

## **MAAP STARS Officer: Robert Johnson**

My name is Robert Johnson, I am a Junior at Voyageurs Expeditionary School, a charter school, located in Bemidji, MN. I am from the Red Lake Indian Reservation. This is my third year involved in MAAP STARS and was elected as a State Officer for this school year.

When I first started high school, I was shy and felt alone; like an outcast. I was in a small school. I didn't know anyone or anything about MAAP STARS at the time. This changed when I decided to sign up for MAAP STARS; unaware of what I was getting myself into. It was a good choice and has taught me to never be afraid to try new things and to take chances. Without the leadership skills and the remembrance of what STARS stands for: **S**uccess, **T**eamwork, **A**chievement, **R**ecognition, and **S**elf-esteem, I wouldn't be where I am today. Being in MAAP STARS has taught me to be confident in my ability to grow as a person and share the knowledge I have learned with others. As an officer, I will approach things with an open mind, open to new ideas and suggestions; and be the voice for the people without one. Being a MAAP STARS officer means I will represent all of Minnesota's alternative education students and not just a single demographic. In this position, I will spread awareness to how beneficial MAAP STARS can be to any and every school in Minnesota.

This open minded approach to things led me to join and be part of the Minnesota Youth Council, a non-partisan organization of adults and youth working together to empower and mobilize young people across the state to exercise their voices. The Minnesota Youth Council represents youth throughout all of Minnesota. It is the only legislatively mandated youth council of it's kind in the country.

My goal will be to advocate for alternative education. Alternative education emphasizes small class sizes, close relationships between students, and a sense of community within the school. These are the reasons why I switched from mainstream education to alternative. Alternative Education is a blessing. It gives students the opportunity to have one-on-one time with a teacher and provides students with hands-on learning. As a STARS Officer, I want to work to make everyone feel welcome and show people that alternative schools are a community, a family. Being a MAAP STARS officer is an honor, not just a title. I want to show students that they can and will succeed with hard work and dedication.

I have had the pleasure of meeting many inspirational people during my time in MAAP STARS, many with motivational upbringings and stories, and just all around nice people. I envy their stories and character. I hope to be one of these people one day; someone that students can look up to. I felt lost and detached, but MAAP STARS has shown me I could do more, and gave me the will and want to succeed. It was my honor of having you listen to me today. Thank you for giving me this opportunity..