

To: Dr. Weikle & The Board of Education
From: Angie Codron, Normal West High School Principal
Re: MLK 2025 Award Winner
Date: February 19, 2025

Normal West student, Benedicte Diamonika, has been announced as the 2025 Martin Luther King Junior Award recipient. She was honored on January 11, 2025 at the Bone Student Center on the campus of Illinois State University at the Town of Normal sponsored banquet. Recipients of this award must show 1) a demonstrated commitment to improving cooperation and fostering mutual respect among people of different racial, ethnic, religious, and other backgrounds and 2) have made an outstanding contribution in human relations in the City of Normal.

Special thanks to Dr. John Bierbaum, social studies teacher and building chair (and lots of other leadership things at West) for taking the time to complete the nomination for Benedicte. When the news came back from the Town of Normal about Benedicte being the chosen recipient, Dr. Bierbaum had forwarded me the email and then added, “Boom! No brainer.” Within the nomination for this award, Dr. Bierbaum writes a much more sophisticated reason as to why she is so deserving and I would like to share just part of that with you all this evening.



Benedicte is Vice President of the Black Student Union. She is the CAPTAIN of the Cheerleading team. She is the Vice President of the French Club, on the Senior Class Board, participates in the Student Council, is a member of our school's book club, participates in Girls Who Code (a STEM-related club), is in the orchestra, and runs on the Track and Field team during the Spring. Throughout so many of these capacities, Benedicte leads service learning projects in partnership with the Ecology Action Center, plays music for nursing homes throughout the holiday season, and works at our school's blood drives. Still, these accomplishments don't tell the whole story of what makes Benedicte Diamonika a special candidate for the Martin Luther King Jr award. Last year, Benedicte had an opportunity to be the "expert" - literally - as our Model United Nations club prepared for a summit based on the deep economic and social troubles of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). She had such a glow - educating us about her culture, her family's journey, and all things DRC. As Vice President of our school's Black Student Union, Benedicte uses all of these skills to advocate with passion for representation on the behalf of all students at our school and in our community.

Benedicte will also be the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) award recipient representing Normal West at the upcoming *Good Citizens Youth Awards Celebration* in March for all the obvious reasons already shared here today. Congratulations to Benedicte!

[Reminder: have Benedicte introduce her family; allow time for pictures]