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11<sup>th</sup> Grade

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### What Drives Me

The year is 1997. A newly wedded couple has just arrived in Tulsa, Oklahoma from Saigon, Vietnam, where they had packed up their entire lives in a couple suitcases to start new ones in America. They came to this country with intentions of starting a family and giving their future children a life they never had back in their homeland. That couple was my mother and father. They, like many immigrants, have worked tirelessly to provide their children opportunities they could only dream of. Everything they and millions of immigrants across the nation have endured while pursuing the American Dream is what motivates me in life every day. The experiences of immigrants in contemporary America drive what I do now and what I plan to accomplish in the future.

Being the child of immigrants myself, I have always had an appreciation for all the sacrifices they make, the long hours they work, and the dedication they have to family. It has never dawned on me, though, that there are still people in my community who do not share the

same outlook as I do. At the root of the issue was a lack of connection to immigrants, and I was determined to bridge this gap of understanding between immigrants and non-immigrants from a young age. I finally got an opportunity to enact change when I became involved in an organization called Youth Philanthropy Initiative, or YPI for short. Through YPI, I and twenty-eight other high school students were able to create a philanthropic project of our choosing. We decided to create an immigrant simulation called CultureBridge: Tulsa with the mission of building empathy for the immigrant community in Tulsa. In our simulation, participants walk through the lives of characters we have created based on interviews of real immigrants that we conducted ourselves. Not only are participants able to gauge the hardships many immigrants face on a day to day basis, but they also come to recognize the joys and cultural richness that comes with being an immigrant. Through this project, I was able to achieve my long-time goal of creating a more accepting environment for people like my parents. The progress I have made through CultureBridge: Tulsa has only furthered my passion and desire to help the immigrant community in the future.

Among the hardships that immigrants face that I have researched about and personally experience, the lack of knowledge in the American education system is one that greatly resonates with me. As a first-generation college student, it is immensely challenging having to navigate the world of ACTs, AP classes, and saving for university with little guidance. In the future, I hope to obtain a degree in finance and fulfill my dream of starting my own non-profit focused on providing financial advice to under resourced immigrants, which would alleviate the stress felt by teenagers just like me.

