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My Name Is...

by Brandon Constantin

Tolerance-*“the ability to accept, experience, or survive something harmful or unpleasant.”*
-Merriam-Webster.

My Name? What kind of question is that? It was one of those questions that I always hated getting. Why should people know my name? I was some kid that sat at his desk thinking of other worlds just beyond my reach. There was nothing special about me. I seemingly blew through school with passing grades and barely learned a thing. Before my epiphany, it was the world's fault that I did not do well in school and everyone was to blame except for me.

I was walking down the hallway of my new high school, “9th grade” I thought to myself. I first noticed that new school smell and then I saw all the students lining up for their classes. When I came into my advisory class, I was concerned about how bright it was in the classroom, It was still dark outside, and the room was lit like a hospital office. We were told as a class that we had "Standard Based Grading" which in part tests on skill rather than content. I was excited already because I sucked at memorizing things. My teacher continued and said that for every class we would have a practice test of sorts in order to see what we know. This new system of grading was beneficial to me. I eventually started winning for the first time in my life, I felt as if I could achieve anything that I put my mind to. It was not the school itself that changed my mind, but rather the teachers and mentors that encouraged and challenged me every step of the way.

It was one class in particular that changed my perspective in a radical way. AP World History was the only “advanced” course we as freshmen could take. I always loved history. It did not matter if it was about the evolution of ships or Roman conquest of germanic tribes. All of it fascinated me. When I heard that we could take this course I said to myself “it will just be like any other class. What is the worse that could happen?” When I stepped into the classroom on that first day, I saw that the same bright hospital lighting, like all the other classrooms. I guess I just had to get used to it. Furthermore, the teacher introduced himself and without hesitation talked about the challenge this class would present. He said that if we could not handle hard work to leave then. Nevertheless, my classmates did not heed his advice and one by one people dropped out because the course was too difficult and “stress-inducing.” At the start of the year we had a sizable class of twenty-six students but at the end, we had only thirteen, half of what we started with. My teacher explained the course as follows “ If this class has not made you cry yet, then you are not doing it right.” I loved the challenge of it all. It was very inspirational for me. My teacher made it in such a way that only those that actually cared about the subject and did their work prospered. In a sense, I learned how to actually manage my time and develop my work ethic just from this one class. I learned what all the students that dropped the class did not. I learned how to work hard and persevere. Every week we had to read and take notes out of our textbook. This taught me to do my assigned studies and not to procrastinate. We had big projects as well. Many a night I had to work on an AP World

project in order to get a good grade. I learned the hard way how to focus on my work and how to break down a large task into digestible bites.

These in themselves are excellent skills, and they all worked together in order for me to excel in other areas. Since I did a huge amount of homework for AP history all the other homework seemed easy by comparison. My parents thought they would never see the day. I always thought that one has to be born exceptionally intelligent in order to succeed in life, but I realized that there is a certain kind of genius to everyone that just needs to be awakened.

Just because I took a college course once that does not mean that I am set for life. The opposite is true. AP World History opened my eyes to the challenges. The secret is hard work. With this new mindset, I limited distractions at home and cut TV and video games out of my weekdays. I started eating healthier and exercised regularly. I went above and beyond in every other class that I was in and to my surprise for both semesters of that year I had a straight 4.0-grade average.

I owe an unpayable debt to my mentors and teachers that taught me how to prepare for my future. The future of my education (ie college) and the career I will one day pursue depends on how well I learn now. In order to be prepared to succeed in life, one must have honesty and a good work ethic and my belief is that charter schools are one of the only places that encourage both. Now that I obtained these essential qualities I am ready to take on whatever is thrown at me. I am so thankful that I have the opportunity to go to a good school. I will be forever grateful to my teachers and mentors who made it possible for me to succeed in life.