

Hello, Frederick County Public Schools students! I'm Elijah Steele, I'm a junior at Governor Thomas Johnson high school , and I'm thrilled to stand before you as your nominee for the Student Member of the Board of Education. Many of you, along with other students, may not even know what the SMOB is or understand it, don't worry; it's not a secret code. It stands for Student Member of the Board, which essentially means I'm here to be your voice, through which your concerns, ideas, and aspirations can be heard and decisions on your education and future will be pushed through to make changes, improvements, and reform to our education system so all 47,000 students can thrive in healthy learning environments .

I know we all come from different backgrounds and beliefs and it may seem like a different universe, but that is what will bring us together to improve our school systems, through all your perspectives and experiences. That, my friends, is our strength. As SMOB it would be my responsibility to listen and to highlight the wants and needs of our students.

Now, I'm not just vying for a title here. I'm not chasing after a badge that says "SMOB." No, I'm chasing change, such as educational equity, the idea that all students should have the same amount of educational opportunities regardless of school size and population. A student at Monocacy middle school should have the same amount of honors classes as students in Brunswick middle school. Every student should have access to the same opportunities and education.

I'm chasing progress, by giving the SMOB a vote. The idea of a SMOB is unknown to many students, but the idea that the one student

who is representing **47,000** people doesn't have a vote is baffling. **47,000**, that is a larger number than the number of people who live in Thurmont and Brunswick combined. The students won't have a say in issues such as redistricting that affect their lives, while the adults who are unaffected sit in the rooms and make decisions for us. Redistricting is an idea that scares many students, to think that they won't be able to see their friends and teachers, and how it may affect siblings. These decisions are difficult to make, seeing as to how it's the wants of students, vs the need to lessen the amount of students in schools. No one likes cramped hallways. The fact remains that students should have a say in these major decisions regardless of the benefit or harm.

The biggest issue that I have noticed is the rise in mental health issues arising in every school, not just in Frederick county, but across the nation. While students may be doing well in class that doesn't mean mentally the same can be said. One of the lead causes in student deaths is suicide. 1 in 5 students have had thoughts of harming themselves. In a classroom on average that is 6 students out of 30, in a grade of students that would be 100 students out of 500. These students should have systems in place to have someone to talk to, and not just counselors. They should have peers they can rely on or talk to so that they can feel comfortable and safe within their own school. Students have also shown to not respond well to standardized tests, all it shows is students ability to select A-D, and not what they are actually learning. This goes hand in hand with sleep deprivation, students waking up early while still developing has been proven to have a negative effect on mental health and yet we still continue to open schools at such early times, when they should begin much later so students are fully prepared and rested.

I believe in the power of collaboration, and I know that by working together, we can make a lasting impact on the education system. Your dreams and ideas are the driving force behind my campaign, and with your support, we're going to reach new educational heights.