

Like June Nelson, I have had the pleasure of serving on a school board. Last spring, at the annual meeting of high school student councils, I was elected by the students to be our representative. My first school board meeting was on the Seward High School stage. The minute I sat in my seat behind the little microphone and the nameplate that said, "Student Representative Maggie Grenier," I was hooked. Nothing in my educational experience had influenced the direction in my life like my time on the school board.

Building community has been a goal of mine in high school. After Covid, it was especially evident that we needed to consciously come back together and start making connections. While many people might not find school board meetings fun, I enjoy the school presentations and the time spent listening to and working with the public. I love the passion people bring. Their local schools mean so much to them and our funding and staffing problems can seem insurmountable. However, it is when we come together with all sides represented, that we can solve these problems. This listening practice and collaboration have taught me so much not only about my community, but about myself and who and what I want to be.

It inspires me to work alongside nine other board members that care as much as I do and are willing to teach and mentor me. I was able to represent their voice and my own at the Alaska School Board Conference in Juneau. Being in a room full of people that felt that same energy and determination for change was electric. In Juneau we spent an entire day educating ourselves on current policy and learning to be advocates for education. We then spent two days putting these lessons into practice. Speaking with legislators in the capitol building, we shared the beauty and hardships of our state's education, the dire need for more funding, and stated clearly that without the increase in funding, our state would lose so

much. In my testimony to the Senate Committee on Education I said, "It is *us* this state will lose," referring to the next generation of Alaskans. During one conversation with a representative he told us "he had never thought of it like that before." Those few words were one of the biggest accomplishments of the trip.

The last day we were in Juneau, the rest of my team was rightfully exhausted, but I didn't want to stop. I walked around knocking on doors and shaking hands until I found someone who would listen to me. I sat down with the secretary of the Senate President after chasing her down a hallway. At the end of our conversation I told her I would be back and she said, "I believe you will." I am enrolled with the University of Alaska, Southeast and will start with 36 college credits. To become a future leader of Alaska I need to be where the action is. I plan to pursue a degree in political science and intern with the Ted Stevens program in the capitol building working side by side with our legislators. I will walk those marble steps into the capitol building again. I may not know my exact job title, but one day I would like to work with others to create and implement effective policies.

While I have saved every PFD, birthday gift of money and every paycheck, I still do not have enough money for the level of education I am seeking. I am very frugal and will use the scholarship money I receive wisely. Investing this scholarship in me, is investing in positive leadership for Alaska's future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

This was all solidified when I was able to attend the AASB fly-in. I loved talking about the history of education in Alaska to current public policy and it was a privilege to speak with so many of our caring educators, students and administrators from around the state. After spending the day speaking in twenty minute meetings with many lawmakers, the rest of my group was pretty tired. However, the experience filled me with energy. As the hallways were getting more quiet, I chased down the secretary for the Senate President to try and catch one more meeting that I could advocate for education in Alaska. The Senator had long gone home but I told her I would be back. She said, "I believe you will."