

Hello I am Jonathon DiGiovanni and I am a MAAP Stars Officer. Alternative schools are communities of excellent students who happen to be misunderstood.

In class we read a book called “ The 7 habits of Highly Effective Teens “ by Sean Covey. One of the 7 Habits he talks about is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” One thing I’ve noticed since I joined the Austin ALC and the MAAP STARS program is that people listen, they hear me out, and they work with me to reach the goals I set for myself. I love the ALC because of the possibilities that come with it. I do not believe all teens - or even humans as a whole - are wired alike. We can’t always expect someone to learn the same information the same way. Given extra tools and space, alternative education options can open up the doors for so many more students to gain the opportunity to achieve graduation.

Anxiety and depression consumes the lives of many teens around the world. My ALC gives me a space where the people around me understand what you're going through, including some of the teachers. To go out and explore things outside your comfort zone gives you the ability to commit to more than just daily tasks. It gives you the ability to achieve greatness, write music, sing for people, lead a group to change political views or simply to own you own restaurant. I believe some of the events we have should really push the comfort zone for people, while still having a fun spirit to it. Showing someone what they're capable of opens more doors to life and what they can do. I strive to see the best in people.

I fought social anxiety for years. Stepping up on stage and talking to a group of people wasn’t realistic for me. After I joined the National Guard and went to Basic Training, I learned the importance of a team. My team pushed me to do things I couldn’t ever do alone. I overcame my fear of heights and my ability to control myself when it came to Panic Disorder. I wanted to give back to my Battle Buddies like they gave to me. I stood up and I helped cheer them on and stand by them to their limits. Watching someone succeed is my inspiration.

Fear is a battlefield; MAAP STARS is the Battle Plan to get past it. When I ran for state officer, I began looking into the STARS acronym and it reminded me of the Army core values, so I’d like to talk about a couple of those words today.

With my anxiety and panic disorder I was trapped and couldn’t find myself taking risks. Getting up on stage and running to be a MAAP STARS Officer was a form of for me. When it came to breaking my fears I started with the skills I was taught at basic training. Overcoming fears and completing tasks we never thought were possible before. Because of the ALC I was given the ability to kick butt on credits, come back from nothing, and realize I don't have to drop out and get my GED. I can actually graduate with a diploma. This is an of mine I take pride in. I still work on this achievement every day. I like to take in the effort, and time someone puts into the work they do. With any project no matter how big or how small, I believe it's important to make sure someone knows you have not let there work go unseen. My

has gone in a positive direction since I have been in the ALC. MAAP STARS truly is a family of people who have given me a positive image of who I am.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said “ The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams ” Given the right situation and opportunities I believe anyone can achieve greatness. Thank you for allowing me to share my journey.