

National ACE Student of the Year:

Ayden Leal

**Nominated by Teacher, Melanie Justice
Creekside Elementary Livingston, TX**

***T*eacher, Melanie Justice, nominated fifth grade student, Ayden Leal. She did not write the usual recommendation. In fact, her comments start with “he talks too much.” It ends with a teacher who recognizes a child who has so much on his mind that “he talks too much” about his passions and his dreams. Talking too much about aviation hooked this teacher on the coat tails of this student where she hangs on conversations with him. It looks as if they make a perfect pair!!**

His write-up and photos follow...

“Ayden can't stop talking. Even in the Physical Education classroom, he can't stop talking. He is a busy, bubbly fifth grader. I've been teaching him for the past three years. In previous years, most of our conversations were about expected behavior.

Since finding common ground, our love of aviation, we have had many conversations about everything aviation. Every day. The conversation begins as soon as he gets off the bus. Ayden talks about what plane he is reading about, what game he played, or what plane he is going to draw next. He describes planes I've never heard of. The conversation continues when he comes to P.E. class. I see him again when he leaves to get on his bus. He shares drawings and colorings of some of his favorite planes. In October, his grandparents took him to the *Wings Over Houston* airshow. He was on cloud nine for weeks following the event. We discussed the Snowbirds and F-22 Raptor for days. His favorite plane is the F-14 Tomcat. Last week it was the P-51 Mustang.

Leading up to his birthday, he shared with me his birthday plans. He wants to go to the *Lone Star Flight Museum* in Houston. The main reason for going is to fly the Redbird simulators. He knew what exhibits were at the museum and he knew what type of simulators they had.

Ayden is in my P.E. class and in my Aerospace Connections in Education (ACE) class. I have several aerospace-minded students in class. However, Ayden is the Top Gun. He looks forward to every class. He hasn't missed a Thursday this year! At the beginning of class (ground school), I always ask the class, "Where are we flying today?" The students have flight logbooks to fill out for every class. The students are responsible for deciding on a destination (airport code) to fly to each week. I can usually count on Ayden to have a destination. He asks for extra information regarding specific lessons. He asks challenging questions. The students listen when he speaks. Ayden shines in aerospace class. When discussing the space shuttle, we formed small groups to assemble a 3D space shuttle pattern made from cardstock. It was much harder than the students expected. After completing the task over two days, his group had the best shuttle. Ayden requested an extra set of prints for his own personal use. Granted. His science teacher thinks he will become an engineer someday and I agree.”

Congratulations, Ayden!

You epitomize the heart, mind and spirit of a true ACE student! CAP is proud of you and hopes you become a CAP cadet! There you can learn more about your love of aviation and even find a pathway to become an aerospace engineer or pilot or astronaut. The world is yours when you dream big!!





