

# Students Prove Ability

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If the students at Dimond High are any indication of what our next generation of leaders will hold for us, then I must say that I'm excited for our future. I recently was invited to a panel discussion sponsored by the Dimond High School Student Government on the issue of closing high school campuses during lunch times. This issue has long roots, where over the last thirty years Sand Lake neighborhoods have encroached upon a high school that was once surrounded by trees as far as the eye could see. Students have been accused of loitering and littering in adjacent neighborhoods as well as other criminal offenses. The culmination occurred last spring when one of my neighbors decided enough was enough and proceeded to dump a sample of the students homework on the vice principal's desk. Dimond High students and the school administration, facing a back lash from homeowners and neighborhoods, are now paying serious attention to a situation that has not only gotten out of hand in neighborhoods, but threatens one of the sacred freedoms that are afforded to students in high school. In an effort to engage policy makers and give fellow students a first hand view of the severity of the issue, a panel was convened. The student organizer, Amy Downing, put together a very diverse panel that was representative of all facets including law enforcement, policy makers and a student voice. As someone who spends the better part of four months as a legislator in one continuous meeting, this was one meeting that impressed me with the way it was conducted, the quality of questions asked and the level of respect shown by the standing room only crowd. Those who arrived late were quieted and guided to the few open seats by fellow students. Those that stood and asked questions were incredibly articulate and respectful of the panelist. After every answer given, students applauded even though it was clear that some disagreed with the particular answer. These were students that were very interested in hearing what the problems were and understanding how to solve them.

The panelist I sat next to was a representative from the student body, a young man by the name of Ryan Hull. He appealed for the public to look beyond their baggy pants and hats and understand they're still good kids. I glanced over at his jeans and sweatshirt stopping to reflect that Ryan Hull looked a lot like Andrew Halcro on the weekends when I'm free from a suit and tie. I had the opportunity to chat with him before the forum started and asked him about his future plans which he shared without hesitation. In eight years, you'll find Ryan Hull replacing a critical valve on the pipeline, or fixing something else that's incredibly important to us all. And what about Jody McCarrey, the senior who wasn't afraid to stand up and defend her fellow students against stereotypes generated by a few but was humble enough to admit that even she could be more diligent. More importantly, she refused to relinquish the microphone until she got an answer to her question about how she was going to meet her yearbook commitments with a disrupted lunch schedule. Demanding straight answers from policy makers, we should all do that more often.

Three years ago when I was Chair of the Sand Lake Community Council, we discussed this same issue except it was in the neighborhood on the opposite side of the school. I have always felt that the students at Dimond High School along with those at other area high schools where these

conflicts are common, will need to establish a self policing policy to deal with their neighbors or they will continue to have to vigorously defend a freedom that some of us fondly remember. As it was mentioned during the forum, with freedoms come responsibilities. Walking through the hall on my way out to the parking lot I thought about my days at East High School. Driving with friends to lunch at Tastee Freez or an old time favorite, Jams. I wondered about how my generation of classmates would have reacted to this issue and I was grateful that Dimond High is comprised of young Alaskans like Amy, Ryan and Jody who are searching for solutions. I believe the guest panel showed their ability by answering how to be a good neighbor and I believe that our future leaders at Dimond High showed their ability by asking.