

# Black Horse Pike Regional School District

## Spotlight on Alumni Spotlight – DECEMBER 2020



### HAILEY D'ELIA, CO 2017

*"Hailey D'Elia is a senior at Rowan University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Sociology with a Certificate of Undergraduate Study in Social Justice and Social Change. This summer, Hailey had the opportunity to intern for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) Foster Youth Internship (FYI) COVID-19 Pandemic Working Group where she along with her cohort explored how COVID-19 is impacting the United States foster care system. This opportunity allows youth voice with lived experience to influence policymakers on ways to support foster youth and strengthen the child welfare system during and after the pandemic. The Foster Youth Interns have presented their congressional report "Seeing Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Creating Change for Vulnerable Children and Families" to members of Congress and their staff, the White House Domestic Policy Council as well as the First Lady of the United States, Health and Human Services, and the private sector. D'Elia is thrilled to participate in the program again next summer, where she will intern for a member of congress and write another congressional report.*

*Hailey has worked as a Youth Ambassador with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Office of Resource Families speaking to foster parents and case workers about her experience in care and addressing misconceptions of youth in care. She is also a member of the Youth Advisory Council which works directly with the DCF Commissioner to identify issues within the system and offer possible solutions. Hailey's advocacy work led her to volunteer with Camp to Belong, a camp that reunites siblings who have been separated through the foster and adoptive system. Hailey's first-hand experiences and passion for reforming the child welfare system are a driving force behind her plans to pursue a family law degree and a Masters in Social Work. After law and graduate school, Hailey would like to work on child welfare policy in Washington D.C."*

*~ Kimberly O'Callaghan, School Counselor, Timber Creek HS*

**1. AA: Upon graduation, what post-secondary path did you take and why?**

***Hailey:** I decided to go to Rowan University to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and a Masters of Arts in STEM Education. I wanted to become a high school math teacher because my high school math teachers had such an impact on my life.*

**2. Looking back, would you have done anything differently and why?**

***Hailey:** I wish I had gotten into advocacy sooner and that I felt more comfortable leaving education sooner when I knew it was no longer the path for me.*

**3. AA: Describe your career/profession today?**

***Hailey:** I am a foster youth advocate on the state level through my Youth Advisory Council, Youth Ambassadorship, the National Foster Youth Institute New Jersey Chapter, and Camp to Belong, and on the federal level through the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute Foster Youth Internship. As a Foster Youth intern, I have been able to write a Congressional Report on how COVID-19 is impacting the U.S. foster care system and present to members of Congress, the White House Domestic Policy Council, the First Lady, and Health and Human Services. After I graduate with my BA in Mathematics and Sociology this spring, I will be in Washington D.C. to intern for a member of Congress and write another Congressional Report with my fellow Foster Youth Interns. I plan to attend graduate school this fall so I can pursue child welfare policy full time. I hope to work on federal child welfare policy in Washington D.C. after graduate school.*

**4. AA: What impact did your BHP high school have on your career path/profession?**

***Hailey:** Although I've graduated almost four years ago, I've kept in contact with my teachers. They've guided and supported me through all of the craziness of college and my career path. Child welfare policy is a very niche field but they've always encouraged me to follow my dreams and pursue what is meaningful to me.*

5. **AA:** Were there specific teacher(s), coach(es), counselor(s), administrator(s), secretary(ies), or other professionals that had a major impact on you while in school, and if so, who were those professionals and describe how they helped you along your HS journey.

*Hailey:* Yes, Ms. Loring, Ms. Reilly (now Mrs. O'Callaghan), Mr. Gratton, Mr. Terruso and Mrs. Sauer (the Title I math tutors) to name a few! They really helped me through some of the most difficult times in my life before and during foster care. They were always there to listen and offer helpful advice. I think most of all my teachers and coaches taught me how to show up for others in difficult situations.

6. **AA:** Which school clubs, sports, activities, etc., if any, did you participate in when you attended your BHP high school? If so, were there any moments or experiences that you can recall that helped you become the person you are today?

*Hailey:* I was co-captain of the field hockey team. I was also on the swim team and I participated in the chorus. These experiences taught me how to be a team player, cultivate meaningful relationships, and instilled important leadership skills that I use every day.

7. **AA:** Please share any other favorite memories of the Black Horse Pike Regional School District, your HS in particular, that would inspire today's youth?

*Hailey:* I have a lot of good memories of Highland but one that I distinctly remember is at the end of my senior year a few weeks before graduation a group of seniors from my AP Literature class were all sitting around Mrs. Brady's classroom at Tartan Time singing because one of my friends had brought in his ukulele. It was when the year was really winding down and we had more time to spend with one another. It's just a nice memory to reflect back on.

**8. What advice would you give to our current student body? What would you have done differently in high school if you could turn back time?**

**Hailey:** *It sounds cheesy but you are capable of anything you set your mind to with hard work and determination. In my experience, if something doesn't work out, something better usually falls into place. I've had my fair share of redirections in life but they have led me to where I am today. Don't be afraid to ask for help along the way if you need it, not just in school but in life. If you plan on attending college or trade school, apply to all of the scholarships you can your junior and senior year. You never know what you could get unless you try. If I could turn back time I would have definitely taken advantage of more dual credit classes. \$150 in high school sounds like a lot of money but it pales in comparison to what you pay for a class in college. Some of my textbooks are \$150 or more for one class now to put it into perspective. I would have just paid for those to fill up more of my general education courses in college to make room for major specific or special interest courses.*