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Growing up in a family with a low socioeconomic status taught me to appreciate my education, especially coming from a small-town like Brownsville, Texas – a strong, united, border-town community. It has been shown that students from a low socioeconomic background are linked to lower academic achievement, retention, and progression. To not be another statistic, I applied to Guadalupe Regional Middle School (GRMS), a small private Catholic school known for its rigorous curriculum. GRMS awards full scholarships to students with a high academic background who cannot afford a quality Catholic education. Fortunately, I was accepted to the 2011 class with a full ride and hope for a different future. As I pursue my graduate career away from Brownsville, it has been challenging to give back to my GRMS community. However, the distance did not stop me from continuing my passion for encouraging the next generation to pursue a higher education. I collaborated with other GRMS alumni to create the Junior Board of Directors (JBOD), where we have continuously kept students and alumni connected through social media. We established a mission statement and bylaws committed to serve GRMS students and its community. Stemming from JBOD, we initiated a mentoring program for GRMS high school students, with GRMS alumni guiding students into their careers. I volunteered in the mentoring program guiding high school students in their pursuit of college and provided them the tools necessary for their career path.

During the pandemic, GRMS unfortunately struggled as funding became scarce. JBOD created online fundraisers to aid GRMS through these hardships. Not only has JBOD supported GRMS students, but we have also targeted our Brownsville community by distributing food to our homeless shelters in the valley. As one of the founders and leaders of both JBOD and the Mentoring Program, I plan to continue serving GRMS to help future generations of my community.

I have also targeted undergraduate students from my hometown's university, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). I have assisted on several panels sharing my trajectory into graduate school and what it is like to be a Ph.D. candidate. These panels were held for two programs: Caring for the Valley, a student-run UTRGV organization aimed at preparing members for future professional health

care careers, and B2BMED scholars. B2BMED is a program where students complete their associate degree, then transfer to UTRGV for their bachelor's in sciences and transition into research.

In addition to encouraging students from my hometown, I have started giving back to my Dallas community. I am part of a rising program known as Sibbs in Science, where we mentor high school students, converse about their career goals and how to reach them, as well as ScholarShot to mentor students through college. I will continue giving my time to guide and motivate younger generations in my community at any stage of my career. I believe educating and encouraging young minority students is crucial for our community to grow.