive a large amount of individual attention from a teacher," Nestor said.

"I also believe that standardized tests such as the MEAP should be reformatting in order to more effectively evaluate what students are actually learning in school."

Nestor is the daughter of Thomas and Susan Nestor and the sister of Megan, 15, and Melissa, 13.

Stacey Ann Schroeder Ladywood High School Commerce Township

As a Mercy High senior, Schroeder is

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Tekla Bude
Canton High School



Adam Z. Kogut
Churchill High School



Bethany Nestor
North Farmington High School



Stacey Ann Schroeder
Ladywood High School