

Looking Back and Moving Forward: Peter's Reflections



North Penn High School senior, Peter Jaskiewicz, reflects fondly on his school experience. He cites highlights as the fun he had with friends, his participation in clubs and activities, and attendance at football games, the senior prom, and other school events. Peter recalls the challenges of AP classes and research papers, but knows he is leaving high school prepared for college and beyond. While many of Peter's reflections are typical of graduating seniors, unlike most of his peers, Peter navigated his high school experience with a diagnosis of autism.

Yet, when speaking with Peter, it's as if his autism is a blip on the radar. It is not really a topic of conversation, just a small part of who he is and something he has dealt with gracefully. Through the support of Peter's family, teachers, and friends, he has thrived at North Penn. His current schedule of Calculus Honors, AP Computer Science, American Government Honors, Astronomy Honors, Contemporary American Literature, and a handful of electives would be harrowing to most. However, Peter hasn't been afraid to tackle a challenge and puts in the work required to be successful. He mentions staying after school for many days with one of his favorite teachers, Mr. Steve Henry, to successfully complete his research paper. "The academics and honors classes were hard," says Peter, "but I managed to get help and stayed after to do what I needed to do."

Peter's work ethic extends beyond academics. Outside of school, Peter earned his Eagle Scout rank which he noted was "a huge accomplishment for me." Throughout his career at North Penn, Peter has been actively involved in the student body, participating in the Japanese Animation and Culture Club, the Simulation and Game Society, cheering in the stands at football games, and guest anchoring on the morning show. Although difficulty with social

situations is a hallmark of autism, Peter states that "gaining friends and getting to know my teachers was easy," and shares that his fondest memory of high school was spending time with his friends. Peter's parents believe that taking the regular bus from his neighborhood to school, rather than a special education van, was helpful in him being treated as "[one of the guys](#)."

When reflecting on the teachers who supported him along the way, Peter cites NPHS special education teachers Mrs. Wittmer, Mrs. Ozga, and Mrs. Byrnes, as helping him speak up for himself. He also expressed his gratitude for Penndale teachers Mr. Brick, Ms. Boccella, and Mr. Murray, and two of his elementary teachers, Mr. Fink and Ms. Riley. Peter's family shared how Peter was both thrilled and surprised when Mr. Brick attended a ceremony outside of school where Peter earned his Eagle Scout rank (pictured above).

When asked what advice Peter would give to teachers who have students with disabilities in their classrooms, he eloquently expressed, "don't be concerned about the things that push them down. Help them pursue their dreams." Peter was able to pursue his dreams, in large part, due not just to the support of teachers and family, but his own self-advocacy. He offers the following advice to students with disabilities – "Don't be afraid to ask for help. Advocate for yourself and for the accommodations you need."

What's on the horizon for Peter? He plans to begin his college career at Montgomery County Community College, focusing on mathematics and science courses. After getting his feet wet at MontCo, Peter hopes to transfer to Villanova, citing its proximity to home, strong academics, and disabilities support center as a good fit for him. "I could see myself there," he says. So can we, Peter. So can we.