

Growing up in a single-parent, low-income household, I had to be grateful for the limited opportunities I was afforded. The challenging experiences I faced motivated me to provide not only for my family but for the greater community.

My mom helped kickstart my life of service at a young age through participation in the Boy Scouts of America, the New Jersey Clean Communities program, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These organizations taught me the importance of civic engagement. From an early age, I understood that this is our world, and we are responsible for protecting it. As a Boy Scout, I completed a final service project that helped me attain the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in scouting. My service project revolved around the beautification and restoration of the outside areas of one of the local elementary schools. Even though it was completed 4 years ago, my project still positively impacts the lives of the students, parents, teachers, and staff at John F. Kennedy Elementary School in South Plainfield, NJ.

After graduating high school in 2019, I moved to Pennsylvania to attend a small private college about two hours from my hometown. During my first semester, I was active in student life as an athlete on the wrestling team and as a member of several organizations on campus. However, I felt like something was missing. As the fall semester wrapped up, I decided it was best for me to transfer to a school closer to home so I could be closer to the community that supported me throughout my life.

Once the spring semester of 2020 started, I was enrolled at Middlesex College. Like all college students, I felt that my college experience changed forever due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we were forced into a virtual learning model, I did not let that stop me from leaving my mark. I knew I was already accomplishing the unthinkable as a first-generation college student, but my determination led to earning Dean's list recognition and an invitation to join the school's honors society, Phi Theta Kappa. Not only did I join the society, but I volunteered on the executive board as a philanthropy chair, where I helped host several donation drives for books, feminine hygiene products, and canned goods. Although we were in the midst of a pandemic, I spearheaded various initiatives where we were able to provide items to support those in need. At Middlesex, I reconnected with my NAACP community as a member of the executive board, serving as the Young Adults Chair. In this role, I have hosted various events, including our annual Juneteenth celebration and our young adult panels.

In 2021, I graduated from Middlesex College with the highest honors and transferred to Rutgers University-New Brunswick to further my academic studies. After graduating, I knew I wanted to do more to give back to my community, so I successfully ran for my town's Board of

Education against the three incumbents. In January 2022, I was officially sworn into office as the youngest person and the first male of color to ever serve on the board in the town's history. So far, during my tenure on the board, I have reviewed curriculums and addressed inclusivity concerns, helped hire special law enforcement officers in all of our schools to ensure safety, and most recently approved a new preschool building to address the overcrowding of our classroom spaces. In this role, I serve as an advocate for taxpayers, students, teachers, and staff members. When I vote on any agenda item, I do not just vote on behalf of myself but also for every individual who is affected by this change. The community that has supported me throughout my adolescent years is the same community that I fight for every single day.

I dove head-first into the Rutgers community once I landed on campus. I joined various organizations, including the Scarlet Council, the Mark Conference team, Thrive Student Support Services, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement program. My on-campus commitments allow me to enrich my knowledge to greater impact the lives of others. As a member of the Scarlet Council, I connect current students with alumni to help them see themselves in various roles in their future careers. As a leader for the Mark Conference, I handpicked guests of diverse backgrounds to speak to an audience of more than 250 participants to help encourage them to leave their mark on society. As a peer mentor for Thrive Student Support Services, I provide coaching and support to more than 30 students during their acclimation to Rutgers University. Lastly, as a McNair Scholar, I was able to develop a passion for research that I will be exploring next year in graduate school. My research interests focus on education policy and the factors that encourage or deter students in a pre-K-12 school district to pursue postsecondary learning. I am grateful that Rutgers was able to provide me with all of these incredible opportunities.

Now, as a graduating senior, I can reflect on how my lived experiences reflect not only my personal aspirations but the aspirations of others. Whenever I am unavailable to attend community events, my mom will attend on my behalf. Whether it is at one of the elementary schools in town or the senior center, she comes home with an enormous smile on her face, and I ask her what happened. She responds with, "It's you. Everybody that I talk to tells me how proud they are of you." That is the kind of community that surrounds me: A community that cares. What I do isn't only for me. I do it for my brothers and sisters, family and friends, strangers, and future generations. In everything that I do in life, I approach it with the same model: it is bigger than me.