



## **NJDOE News**

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**For Release: November 3, 2004**

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### **State Board Honors Courageous Role Model from Bergenfield, New Jersey**

The State Board of Education today recognized Stephen Castano, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student attending Roy W. Brown Middle School in Bergen County as its November Student of the Month.

Stephen has overcome many physical obstacles to attend school with the rest of his classmates and is achieving at the middle school beyond all expectations.

"Stephen Castano is an inspiration to both his fellow students at Roy W. Brown Middle school and to students all over NJ," said State Board President Arnold G. Hyndman. "Overcoming physical challenges to achieve academically is a tribute to Stephen's determination to conquer all obstacles in his way. We salute his strength and wish him continued success."

"I join the State Board in praising the accomplishments of Stephen and his support team," said Commissioner William L. Librera. "Through sheer personal tenacity and resolution, Stephen has exceeded all expectations. By working with his support team and his school's staff and student body, Stephen has beaten the odds and will continue to do so."

Stephen Castano was born with Morquio Syndrome, which is an inherited disease belonging to the group of mucopolysaccharide storage diseases. Those stricken with the malady may experience difficulty with vision, walking problems related to abnormal curvature of the spine, abnormal neck bones that can cause spinal cord damage, and breathing problems.

During the summer between his 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year, Stephen suffered medical complications that caused him to be hospitalized for most of the school year. These complications had the effect of a stroke and caused severe physical deterioration. He had to use a ventilator and still uses a tracheotomy tube to breathe. Stephen was also plagued with a decline in his mental abilities and fatigue.

Stephen received home instruction after his release from the hospital and started to regain his cognitive abilities. His team and began to prepare Stephen for his return to school in the spring of 2003. Upon his return to school, Stephen's mood brightened, his enthusiasm increased, and he achieved academic success. With the love and support of his family, team and school, Stephen has made it back and continues to inspire countless others.

Each month during the school year, the State Board recognizes a student or group of students for accomplishments in community service, the arts, academics, personal achievement and sports. In October, the State Board honored Kelci Kile, a senior at Absegami High School of the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School district in Atlantic County.