

Nilanjana Ghosh

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Thank you President Goldenberg, and good morning to all.

As we enter December, the beautiful Fall leaves have long fallen, and winter is in full swing. Despite the colder temperatures, there is the warming feeling of the Holidays! We have Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Diwali, and so much more to look forward to this time of year. We have the opportunity to spend time with family and friends, reflect on the year behind us, and look forward to the year ahead. Regardless of what you may celebrate, I wish a very happy, healthy, and joyous holiday season to all.

I would like to start today by talking a little about the Student Council activities in my school. On November 16th, student leaders of our school were invited to meet with representatives from Sodexo (our food services company). Our Student Council organizes such a meeting every year in order to provide students with an opportunity to provide feedback about the food we are provided. This year, the Student Council Executive Board reached out to the religious clubs at our school, and invited them to this meeting so they could voice specific religious dietary needs that may not be met with the current menu. Through this initiative, we hope to create a more inclusive climate for all. During the meeting, talking points were brought up relating to quality, variety, and more. The Sodexo team was very receptive, and we are always thankful for the opportunity they give to hear the student perspective.

On the activity side of events, our Junior Class Council hosted a school-wide Pickleball Tournament on November 17th. The competition consisted of 32 teams of 2, playing out in a classic single elimination style. There were students and parents present as spectators to support their peers. This tournament also served as a fundraiser for the Junior Class Council, and they

were able to raise over \$\$\$\$. In recent years, hosting this event has become a tradition for every Junior Class Council, as juniors have a heightened interest in the game. This interest can be attributed to the Pickleball Unit exclusive to the 11th grade physical education curriculum. The Physical Education Department even organizes an in-school Pickleball Tournament that spans across all 11th-grade physical education classes, setting the tone for the Junior Class Council's rendition of the event.

On November 13th, NJASC held its November Executive meeting. Here, I had the chance to catch up with my fellow State Officers about events happening in their schools. Our Vice President, Alina Chen shared with me some of her recent Student Council endeavors. At Alina's school, East Brunswick High School, a Thanksgiving chocolate fundraiser was underway in November. Additionally, as a part of their annual Holiday Spirit activities, the school is organizing a toy drive to provide gifts for students within the district who qualify for free or reduced meals. Alina acknowledged that not every student possesses the means that many of us are fortunate to have this time of the year.. In addition to this charitable effort, Alina's Student Council will also host a Festive Door Decorating Competition, where students bring their creativity to their homeroom and administrative doors, turning the hallways into lively displays of holiday spirit, diverse culture, and school pride.

Alina also shared with me her experiences attending the Fall 2023 LEAD National Student Leadership Training Conference. Attending this conference was a part of her duties as an ambassador of NatStuCo (National Student Council) and of the National Honors Society Student Advisory. At the conference, she was able to meet with 14 of her fellow student ambassadors. The three-day event, hosting over 500 students, was an incredible opportunity that fostered various skills such as teamwork, communication, and innovation. Importantly, the conference

also promoted valuable lessons such as finding and forging your own path in life, and believing in your ability to make significant changes in the world. She also had the opportunity to temporarily manage social media accounts for NatStuCo (@natstuco) and National Honors Society (@nationalhonorsociety) while at the convention, where she posted takeovers and videos of the delegates. She will be encapsulating her experience at LEAD Fall 2023 in an article that is to be published under the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) School of Thought Blog. In recounting her incredible experience, Alina highlighted one specific aspect she wished had been different. She noticed the absence of other New Jersey student leaders, and expressed a fervent hope for this to change in the near future. She wishes to stress the importance of increased participation in these conventions, emphasizing the unique opportunities they offer to gain diverse perspectives and experiences from student leaders across the entire nation. I resonate deeply with Alina's sentiments. Additionally, it's gratifying to see that even in the midst of our busy lives, New Jersey students consistently prioritize helping one another grow and continue finding meaningful ways to connect with each other. This spirit is a testament to the strength of student community and leadership, and I wish students continue fostering these connections through various initiatives and shared experiences.

Finally, as I wrap up my remarks, I wish to acknowledge something that has been weighing heavy on my heart. I debated for quite some time whether I wanted to discuss this matter, but as a young person who has been given an incredible opportunity here at the Board of Education, I feel compelled to share my voice, represent the voices of my peers, and share the following message. It has been over a month since conflict arose in the Middle East. As our social media feeds became filled with devastating news, every day my heart ached (and continues to ache) for those who have suffered, and the lives that have been so unfairly lost. In

acknowledging this matter, I wish to put forward a very simple message. During such times of world conflict, I feel it is imperative that we remember one thing. Despite our differences, we are all united as a human race. *Every one of us* - we are all united as *one* human race. The greatest strength humanity has is just that: our humanity, our ability to love and protect one another. I'm sure that many of us are experiencing a collective shock and sadness at this time. I hope to perhaps provide some consolation when I say that *I am optimistic*. I am optimistic that humanity has the power to prevail. I am optimistic that love has the power to prevail over hate because, "love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love; cannot be killed or swept aside."

Thank you very much for your time.