

# Howard High junior elected student member of Board of Education

By Andrew Michaels, Howard County Times  
May 27, 2015

A student. A swimmer. A videographer. And, now, the newly elected 2015-2016 student member of the Howard County Board of Education.

Howard High School junior Rachel Lin, 17, was elected as student member of the board on April 22 and begins her term on July 1.

Lin said she saw herself as a student board member since she started watching student elections on television as a sixth-grader.

"Student leadership and having a voice in the community is a really good opportunity," Lin said. "Every student should have a voice."

Lin was active before her campaign. When she is not working with the Student Government Association, the National Honor Society, National Spanish Honor Society and the National Math Honor Society, Lin said she's swimming with the Retriever Aquatics Club at UMBC, making videos or volunteering in the community.

"With volunteering, I'm introduced to people I wouldn't usually be introduced to," Lin said. "I know how to communicate effectively with adults, interacting with adults versus my peers and students."

After completing the application process and getting two recommendations, Lin said each of this year's five candidates were interviewed by the current student member, Patrick Mikulis, board members and advisers. The board then selected two candidates to start the campaign.

"When they called saying that I was in the final two, I was extremely ecstatic," Lin said. "It's the only thing I could have dreamed of. Getting the good news, I was extremely excited."

Lin said she entered the campaign to make changes to the Howard County school system and work with students throughout the county.

"I wanted students to get to know me," Lin said. "I visited all the Howard County schools and interacted with students throughout the different schools and talked to them about issues. I heard what their concerns are in the county."

After students from sixth through 11th grade voted, Lin received the call that she'd been elected while volunteering with HC DrugFree substance abuse education program.

"That was an awesome moment," Lin said. "The board called, I answered the phone and they were like they had good news for me. I was so happy and called my parents and told them the good news ... To realize that my hard work has paid off and help the students get their voice in the community, working with the students to get their opinions and ideas heard. It was one of the best moments of my life."

Board Chairwoman Janet Siddiqui said the board is eager for Lin to join its team.

"Rachel certainly brings lots to the board in terms of her enthusiasm and previous work with student government," Siddiqui said. "We're looking forward to hearing her ideas and things she would like to look at this year. I encourage students to look at the policies."

Every year, Siddiqui said, the student member of the board is shown a list of policies they can review and revise along with the board. Lin said she is one step ahead, having listened to students' concerns focused on the school's Food and Nutrition Policy and the Bring-Your-Own-Device Policy during her campaign.

"A lot of students have talked about the Food and Nutrition Policy that talks about the food standards and guidelines that students can and cannot have during the school day," Lin said. "A lot of students wish this could be revised."

Lin said students have the same issues with the Bring-Your-Own-Device Policy, where only certain teachers are allowing students to bring cell phones and laptops into the classroom for Internet access. Lin said she wants to discuss these policies with board members and develop an outcome that satisfies both them and the students.

Siddiqui said Lin has been attending board meetings and working with Mikulis to prepare.

"He's been a gem on the board," Siddiqui said of the current student member. "He's truly gone above and beyond in terms of making sure he's getting to every school and getting to the voice of the students. We're very proud of him and we're looking forward to Rachel being an outstanding board member as well."

With Mikulis' mentorship, Lin said she's learning how board meetings are run and how to maintain a voice for all students.

"I believe that students should have a voice in their community because ultimately the Howard County school system is about the students," Lin said. "Other counties around the country don't have this position, so even having the position allows the students to get their voices heard. Adult members of the board might not have the students' opinions. Being the lynch pin between the students and the board members is something I would want to do."