



An Interview with Ms. Kateryn Ochoa

Q. While you were learning English, what types of support did you receive while in school?

I came in 3rd grade and felt like I didn't get any help. I remember coming during testing and had to do the test without any help. It wasn't until I got to middle school that I got the support I needed. She pushed reading and writing and I got tutoring during lunch and she would guide us through the whole process. Her name is Ms. Soto and she is still a teacher there at Korematsu.

Q. What are your plans after you graduate?

I am going to Contra Costa College and then I plan to transfer hopefully to Monterey Bay State University. They have a cool veterinary program. I also plan to keep coming back to support Youth ELAC at El Cerrito High School.

Q. What was your main motivation for wanting to start a youth ELAC?

I got to see students being mistreated or feeling left out and I felt they needed a space to feel welcomed and to feel like they can talk about how they are feeling. Also to make a change to all the things that are happening even if we all have different experiences. As soon as I heard that this group was going to be started I wanted to be part of creating it. I am a founding member and have been part of the group for 4 years now.

Q. What did you enjoy most about your time as a student board member?

I liked that I always felt included and had a say in things even if it was just an opinion. I knew it was not a voting count but the fact that they heard me felt good. I got to meet a lot of great people and people I look up to such as Mr. Panas and Ms. Cuevas. I think it represents students' voices being heard, especially as an EL student.

Q. You had prepared a speech to share with the board on 1/23/19, but were unable to speak. In your speech, you shared that you were going to graduate without being reclassified. Why were you inspired to speak at the board meeting?

I wanted to speak that day because I felt strongly about pushing the district to make change. I am on the LCAP committee and have been involved in different ways and every year we see the same insufficient and bad data. I felt it was important to not only hear it from parents but also from a student's voice.

Q. What do you think we need to do better in our schools to ensure more students have the opportunity to reclassify earlier?

Have a person to check in with and follow through. I am an ELD 5 student and nobody provided any support. You never really hear anything about reclassification unless you are involved. My teacher in 8th grade told me that nobody was going to help me or push me in high school to reclassify and that I had to do it on my own. She was right. In middle school I was able to move from ELD 3 to ELD 5 and it was because my ELD teacher pushed and supported us.

Q. Looking back on the years you've spent in this district, who (teachers, board members, anyone) do you feel truly knows who you are, and has provided you the support you need to succeed?

There has been many people who have supported me, such as Lucero Garcia who is a social worker at the James Morehouse Project. She has pushed me to get involved and also supported me with school and getting me involved with Youth ELAC. Youth ELAC has been a family for me and that is a big part of my life and what started everything that I am doing.

Stephanie Sequeira a parent advocate, has taught me a lot, such as how to navigate hard situations and how to stand up for myself.

Valerie Jameson from RYSE has also been a huge support and was the one who encouraged me to be part of RYSE. I appreciate everyone at RYSE because they are a supportive family.

Tom Panas has also been a support because he is always telling me about new opportunities and when I was on the board he always checked in to see if I had any questions. He always told me to never be afraid to speak up.

Also my teacher from Korematsu Ms. Soto really pushed me to read and helped me move up in ELD levels really fast. She always gave me advice for high school.

Finally I thank my family for always being supportive and allowing me to be involved even when they knew it meant being less time at home because of all the meetings. They have been so flexible and available in driving me to all the different meetings and at very late times.

Q. What advice do you have for families who are struggling to get their children reclassified?

I would tell parents to keep pushing and go to the schools and advocate for their kids. Also to be informed about how important it is because sometimes parents worry that they just learn English and don't know about what it means to reclassify or really get a quality education.

For more information and tips on reclassification, refer to pages 14-15 of our West Contra Costa Kids Can Report To request the report in hard copy format, please visit bit.ly/KidsCanReport