

Good evening members of the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, parents, and fellow students.

Today I want to talk about three things that shape our schools every single day. Voice, funding, and the future. Who gets heard when decisions are made. How public schools are supported. And how students can be part of protecting and strengthening the education we all depend on. I want to begin by thanking Ms. Luciano, Dr. Levine, and Mr. Carbonetti and the Board of Education for selecting me as a student representative. Creating this role sends a clear message that students belong in the room where decisions are made. Being part of this larger group helps us understand how our district works, why certain choices are made, and how much thought and effort goes into supporting our schools. I am grateful for the trust placed in me and being able to represent the student body of the South Orangetown Central School District. Public schools across the country face serious challenges every day. Budgets are tight, and we are asked to do more with less. Decisions made at the state and federal level directly affect what support we get in our schools. Recently, many districts have seen state aid cuts and funding limits that make balancing budgets even harder. Districts also work to balance enrollment so students are evenly distributed and class sizes stay within a healthy range. Research shows that when schools do not receive sufficient funding, student outcomes can suffer, especially for those who already face barriers. That is why I am glad our school district has a plan in place to face these challenges head-on. Leaders, teachers, and community members are working together to use resources responsibly, balance needs across schools, and protect what we value most- quality education, equity, and opportunities for all students. We know it will take creativity, teamwork, and courage, but we are ready to meet the moment. As students, we don't just watch these issues unfold. We advocate for public funding, we speak up for fairness, and we stand for policies that strengthen our schools instead of weakening them. Our voices matter. When we talk to lawmakers, when we share our stories, when we show up, we help shape the future of public education.

Thank you again to the Board, the administrators, and all of you for listening, for caring, and for joining us in the work it takes to make our schools better today and tomorrow.