

ACCELERATORS IN EDUCATION

Thanks, Kathryn! I've got to say, it's very weird to call you Kathryn. My first memory of USN was the call my mom got to invite us to learn more about the middle school they were putting together on the west side of Columbus. This school would end up being directed by Kathryn, who walked door-to-door on the west side to introduce herself to children and their families. In doing this, she **assured** families that USN **valued** the futures their children had to offer. This is the core of what it means to be a student at USN. It is having professionals give you their word and then following through on their promise. For teachers, it is faith in the children.



As a sixth grader at USN's new west-side campus, I was able to see how much a school could give me. Up to that point, I had been under the impression that my education would be my own to build. USN taught me that, while it was my own, I did not have to nurture my love of learning alone. Classes were tailored to our needs. We were quite lucky to have a leadership class that showed us how to define what we wanted from our lives and find the institutions that could help give us that future. We were also celebrated with weekly awards like spirit stick and highest paycheck that gave us joy in tasks like completing our week. I cannot tell you how many special awards shirts my mom still has commemorating this time in my life. USN supported each and every student in every endeavor and continued to as we grew.

This support followed me into my high school career. USN often took tours of the high school I attended, and I would see students who looked just like me walking through the halls, imagining what their futures looked like. When I entered my junior year, I was given the opportunity to seek out a job shadow placement of my choice. This was an easy choice for me. I wanted, and still want to, become a history teacher. This was a love introduced to me by a teacher at USN and indulged by every other staff member. I shadowed at CCA-Dana and knew that that was where I wanted to be. It was truly like coming home. After I graduated, I remained in contact with the teachers and administrators who supported me during my middle school and high school education. In fact, I was able to share my first

educational blog piece with some staff members here and I credit them with building my confidence in writing this piece.

United Schools Network condenses their vision into six simple words: For every child, an open door. This is not just when you are with them. These doors stay open and continue to be open for as long as you want them to. I am lucky to have been introduced to USN when I needed them most. Their dedication to their students is evident as they have created an alumni services department that actively keeps in touch with former students and provides resources for secondary education. This is their standard and one they take very seriously. I am certain that this standard and their faith in students will stay their priority as long as they are active.

Today, I am lucky enough to use the networking tools, taught to me by USN, to intern at the Ohio Historical Society as an informal educator. Without USN, I would not be who I am today. Thank you all for coming and I hope you have a wonderful night.