

2018 - 2019 Mayor's Youth Council Biographies



Antony

Antony Pena, Union High School, 11th Grade, 1st Ward

"I've seen what teens in my neighborhood struggle with. We need change."

Antony is part of the Youth Grant Committee of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. He is also a member of Youth in Government. One of his special talents is photography. After high school graduation, Antony would like to attend college to study political science with his ultimate goal of being an elected official.



Cody

Cody Garrison, Union High School, 11th Grade, 1st Ward

"I'm a leader and not afraid to speak my mind and state my opinion about subjects."

Cody is a member of the Youth Grant Committee of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, the Native American Education Program, and the Union High School Leadership Team. He loves sports and helping those in need. Cody describes himself as a respectful leader who is understanding.



Emanuel

Emanuel Galindo-Peralta, CA Frost Environmental Science Academy High/Middle School, 10th Grade, 1st Ward

"I hope to strengthen my skills in teamwork and public speaking and gain new skills that may be useful in life."

Emanuel enjoys reading, drawing, and volunteering. He is a member of his parish as well as the Student Council at his school. He believes more youth need to be involved with city government. Emanuel believes he can work toward this goal by being part of the Mayor's Youth Council. He describes himself as a fast learner and considers Grand Rapids to be a diverse city.

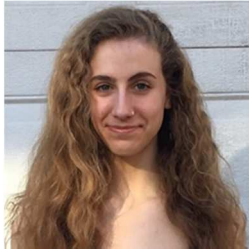


Liliana

Liliana Jeronimo Lucas, City High/Middle School, 9th Grade, 1st Ward

"I always have liked talking to people about the change our community needs. I have many friends who are my age that want to speak out but don't have the confidence to do so."

Liliana maintains a 3.5 GPA. Her ultimate career goal is to become a dentist as well as a nurse so that she can improve the health of those living in her hometown. She enjoys reading and listening to music. During her time on the Mayor's Youth Council, she would like to explore the daily functions of city government.



Lillie

Lillie Birnie, 12th Grade, Ottawa High School, 1st Ward

"I believe that the most critical issue facing youth in Grand Rapids right now is mental health struggles. We have many resources available in our community for our youth but it may not feel as though the resources are all equally accessible. "

Lillie is serving a second term as a Mayor's Youth Council member. She is very passionate about art, reading, writing and dancing. She describes herself as a motivated and creative person. Lillie is also passionate about civil and human rights. Her future goals are to be a life-long learner and attain several post graduate degrees.



Madeline

Madeline Velez, CA Frost Environmental Science Academy High/Middle School, 11th Grade, 1st Ward

"I feel I can be a strong voice and bring important ideas to the table and address issues."

Madeline is a member of the GRPS Student Council and volunteers at her school. She also enjoys playing sports and has a strong interest in nature. She believes that the youth of Grand Rapids face issues of acceptance and they need to know that adults care about them. Her ultimate career goal is to become a police officer.



Pablo

Pablo Villalvazo, Union High School, 10th Grade, 1st Ward

"I am passionate and open-minded to new ideas. I love to learn about politics and give my opinion on certain subjects."

Pablo loves to spend time at his church where he plays the drums. He is also a member of the Youth Grant Committee of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. He is also in JROTC, Michigan Youth in Government, a Challenge Scholar and an intern for the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan. After high school, Pablo would like to go into the armed services or become a police officer.



Sherlyn

Sherlyn Divas, Union High School, 12th Grade, 1st Ward

"I know the issues and challenges that each group of teens may face in school with their education. I want to help break barriers."

Sherlyn is 4.0 GPA student. She enjoys singing, playing the guitar, soccer and volunteering in the community. She feels the most critical issue facing youth in Grand Rapids is bullying and that more should be done to eliminate these acts within schools. Her dream is to attend college and study medicine.



Tatiana

Tatiana Cervantes, Union High School, 11th Grade, 1st Ward

"The biggest issue facing youth in Grand Rapids is the lack of funding for schools."

Tatiana is a member of the TRIO program and her church's youth group. She enjoys reading and playing soccer. She describes herself as a leader, hardworking and opinionated. Tatiana maintains a 3.7 GPA.



Veronica

Veronica Gilbert, City High/Middle School, 12th Grade, 1st Ward

"One goal that I would like to accomplish this year would be creating more opportunities for youth to get involved with politics."

Veronica is serving her second term on the Mayor's Youth Council. In the summer of 2018, she studied abroad at the Eleuthera Island School. She is also a member of the Upward Bound TRIO Program at GVSU and the President of the Mindfulness Club. After graduating from high school, she plans to attend college and eventually go to medical school.



Abigail

Abigail Haan, City High/Middle School, 9th Grade, 2nd Ward

"It is important to know how changes are made in city government because change is what fixes problems and it's what moves us forward."

Abigail is a 4.0 student who has aspirations of graduating from college and working in the field of environmental conservation, education or therapy. She believes that the biggest issue facing youth in Grand Rapids is the altered reality of social media and what gets projected through online media sources.



Adam

Adam Kuzee, City High/Middle School, 11th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I am a hard worker who is a capable problem solver as well as an excellent communicator."

Adam maintains a 4.0 GPA. He enjoys writing, playing music, learning and swimming competitively. He describes himself as persuasive, engaging and communicative. Adam believes that there is a shortage of social wealth and that teens are limited to a single experience, i.e. school and their own culture. He would like to build a sense of community among teens.



Angelise

Angelise Monroe, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School, 9th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I want to make our city a better place and help connect our youth to city officials."

Angel enjoys cooking, singing and spending time with family and friends. She describes herself as a good communicator with a great personality. In Angel's opinion, issues facing Grand Rapids teens are school violence, school curriculum changes, lack of motivation, drugs and bullying. Her future career goals include studying social work and business administration.



Chasity

Chasity Hicks, Grand Rapids Montessori High School, 10th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I would like to know more about the functions of city government and understand what improvements elected officials would like to make to our city."

Chasity enjoys writing, debating, art and painting. She also volunteers at the United Methodist Community House. Chasity believes that the most critical issue facing youth is the lack of programs and school attendance.



Gia

Gia Williams, Grand Rapids Montessori High School, 11th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I am concerned about my city and my community. I know that I can help make Grand Rapids be a better city."

Gia enjoys reading, writing, babysitting and taking care of animals. She wants to be a positive influence on her peers to improve issues present in her community. She describes herself as being a caring and responsible person. She plans to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) and one day become a surgeon.



Jourdin

Jourdin Merrill, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School, 9th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I want to help my generation. I love helping kids."

Jourdin taking on new challenges that come her way. She describes herself as being outspoken and one who likes to share her opinions with others. The most critical issue facing teens in Grand Rapids in her opinion is racism and child abuse. Her future career goal is to be an entrepreneur.



Madeline

Madeline Uren, City High/Middle School, 9th Grade, 2nd Ward

"As I start my high school career, I think that it's time to start stretching myself and reaching outside my comfort zone."

Madeline plays the piano, bassoon and percussion. She volunteers at Camp Casey, Creston Neighborhood Association and Kids Food Basket. Madeline describes herself as caring. She also pays attention to the news. She believes that the most critical issue facing youth is the pressure to prove to others that they are valuable.

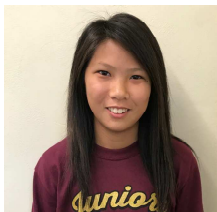


Nyla

Nyla Davis, Grand Rapids Montessori High School, 10th Grade, 2nd Ward

"If Grand Rapids is my city, I should be aware of the issues and know who makes decisions."

Nyla maintains a 3.86 GPA. She has aspirations to become a surgeon one day. She's a member of the National Honor Society and volunteers at God's Kitchen. Nyla also plays the baritone. She believes that the most critical issue facing youth in Grand Rapids is teen pregnancy.



Qiqi

Qiqi Clark, City High/Middle School, 12th Grade, 2nd Ward

"I will bring insight to inner-city issues affecting minority youth and use my personal ambition to help relieve challenges that youth face."

Qiqi is serving her second term on the Mayor's Youth Council. She is actively involved in local campaigns, a member of the Model UN Club, and Vice President of the Environmental Club at her school. Qiqi is also a soccer player and a cross country runner for Ottawa Hills High School. After graduating from high school, she will attend college, study abroad and continue to volunteer for political campaigns.



Damaris

Damaris Vailmencho, Innovation Central School, 11th Grade, 3rd Ward

"What I hope to accomplish by joining the Mayor's Youth Council is to not only gain experience in local politics, but to also have an impact on my community."

Damaris has a 3.9 GPA. She describes herself as confident, willing to learn and being accepting of differing points of view. She is dually enrolled at GRCC, a member of Upward Bound and the Girls Empowering Together Club. Her hobbies include interior design, DIY projects, cooking, and computer programming. After high school, she would like to attend the University of Michigan to study social work and public policy.



DeUnique

DeUnique Dorris, City High/Middle School, 12th Grade, 3rd Ward

"I have experience and a great personality. I am inclusive and the voices of all youth matter."

DeUnique is serving her second year on the Mayor's Youth Council. She maintains a 3.5 GPA and is a member of the Debate Team, Mizzi Maji Mentoring Program, New City Kids and a Youth Board Trustee for the Youth Grant Committee. After graduating from high school, she plans to attend college and work in philanthropy or non-profit.



Haylee

Haylee Smith-Scales, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School, 9th Grade, 3rd Ward

"I love making community connections and listening to diverse voices."

Haylee loves to read. She also enjoys writing and running. She is involved in an afterschool program that has exposed her to underwater remote operated vehicles (ROV). Haylee describes herself as a collaborator and as having a growth mindset.



Imani

Imani Richmond, City High/Middle School, 10th Grade, 3rd Ward

"I hope to be able to be the voice for other teens that are afraid to share their opinions."

Imani's future aspirations are to attend Harvard or a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) to eventually become a pediatrician. She is a 4.0 GPA student. She likes to play basketball and soccer and sings in her school's choir. Imani describes herself as a being a good communicator and being outspoken. The most critical issue facing Grand Rapids teens in her opinion is bullying.



Maurice

Maurice Holt, Ottawa Hills High School, 12th Grade, 3rd Ward

"The biggest issue that youth are facing in Grand Rapids is the relationship between youth who live in the city and law enforcement."

Maurice wants to be the voice of young black youth in the community. He enjoys talking to younger students and volunteering. He looks forward to learning more about the duties of the city manager especially those duties that lead to solutions for the urban core. Maurice plans to attend Alabama A&M University after high school to study graphic design.



Na'Ryah Snell, Union High School, 10th Grade, 3rd Ward

"I hope for a stronger, more educated generation. Not all teens are lost."

Na'Ryah is a student athlete and a poet. She also is a volunteer tutor. Once Na'Ryah graduates from high school, she wants to go to college to major in journalism and finance and minor in cosmetology. She is a member of Challenge Scholars, Diatribe, and on the Honor Roll.

Na'Ryah



Riley Wilson, City High/Middle School, 12th Grade, 3rd Ward

"The stress and inequity of college tuition and the increased pressure to perform in school takes away from the personal lives of students across the country. It makes it more difficult for those in poverty to achieve educational success."

Riley is serving a third term as a Mayor's Youth Council member. He was elected President of the Council last year. He is also a member of the Debate Team, Model UN, Youth Grant Committee and the One Michigan Alliance. His future goals are to attain a college education and eventually practice law.

Riley



Rukundo Nshimiyimana, Innovation Central School, 12th Grade, 3rd Ward

"There are many issues facing teens in Grand Rapids and I want to be part of the solution. My ideas count just like everyone else's."

Rukundo is part of the Debate Club, Art Club, GVSU's TRIO program and attends classes at WMCAT. He is a native of Rwanda and describes Grand Rapids as a place of opportunity. He believes teens struggle with the issues of affordable housing and anxiety over future planning. After graduating from high school Rukundo would like to attend college to study computer and aerospace engineering as well as visual art.

Rukundo



Taliyah Davis, Ottawa Hills High School, 9th Grade, 3rd Ward

"I would like to be the voice for young women of color. My goal is to influence students to make healthy decisions."

Taliyah would like to learn beyond what is taught in a textbook about government. She wants to voice her opinions about policies specific to teens. She enjoys dancing and singing and is an aspiring nail technician and cosmetologist. She describes herself as an optimist.

Taliyah



**Mayor's Youth
Council**

The Mayor's Youth Council is a program managed by Our Community's Children. Our Community's Children is a public/private partnership of the City of Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Public Schools and the community.

For more information about the Mayor's Youth Council, please contact Shannon L. Harris, Program Coordinator, at Our Community's Children: 616.456.3558 or sharris@grcity.us.
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