

# CLIFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*www.clifton.k12.nj.us*

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Clifton High School Senior, Ashley Hernandez, Accepted into United States Senate Youth Program**

After witnessing this past summer's social reform movement and interning on two political campaigns, Clifton High School senior, Ashley Hernandez, was confident that a career in government and policymaking was in her future. "I wanted to take this passion a step further. Eventually, I came across the USSYP and was immediately interested in the opportunity," explained Hernandez.

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), established in 1962, is a week-long summit held in Washington DC. Ashley was one of two students selected to represent the state of New Jersey at the "intensive week-long educational experience ... for outstanding high school students ... interested in pursuing careers in public service."

In addition to meeting other students, US Senators, and possibly the United States Vice President, Kamala Harris, Ashley remarked, "The USSYP gathers 104 students across the nation, and the opportunity to meet such a diverse group of students and spark nonpartisan conversations was extremely valuable to me."

The USSYP's goal is to "increase young Americans' understanding of the interrelationships of the three branches of government, the caliber and responsibilities of federally elected and appointed officials, and the vital importance of democratic decision making not only for America but for the people around the world."

"Ashley's acceptance into the United States Senate Youth Program - whose slogan is Education, Leadership, Public Service - does not come as a surprise to me. I first met Ashley at a Clifton Board of Education meeting in July 2020 when she spoke publicly about the importance of creating cultural equity within our schools," said Clifton Superintendent Dr. Danny Robertozzi.

Since the meeting, Ashley and her best friend (and champion through the USSYP application process), Mariam Mufleh, developed the district's Diversity and Inclusion Committee that fosters the strengths of Clifton Public School's culturally diverse population.

"I am delighted that Ashley is extending her own education, leadership, and public service beyond Clifton's city limits," Robertozzi continued. "I am certain that Ashley will make us proud representing Clifton Public Schools in this esteemed program."

Clifton High School Principal, Michael Doktor, shared that Hernandez has consistently excelled in her advanced level courses, paving the way toward her acceptance into the USSYP. "In addition to maintaining exceptional grades in all of her classes, Ashley dedicates a great deal of her time and energy to being President of the Senior Class. She has held the office of President of her class each of her four years in high school. She is an outstanding student, person, and representative of Clifton High School."

Disappointed that the summit will be remote this year, Ashley is nevertheless delighted the program can continue virtually. "I am a little upset that I won't be able to meet the other USSYP recipients and politicians in person. Still, I am grateful that the organization continued regardless and am happy they prioritized our safety over anything."

Ashley's parents and older sister, Heather, were ecstatic by her acceptance. Ashley's sister, Heather, was next to her when she opened the email. "She was just as happy for me as I was for myself ... and I'm endlessly grateful for her support."

Ashley recognizes the opportunities afforded to her that her parents did not have as immigrants. "They were thrilled that I was being offered the opportunity of a lifetime and extremely appreciative of the scholarship that will lessen the financial burden of college tuition."

In addition to the experience, the CHS Senior will receive a \$10,000 scholarship after attending Washington Week. Ashley plans to major in Political Science in college but has not decided where she intends to attend college in September.

John O'Reilly, Social Studies teacher and Key Club Advisor said of his student, "Through countless hours studying, volunteering, and planning, Ashley has distinguished herself as someone who perfectly represents Clifton High School's motto of 'excellence in education.' Being accepted into this program is a testament to her outstanding character and limitless possibilities!"

AP English teacher, Dr. Rita Whetton, noted, "Ashley is an extremely pleasant, articulate, and intelligent young woman. Her expressiveness, both verbally and in written form, conveys a maturity that sets her apart from her peers. She is a pleasure to have as a student."

"There is no challenge too big for Ashley. She can accomplish anything she sets her mind to because she breaks her goals down into manageable steps that she then conquers one by one," remarked Raymond Burns, CHS Physics Teacher.

In a note to Mr. Doktor, Ashley expressed concluded by stating, "[I'm] So proud to be a Mustang!"

Clifton High School was last represented in 1969 when Kathleen Yaskiw attended Washington Week as the delegate to the United States Senate Youth Program.

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Photo Captions:

Hernandez1.jpg: Ashley and Mariam speaking at the Clifton Board of Education Virtual Meeting

Hernandez2.jpg: Ashley Hernandez, Mariam Mufleh, Jacqui Turk, Matthew Stewart, and John O'Reilly

Hernandez3.jpg: Ashley and Mariam in the CHS Media Center





