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Reflection Essay One

I am part of the group known as "Old LALA". We are the group of students who attended Los Angeles Leadership Academy Middle School during sixth grade and have continued attending LALA despite drastic geographic change. Before my first day of school as a sixth grader, on orientation day, I was introduced to what a scholar, creator, and activist are and how this school would help me become one or perhaps all three. The eight of us who remain from that original group have experienced multiple views of social justice and a variety of administrative expectations. Over those seven years of attending LALA, I can assert that I have had the privilege of being a leader with the qualities of scholar, creator, and activist.

As I stepped into sixth grade, I realized that I did not know anyone in this school. All of my friends from elementary school went to the local public school, John Leichty, while I came to an unknown charter school in Korea Town. I felt extremely awkward wearing straight-legged khaki pants and a black polo shirt because everyone else was wearing the exact same thing. This was completely different from my elementary school where everyone had a distinct outfit every day.

After receiving my class schedule, I ran to the restroom as I felt I was on the verge of having an anxiety attack. The thought of walking into an enormous room full of students I did not know and receive a lecture from a teacher that would probably not remember my name made me uneasy. It took me about five minutes before I was able to stop shaking and actually go to my assigned classroom. I clumsily opened the door and flung into the room. I was shocked. There were three other students in the classroom and the teacher was sitting on a desk. Little did I know that my first period consisted of only four students! The teacher led us through several ice-breakers where we all got to know each other rather quickly. My greatest surprise was discovering we were to address all of the teachers and staff at the school by their first name. I felt fairly comfortable and was excited to see how my next class would be.

Once I was given a quick tour of the school and knew the boundaries of LALA and of the church it was attached to, three teachers joined their classes to form a rather larger group. Yet, it did not exceed eighteen students. Here we were all told about the mandala awards we will be learning and practicing throughout the school year. This was the moment when I truly found out what it means to be a leader and why it is important in our community. After that class, I knew that this was no ordinary school. This is where everyone knew everyone, teachers not only knew your name but also your personality, students were always there for each other, and your advisory became your family. I did not just move schools, I embarked on a journey to find my identity where help was always available.

Seven years have passed now, and I can truly say I have changed because of LALA. Not only was I able to excel academically, I learned about social issues of which I was unaware and found ways to give back to our community. Reflecting on these past years before embarking on senior year made me realize that it was time for me to give back to this school. I was no longer going to be the short, shy girl that stuttered when greeting others; I was now going to take initiative and make my school a better place. Consequently, I took it upon myself to become ASB President and give back to this school: organizing school events, field trips, competitive activities, and being the voice of the students.

I have been able to push my limits as a scholar and constantly try my best in assignments. From making poster board presentations of a plant cell to writing six-page research papers on the theme of Brave New World, I can truly say that my capacity of a scholar has grown. I have always been in Gold Honor Roll, have received a perfect score on the CAHSEE, have taken four AP classes during my senior year, and will ultimately graduate as valedictorian. Having access to teacher office hours, various teaching styles, and a small student-teacher ratio has greatly impacted my academic result at LALA.

As a creator, I have been allowed to free my abstract mind and develop critical thinking skills. My artistic skills have greatly developed alongside my creator qualities, and I can depict my growth with two works of art that I have made. When I was in sixth grade I can remember having my first art-related project. After learning about cave paintings or parietal art of the homo sapiens, we had to create our own artwork that symbolized us. I sketched on my poster board for hours until I completely outlined my detailed drawings. This now had to be approved by the teacher so we can then obtain the watercolors she facilitated for us to paint our poster. She immediately told me I would not use the watercolors because she thought it was impossible for me to paint all of the small details. I took this as a challenge and told her if I did not meet the deadline I would submit to a punishment of her choosing. Having two weeks of detention on the line, I immediately go to work. I successfully completed my poster and received a perfect score on it for craftsmanship. My art skills have developed from using Dollar World water colors on a poster project to using Prismacolor pencils, charcoal, acrylic paint, pastels and various media to complete twenty-four art assignments for my AP Studio Art: 2-D Design Portfolio.  LALA not only nurtured my left brain with knowledge but also enhanced the creativity of my right brain.

Possessing scholarly and creative capabilities, I must not only use it for my personal need but also for the benefit of others. Being aware of my capabilities, I have actively volunteered at The Salvation Army Youth & Community Center, organized two blood drives on campus in collaboration with the Children's Hospital Los Angeles, held a canned food drive prior to Thanksgiving, organized Cesar Chavez day where students and staff dedicated the day to giving back to the community, and various other activist events. The constant instruction of social justice and giving back to our community has empowered me to be actively involved in my community, and I will continue doing so throughout college and persistently in my future.

My perspective on my community and the world has greatly been impacted by the mandala awards I learned about in sixth grade. I aspire to do great things now and strongly believe I will accomplish it because I have been prepared well at LALA. After this year, all of "Old LALA" will be gone, and I know the school will continue having the social justice environment I was introduced to in sixth. Through my journey of becoming a scholar, creator, and activist, I have been able to grow as a student and as a person.