

## ***Testimonial by Christopher Aguirre, Grad Year 2019***

My name is Christopher Aguirre and I'm going to be a senior this year in high school. I've been in the BYVAF Program for 3 years and it's going to be my 4th this year. This program has done nothing but change my life in the most positive and impactful way. Through BYVAF I realized the love and passion I have for performing. Not only does the program teach us how to sing, dance, and perform, but it teaches many life lessons that no other programs could offer.

We're very diverse as we sing gospel, African American culture, original pieces written just for us, and even Cuban foot music. Through this program we all learn responsibility, leadership, the ability to work with others, time management, and being able to coordinate an event (such as our fundraisers like the Walk-A-Thon). I'm currently dance captain and the program has given me the opportunity to experiment with movement and take on my creativity.

Our national trips are life changing and benefit us in such a positive way. Research shows that traveling benefits physical, mental, and emotional health. Our incredible parents and board who coordinate our activities have done their best to plan the best activities. We've done show boats, go to museums, go try new food, and even performed at the Grand Ole Opry! Which is insane.

Overall the program has brought life-changing moments in each of our lives. For example, I won a \$20,000 scholarship in Canada and got accepted into a college already! They chose me and said my audition to the school was performing our In Sync set!

A big issue that's always being assumed is the cost to be in the program and the cost to keep it going. It seems impossible to run a program without those who can't seem to pay off their contributions, but you know what I say to that? False. I have personally been in this program for 3 years now and have had financial aid help my family and I out.

We have incredible families who are so willing to help any student in need of any financial help. I volunteer to help the program function. I help out at our fundraisers, stay before and after shows to help set up, and I come on weekends to help organize and make sure things are in place. I volunteer, because it's what I love to do. Not only does it make me happy, but it makes everyone happy.

The program is run by everyone and the efforts put to make this program be so successful. Artists such as Dove Cameron, Blake Lively, and many more have gone through these programs and have mentioned in interviews how much it has changed their lives. The VAF program offers everything the BUSD Master Plan has written for our schools such as effective communication, collaboration among all stakeholders, and it leads us to success.

This past year I took 5 AP Classes, I'm on Dance Team, and was working a job and the program gave me more motivation to finish strong and persevere, because that's what we're taught to do. Do the best we can and finish strong!