

Driving with my family to pick up our Japanese exchange student was a drive filled with emotional rollercoasters. We were picking up someone we never met nor talked to, my hands were kind of shaking hoping we would get along, yet my face was also smiling as I could not wait to befriend, meet, and go to school with someone from an entire other side of the world. These initial feelings all melted away as we hugged Shiho Komori, my soon to be best friend for the next few weeks. Living with a Japanese person brought me a fascination with Japanese culture. I heard stories about what it was like to be able to go to school in Japan, I learned basic Japanese words and conversations, and I began reading *Landscape of Flatiron*, a Japanese translated book, and collectively all of these experiences have strengthened my passion in Japanese culture, yet I would only ever hope for the opportunity to truly be able to be immersed with going to school in Japan as I heard stories about. These stories and experiences have shaped my worldview and perspective and perception of the connectedness of this Earth. My wish is to be able to see the Japanese Culture come to life by attending school the way Shiho talked about. Further, I would be honored to be able to represent my country if selected for the scholarship. My background has been centered on public service. Having been a class officer for two years and representing Del Oro at countywide conferences, the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Conference, Yearbooks NCA, and then moving into a district governance role of a Pupil School Board Member, I have shown an ability to represent my peers. At the California School Board Association (CSBA) Conference, I had the opportunity to connect with gubernatorial candidates and school board members on education policies. As a student school board member, I was able to listen to my peers to seek to understand what they wanted and put those desires into effect by proposing amendments that were accepted in a board bylaw, and working to represent my peers on the school site council and districtwide ad hoc grading and ethnic studies committees. I also moved up in CSBA by serving as 1 of 2 Placer County representatives and the sole student on the Special Education Research Group, by being the sole student in Placer County to participate in Legislative Action Week, advocating for education legislation to congressmen, and additionally being selected to be on the State Advisory Board of Education as a conference speaker. I further earned a top 3 position out of 93 applicants for a position on the CA State Board of Education (SBE), meeting Superintendent Tony Thurmond, the SBE and gaining recognition from the California Association of Student Councils. Finally, working on local campaigns and being recognized by California as a recipient of the State Seal of Civic Engagement have all contributed to my desire to both represent my country well if selected for this scholarship, and use the skills of listening and seeking to understand that I have found throughout high school to be able to hear more about the Japanese culture. I would be both forever grateful and honored to be able to both represent the US and be able to see, learn, and experience the life of a Japanese student. Thank you for your consideration!