

Joshua Wheat

10th grade

Pojoaque Valley High School, New Mexico

What drives me is the desire for more, for me, and everyone else around me. I grew up on the Nambé Pueblo reservation in northern New Mexico. Like most native reservations, the reservation is poor, but here people don't ask for more. I love my home; I love the culture, the food, the traditions, but I don't love the poverty, the drugs, and the substance abuse that comes with it. What drives me is my desire to better my home and, one day, make it a place people are proud to say they live and not just somewhere they reside. One day I will lead my pueblo to the dream I envision, a community without poverty, without substance abuse, and without the feeling of complacency that looms over the pueblo.

When I finish high school, I plan to study philosophy and political science at a university and then go to law school to become a lawyer. My goals are, and always have been, ambitious, which separates me from the people in my pueblo. The feeling here is of complacency, the idea that they are doing good enough, so there is no reason to strive for more. But the people in my pueblo deserve to do better than good enough. They are intelligent, strong, and great people who fell victim to the cycle of poverty.

School has always been my number one priority, and in my pueblo, that makes me unique. The kids and adults made fun of me for being a bookworm or refusing to miss school when I didn't have to. When I was younger, this made me very self-conscious. I tried my best to change who I was around them. I tried my best to fit in to match the people around me actions

and dialect. Growing up on the reservation and having high hopes and expectations for myself was challenging, but it taught me resilience. It showed me that people might question my ideals, morals, and decisions, but my commitment remains to myself and what I believe I can do for my pueblo. It was because of my pueblo; I formed what I think to be my greatest strength, my confidence. While I was made fun of for the words I used, it made me confident in the way I speak. While I was teased for caring so much about school, it made me confident in my academic ability, but what really made my confidence was when my nickname changed from bookworm to governor. Though they might have meant it to tease me, I see it as motivation to earn the name my people call me. Growing up on the reservation shaped my aspirations into what they are today. Seeing people more intelligent than I settle for good enough drives me to strive for more and never be complacent. I work hard and make sacrifices for myself and the people in my village who I hope to serve, the people who deserve more than what they have.