

Brianna Ginyard

Growing up in a Black single-parent household, I was always reminded that knowledge is power. In the long run, this is what got the bills paid. Having me at a young age, my mother worked hard to provide me with the best education while continuing her own. I've always had many strong female role models who continued to pursue the highest level of education possible in their fields. As I've gotten older, I understand why my mother and others pushed me to embody a strong work ethic. My mother wanted me to be recognized for my work and skillset, not what I looked like. She placed me in schools where I would be challenged and would excel, even if it was not what I had envisioned my life to be.

Prior to enrolling at Oldfields School in Fall 2018, I attended a magnet school in Manhattan. At Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS), my seventh grade teacher, Ms. Junius, and eighth grade teacher, Ms. Folger, were both influential in my development as a student and as a young Black woman. I appreciated their honesty as educators. Not only did I understand what I was learning, but both women made it a mission to help us understand why what we were learning was important. Understanding the importance of people's perspectives of the world. Both teachers told the truth and did not sugarcoat the ins and outs of our nation's history, making sure that their students were learning the full story, not just the story of the victors. I will forever cherish this experience with multicultural education because it has helped me become a more well rounded person in ways I never thought possible.

At Oldfields, I've come to realize how much I miss being in a diverse classroom. Here, it's not uncommon for me to be the only Black student in class. Initially, this was a shock to me because I didn't know who supported me. I felt at times that I was walking into a room blind, not knowing what obstacles I would face or where the walls stood. I withheld many thoughts and opinions regarding certain topics that were being taught in class because I felt as though no one would understand or even be willing to have a deeper understanding, listening to my perspectives on historical and cultural topics.

I allowed these thoughts to make me feel that I was confined to a box, feeling that I would only be able to succeed if I kept my head down and did what was expected of me. During my sophomore year, things began to shift. Before the start of the next school year, the school finally began to get called out for past oppressions against minority students which could no longer be ignored. I started to feel like doors were replacing the walls. Now, I am able to vocalize how I feel. My voice has returned and I am able to breathe in relief even for that moment when someone is willing to listen.

I feel as if it is my purpose to speak up and out, not only about the unjust acts within my education but within the world. Wanting to pursue a career in Criminal Justice, I want to become a lawyer to speak up for the voiceless as I previously felt. I want to help bring change to systems that were not created to support those from backgrounds similar to mine. Making changes in places I feel important such as education systems, incarceration systems, and many other places that currently oppress the African-American community and other minorities