

Scholarship Essay by Ruhan Yi
NBCHS, 2025

I am marching through the howling -40°C gale with a yellow placard firmly held between my mittened hands. My cheeks are as rouged as my passion. The piles of snow in frosty winter cannot stop me. Of course, I can comfortably stay warm inside holding hot chocolate by the fireplace, but I cannot watch my friends suffer and die. I must step outside against the blizzard and search for a way to save their lives. This is a pivotal part of my journey.

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH... my first baby steps and childhood in Seoul, South Korea.

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH... my middle school years in Vancouver, Canada. The life of an immigrant was never easy.

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH...

After flourishing in two global cities, I now conclude my high school years in North Battleford, the most dangerous city in Canada with the highest Crime Severity Index (CSI), drug addiction and homelessness. Despite the intent of our city to be established as the headquarters of North West Mounted Police (1873), settling the “peace” has been an ongoing challenge. After 150 years, the deep roots of this problem continue to be Quality Education. With crowded classrooms, understaffing and unsustainable funding, Saskatchewan Public Education is simply chaotic, unable to cultivate the prairie’s hidden gems.

In April 2023, this provincial crisis led to political disputes between the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation and the provincial government. Amid the fierce political disputes, students had to experience another pandemic as marginalized victims. Endless province-wide sanctions and strike actions disrupted our extracurricular activities and fundamental learning rights. When our Senior Boys’ Soccer Team’s final match was cancelled, I cried out—not because of the sports, but as a vulnerable response against these gigantic barriers hindering my future.

Students felt helpless, and lost without direction; depression and anxiety instantly took place across Saskatchewan. Wherever I went, including the washroom or change room, I saw the tightly packed crowd of addicts relying on another sip of vape juice to momentarily escape their miserable reality. They were once my best friends.

I wanted our students’ voices to be heard. Only one solution was afforded: self-creating the opportunity for students to speak up.

March 27, 2024, Education Minister Jeremy Cockrill’s office declared an impasse. I gathered over 100 students in North Battleford for the “Our Voices Matter” campaign and hit the streets. Although the weather was another overwhelming obstacle, we fearlessly took off and marched together.

Every step we took was for each student’s grievance and lament that had been ignored. Three hours of physical discomfort was surely worth it. Our bodies were frozen by Saskatchewan’s harsh winter, but our hearts were warm, with voices and collaboration serving as the matches. This small spark rapidly spread across the province, igniting collective hope for better Public Education over two months.

At last, I was given an honourable opportunity to represent students' voices to the Minister of Education and public media at the 2024 Saskatchewan Student Citizenship Award (June 07, 2024). I passionately delivered the key message: "Education is our future, and we will continue to fight" on behalf of all Saskatchewan students.

The impact was immediate. After just one week, the Government of Saskatchewan finally agreed to binding arbitration, terminating all strike actions and sanctions.

Some people might wonder how a teenager living in a rural area can impact the contemporary challenges in their communities, but our success was the byproduct of collaboration and a sense of inclusion. Offering space and opportunity for every student to speak their voice not only addressed the 'Crime Town' label in North Battleford, but completely rebuilt a sustainable community and future of Saskatchewan beyond imagination.

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH ...

Here I am, still marching forward with optimistic hope through initiative and cooperation, cheerfully awaiting my next step. As the prolonged winter progresses, and with spring just around the corner, any challenges will be welcomed as another milestone of my journey.