

Tyler Dunn

When I came to PA Leadership I viewed school as something I was required to do. A lot of changes were taking place in my life; not the smallest of which being changing schools. I was frightened and beyond apprehensive about what was to come. I had never heard of a cyber school before my mother's decision to enroll me in the Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School.

The first day of my attendance to PA Leadership was full of mixed emotions. I found myself actually missing my former school and the people that had surrounded me there. I didn't believe I had made the right choice to go along with this decision. The work was educational enough, but I was still skeptical.

A few weeks went by and my attitude was slowly improving. The school was proving to offer more than I thought it would. I found myself attending class chats and becoming somewhat acquainted with teachers and my fellow students.

Two years into my experience I selected Journalism as an elective. I was a sophomore now and felt comfortable enough in my cyber setting to start doing a little beyond just completing my assignments. When I first started the Journalism course, I was amazed. Even after a couple of school years at PALCS, I was pleasantly surprised at how deep and legitimately important writing for the school paper felt. The team work and structure of the class rivaled anything I'd gone through in my traditional school experience.

The following school year, I was convinced to join Student Government. Thinking back on it now, I feel silly at how nervous I was to just attend my first 'formal meeting'. I became a Student Government Senator shortly after.

I worked behind the scenes on several projects throughout the remainder of the year all culminating in my first trip with the class. We went to Harrisburg to lobby State Representatives in support of cyber charter schools. This was when I started to realize that what I was experiencing wasn't typical. My school was truly providing me with something special; something more. That thought inspired **me** to strive to be more than typical.

Coming into my senior year I had high expectations for myself and the school. I was hoping I could accomplish some exceptional things during my final campaign. I can say that I haven't been disappointed.

Student Government proved to quickly become the focal point of my learning through PALCS. I was no longer getting an education exclusively through books, papers and assignments - but instead through personal experience. I was taking action and using my educational resources to a height at which until now I didn't think they could be used.

In February I attended the Student Leadership retreat. There, I along with my classmates and friends spent almost our entire time devouring information on how to become better leaders, followers; people.

My service project for Student Leadership evolved into 'Mission: Green'. A plan we devised to make a difference in the amount of energy consumed by households throughout the state. The stories we heard about what people did during our 'blackout', the promotional events we held prior to the attempt and the final figures we got afterwards showed that we made a significant difference in reducing the amount of energy used during the blackout. 'Mission: Green' became a major success.

May came quickly and it was time again to go lobby State Representatives in Pennsylvania's Capitol. I was extremely excited. We made it to Harrisburg, went through the game plan with the class and were prepared for the following morning.

When I went to sleep that night I thought about how much I had changed since beginning my education at PA Leadership. I thought of all the learning I'd done, all the battles I'd been through, all the friendships I'd made and all of the teachers I have come to look up to. That night was one of the most genuinely eye opening experiences of my life. I became astronomically aware of everything my school had given to me.

The following day we were sent off to go speak with our State Representatives. Mine wasn't in his office that day and I was disappointed. That left me with a decision. The Tyler who came to PALCS would have probably taken that as a go-ahead to enjoy the rest of the day by walking around the Capitol Building. But I wasn't that person anymore. Somewhere over the almost five year life of my PA Leadership career, something had changed in me.

I told my group that we were going to hit as many doors, Aides and Representatives as we could to gain support for cyber schools. We went down the entire hallway of offices handing out my letter to any assistant who would take it and spoke to any Representative who would listen. At the end of the day, I had managed to get our school's message across heavily. I had stood up to one State Rep. who wouldn't listen to us and had entirely changed the mind of another. Where he had once been in favor of cutting funds for cyber schools, he now believes cyber schools deserve *more* funding.

My time in Student Government and PA Leadership as a whole has been nothing short of spectacular. I have assisted my community, the state and cyber schools everywhere. But while I feel the things I have accomplished here are pretty special, I know what this school has allowed me to do for myself is so much more. I have had experiences through PALCS that I can honestly not describe accurately enough to express the profound impact they have had on my life. No written or spoken words will ever be able to say what I have gained from this school. In some ways, I feel like I came to PA Leadership with nothing and am leaving with everything. I am proud to have attended this school. And in the end, all I really hope - is that this school was proud to have me as a student. When I came to PA Leadership I viewed school as something I was required to do. I now view school as something I *love* to do.

