

Grace Wheeler  
12th Grade,  
Weber Innovation High School Utah

### What Drives Me?

In elementary school, I always read ahead in our history textbooks. I loved history but didn't like listening to long lectures with endless dates and names that I would forget within the hour. That all changed when, in the 5th grade, my history teacher would hold monthly class elections. We would nominate classmates that we thought would be good candidates. Those selected candidates would participate in a debate, and then everyone would cast their votes. Each table in the classroom was a "state." Whoever could win the most states won the presidency. Seven years later, I credit this activity with sparking my passion for civics education. Understanding how systems like the electoral college work made politics accessible to me from a young age. Instead of feeling like politics was some far-out, incomprehensible "adult business," I genuinely was interested in understanding current events and issues. As I began to recognize the role of government everywhere -from the water I drink to the roads I drive on - I realized the impact I could have on my community through civics education.

Through volunteering with the Institute of Youth and Policy, I saw these dreams realized and fell in love with nonprofit work. I worked on a student oriented civics curriculum that was presented to the US college board at the AP conference this summer. The curriculum focuses on activities similar to the election activity I loved in elementary school. Through active learning, students can better connect with the material. I also manage our soon to be released magazine, in which I have articles that will be published. The magazine takes current events and civics topics and makes them accessible to young readers. Because the truth is that politicians do not cater to

young people. We are often an undervalued and unrepresented demographic. We are consistently discouraged from registering to vote. We are often told that our votes don't matter, that registering will only get us jury duty, and that politics don't affect us. But our votes are the future of American politics, and we will be the ones to decide the direction our country goes in the coming years. Throughout my career, I want to legitimize the votes of young people and empower them to get involved in the democratic process.

I am driven to pursue my bachelor's degree in Political Science so I can spend my career mentoring young people and advocating for my community's well-being.