**Scholarship Essay**

“Are you nervous or scared?”

These questions were asked of me in the eighth grade, a time when all of my conversations with peers were centered around high school. I knew that this question, asked by a close friend, had a hidden message that she was unwilling to say. Unluckily, others were undeterred by the need for tact.

“Are you afraid you’re going to get shot?”

This question was asked because of the school I was assigned to attend. West Charlotte High School was known for being low performing, crime-ridden, and segregated by race and class. West Charlotte was unlike any school I had attended. I have witnessed multiple students getting dragged out of the cafeteria in handcuffs or surrounded by cops on campus for dubious suspicions of crimes. My peers have been subjected to baseless bag checks in the middle of class. I can recall countless times when student movement has been prohibited on campus due to threats to our safety. During a rare field trip opportunity, my peers and I were followed by a dozen police officers because we looked “suspicious.” In the classroom, we experience inferior conditions when compared to students at different schools in our district. Few advanced courses are offered, and teacher turnover is rampant as educators quickly become frustrated with the conditions of our school.

I knew that I wanted to change the circumstances around me. First, I strove to be a model student. I took advantage of the limited course offerings at my school and filled my schedule with International Baccalaureate classes. As an IB ambassador I prepare underclassmen to do the same. Next, I wrote about my experiences of educational inequity in the largest publication in the Carolinas. My writing has brought me to the stage of the largest theater in Charlotte. I have represented my peers on several news platforms. I have spoken on panels with Board of Education members, civil rights activists, local politicians, and leaders of educational organizations such as Teach For America. As a speaker for the local organization Community Building Initiative, I promote partnerships between companies and Title I schools. All of this work is fueled by my desire to create a more equitable education system.

While I am proud to be a representative of my school, I know that most of my peers also have compelling stories to tell. This year, I established my school’s student-led newspaper. This newspaper has given my peers a place to share their creative writing and art. I also include a student assignment spotlight, to ensure that my peers are getting recognition for their hard work in the classroom. This newspaper encourages my peers to develop their writing skills and identify their academic interests. I take pride in knowing that my contribution has shown my peers that they have powerful voices that deserve to be heard. Obtaining higher education will allow me to continue uplifting voices and fighting for educational equity in a professional setting.