



Science/Engineering Magnet High School



Blue Ribbon School 2005-2011



To whom it may concern:

Jordan has a lot on her mind and more on her plate. When I met her, she didn't: she was 14, a freshman in my English class, and absolutely irrepressible. She was game for anything: she made friends with everyone, she joined clubs, and started one when she saw a need. She aced every assignment and always turned in homework that showed careful, thoughtful work. She found a boyfriend, and then found out she was better off without him. She was a firecracker, and clearly among the strongest in her class.

It was clear, then, why she was good with chaos: she lived in a tiny little house with her parents and four sisters, and when a baby brother (finally) appeared during her freshman year, she rolled with that, too: my own son is just a year or so older, and she and I would commiserate about teething and late nights and diapers. From those conversations, I realized that Jordan has the gift and burden of being a practical, sympathetic person—sympathetic enough to be driven to help those in need, and practical enough to see what can be done. So when her mom struggled with a house full of babies and a job, it was always Jordan who put down her homework to go get dinner started or to wipe a snotty nose or to fold a load of laundry. The older girls had their sights on the big world and the younger ones were too little to help—it tended to fall on her.

It was clearly a house with a lot of love and not quite enough resources, and while she had more responsibilities than I wished, I mostly admired how well she handled it.

All that changed spring of her sophomore year when her father died. Being a teacher means watching this happen once every few years. The emotional impact is, of course, brutal, but usually it's relatively simple: the issue is grief, and time does help. But they have *six children in the house*, 3 not yet in school, and that's not a simple problem. It's a world of responsibility and expense, and it's not something that time can soothe. I cried when I realized she was working part time, because I know how hard she works at school, and I could imagine the grind of her life each day—from the minute she wakes up until she goes to bed, there is an endless need for a pair of hands at home, and then she goes to school to face a brutal academic schedule. Adding a shift at a fast food restaurant before heading home to juggle toddlers and preschoolers and to somehow get her homework done seemed beyond all reason—but the reason was the simple economic need to avoid being a burden on the family, and to help out with some other expenses. I hugged her when she managed to save up enough to quit during AP exams season. I felt like a weight lifted off me—even the sympathy weight was rough—what was the real one like? Of course, she went right back to work when school let out, and when she went back and asked for her job back, they promoted her to shift manager. She spent the summer running a crew of adult full-time fast food workers, and she saved enough to be able to quit for the school year.

I could not do what Jordan does. But she does it. Every damn day. I don't know that it ever occurs to her that she could let anything go—she passed most of her sophomore AP exams a month after burying her dad, and had an even stronger performance her junior year despite having no time to even think. She never misses an assignment, and I wish they looked more rushed, because I'd feel less guilty about assigning them. Her grades have stayed good—not as good as they would have been, I think, but good—and she's continued to take the most challenging course load we offer, including the marathon AP Physics/AP Chemistry course we call SuperLab. She's heavily involved with YWISE, a STEM research program through the University of Texas at Dallas. More tellingly, she's maintained a social life—she keeps up with her friends, worries about their problems, gossips about boys, and never, ever complains. She still makes it to meeting of the Girl Club she helped found, to dances and to socials. She still indulges in blue or pink hair dye when she can. She's still a vital part of our community.

But she always looks tired to me, and a little underfed, and it breaks my heart every day.

Jordan is my favorite in that group—she was extraordinary before, and the tragedy of her sophomore year has tempered her into steel. I want, so desperately, for her to have a chance to go away, to apply all that strength and creativity and initiative to changing the world instead of to serving customers and wiping snotty noses. Jordan will be fine, regardless—she's proved that these last two years. But we as a society need the kind of person she will grow into if placed into an environment that will point her talents towards targets worthy of them.

She carries my absolute strongest recommendation. I am sure there is some concern that she might have family obligations that will keep her from being able to accept a place in a residential program, but I've discussed logistics with her and her mother and I am confident that the family is prepared to live without her in the immediate household. I do expect she will have to work in the summers. If you have any other questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
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Ms. Tiffany R. Huitt, Principal

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