

## Looking back over your high school career, what would your message to your School Board be on improving the education of those who follow you?

My message to the board would be that involvement is the key to success. If a student is struggling, the best way to improve their education is by helping them to make connections and feel like they belong. Once they understand that the school is a safe place and a home, then they will reach out to get the help they need and apply themselves to their fullest potential.

I experienced this my freshman year as I struggled to find my place. When I first entered high school, I did not think that I wanted to participate in cheerleading. I decided that I wanted to play volleyball, but really I was just trying to follow my friends and volleyball was not my passion. I tried out, but to my great disappointment I got cut. My one activity that I had been counting on to determine my identity in high school was gone. I was completely crushed, all my friends had found their place, but not me. I felt left out and alone. Thankfully my mom was there to remind me that high school is a new beginning and I forced myself to move on. Next, I decided that my calling must be drama because some of my other friends were doing it. That year the theater department was performing Romeo and Juliet, so I memorized a monologue the night before auditions and went for it. I didn't do great, but convinced myself that this was it. Unfortunately once again, I was cut and did not get a role in the play. At this point I was miserable and confused. Everyone is supposed to find themselves in high school and I just couldn't seem to do it. Then a few weeks later the cheerleading squad had a second set of tryouts. I had never heard of them doing this before and felt like it was just for me. None of my close friends were on the squad, but I decided to go for it anyway. Thankfully, this time I made the team and jumped in head first. I loved cheerleading and realized that it didn't matter what my friends were doing, just that I was happy and involved. Not only did I love cheer, but I thrived there. By basketball season I became captain and I have held a leadership role ever since. I finally found my place and I am so grateful that I did.

After this I started to throw myself into other groups, too. I joined Student Council, National Honor Society, Junior Executive Committee, and Students on the Go. The more I got involved, the happier I was and the more I felt that I belonged at the school. Now, one of my greatest joys is when I see underclassman getting involved and pouring out their heart into their activities. It is inspiring to see others in these clubs work passionately toward a goal and band people together. This is what I want the School Board to know. Involved students are successful students. Extracurricular activities allow them to unleash their full potential and make their mark on the world. It engages them in their school work and makes them feel like they are part of the school. The best environment for learning is where everyone feels like they have a place and a purpose and are supported by those around them.