

The common narrative of high school is one of being told where to go, what to study, and when to speak. However, my journey at John Adams Academy has been completely different from that script. It has not just been an education in facts and formulas; it has been a slow, difficult, and deeply meaningful formation of my character. JAA did not just teach me how to be a student. It challenged me to become more responsible, more disciplined, and more aware of who I want to be.

One of the biggest ways JAA changed me was by handing me the reins of my own future. While many schools might view a student's desire to push beyond the standard curriculum as a problem, JAA did the opposite. The administration supported my decision to pursue extensive dual enrollment, and because of their flexibility and belief in Self-Governance, I was able to be a high school senior while also studying computer science at Sacramento City and Sierra College. That experience was not easy. It meant balancing deadlines, difficult classes, and a workload that sometimes felt heavier than I was ready for. Honestly, there were plenty of days when I was behind, tired, and frustrated with myself. I have not always had perfect time management, and I know that has cost me. But JAA trusted me enough to learn through the struggle, and that trust forced me to grow up. It turned "personal responsibility" from a phrase into something real, something I had to live out every day.

That independence, though, was never isolation. One of the most meaningful parts of my experience at JAA has been the way our mentors walk beside us instead of standing above us. In other places, teachers often felt like people I had to perform for. At JAA, my mentors felt more like guides who genuinely wanted to see me become better. I think of the teachers who worked with me through the friction of my college schedule, the technical demands of my computer science work, and the times when I was mentally stretched thin. They did not just hand me assignments and grades. They gave me patience, encouragement, and a sense that my growth mattered to them. That changed the way I understand leadership. Real leadership is not pretending to have everything figured out. It is having the humility to help someone grow while still continuing to grow yourself.

My experience in Scholar Government added another layer to that understanding. It gave me a behind-the-scenes view of how much responsibility our mentors and administrators carry every day. Seeing the effort it takes to keep this academy running, the long hours, the difficult decisions, the constant commitment to the mission, deepened my respect for the people who shaped my education. It made me realize that my learning was never just something being delivered to me. It was something being sustained through sacrifice, care, and service. That realization changed the way I see school, and honestly, it changed the way I see people. It made me more grateful, more humble, and more willing to appreciate the work that happens quietly in the background.

More than anything, JAA taught me that education is not just about information. It is about formation. It is about the kind of person you become when no one is forcing you to care. Through this academy, I have learned what it means to take ownership of my life, to respect the people who guide me, and to keep pushing even when I am exhausted. I have also learned that a

noble education does not just sharpen the mind; it shapes the soul.

As I prepare to move on to university and continue my journey in computer science, I know I am leaving JAA as a different person than the one who arrived here. I am no longer a passive passenger in my own life. I have been shaped by a culture that values the Noble Soul as much as the sharp mind. My education here did not just give me a diploma. It gave me discipline when I was tempted to quit, gratitude when I was tempted to overlook others, and courage when I was tempted to stay comfortable. JAA did not just change my transcript. It changed my trajectory, my mindset, and, in many ways, my life.