

Hi

My name is Margarita Rodriguez, however, some of you know me as Maggie. I'm hoping that by the end of this speech you will be able to look at me as someone who has walked in your shoes. I hope my story gives you a sense of inspiration, motivation, and bravery. Well, I am a first generational educated Latina...What does that mean? It means, my parents were born and raised in Mexico. I am Mexican. My parents made their journey to the United States in the 1970s, at the young age of 14 and 16. I have asked my parents many times why they choose to come. Many times, the story changes however, the theme usually stays the same. For a better life. They came over like some of you, alone, scared, nervous, and excited. Scared of the unknown. A better life, right? My dad walked across the Arizona mountains for 7 days wearing only a thin t-shirt and his cowboy boots. He will never forget how cold his feet were, He could have sworn his toes were going to break off, or how hungry he was, and he remembers looking through the dumpster and eating out of a cold soup can. he began his job as a farm worker picking oranges in California. He got paid a few cents per day, and once the season was over, he moved over to Virginia to work at a paper mill.

My mother, whom I adore more than anything in the world swam across the famous Rio Grande. She remembers the heat being so harsh that her skin felt as if it were going to fall off. She recalls how thirsty she was, how desperate she was for water that she forced herself to drink out of the container of water where the cows drank out off. She quickly found work as a housecleaner for families in Virginia. Like many of you, both of my parents didn't speak a word of English but somehow managed to find work and make a living. They were one of the lucky ones who were able to get their residency under President Regan. It was so easy back then

Such a difference now right?!

Now, my siblings

I am the youngest of 3. I have an older sister and an older brother. As I mentioned before we have lived here in Fairfax all our lives. In fact, if most of you didn't know already, I graduated from this very school. Having been born and raised in Northern Virginia I was able to receive some of the best education this country has to offer. But at your age, it sure didn't feel like it. Let me explain why?

Like many of you, I couldn't understand American culture. As I mentioned before my parents left everything in Mexico, but they sure brought their beliefs and Mexico's spirit. I was born and raised in that Mexican culture. I can't skip over talking about my childhood as I feel as though many of you would

relate to it. In my elementary school, I was one of 5 Latinas in the entire school. And I can still remember the names of those 5 students. Even though it wasn't many of us, I never felt different.

It wasn't until I was sitting in my 4th-grade class and the teacher went around the room to ask each student what their parents did for a living. Such as what job they had, everybody said, government worker, business owner. Here I was about to say my mom was a house cleaner. I suddenly felt embarrassed because I had to the realization of being the only Latina –

Now I do remember saying this wasn't going to keep the sad part long, this is one of those times. Because things did get better and let me explain why... I went to middle school and High school! Here at Chantilly High, I had a very close group of Latino friends. We even had a name for our group the Latin Juniors. During my sophomore year, we started the Latino Dance Club, where we would stay after school and dance our hearts out to songs by Daddy Yankee.

As many of you are beginning your 10th, 11th, or even your senior year. You come to realize that sometimes you aren't the same person you were when you walked thru the front door as a freshman.

The group of friends I had, the ones that I cared about, the ones that I connected with just being I was Latino began to head in different directions. I'll be honest,

Making poor choices, skipping class, or not caring about my grades, forgetting all about my education to focus on what I felt was more important hanging out with my friends. I began to realize that those same choices that I thought were cool my freshmen year weren't cool anymore. People began to talk about colleges and careers, and here I am barely passing my classes. The bravery part of this speech comes here because my junior year is the year, I choose to make my change.

I was tired of seeing the look of disappointment on my parent's faces. Especially, my mother, I would see her rush home from work after cleaning 2 or 3 houses. I just worked hard, I stopped making all the wrong choices, I took accountability for my actions, and I got serious about schoolwork. I raised my grades and saw my end goal of graduating high school with the rest of my class.

It took me to remember why my parent's made their dangerous trip to this country.

My dad who didn't even make it out of elementary school, and my mother who didn't finish her education back in Mexico can proudly say they have been able to watch all 3 of their children walk the stage and receive their diplomas. I was fortunate enough to hear the words – I am so proud of you –

I went off to college to study education. I had the privilege to go to college. I'm so thankful for the community college because I met people that worked and went to school. I studied early childcare education

I wanted a career where I knew I could give back to my community. Before I end my speech, I wanted to talk to you about one last person. As I said before, I had the luxury of being born here, well my husband didn't. He, like many of you, has had to fight his way through learning English for the first time, and getting a job under a fake name, all while trying to achieve the American dream.

He became one of those DACA recipients under the DREAMER act, in 2012. Which means granting temporary protection without risking deportation. I can proudly say that he works as an engineer for a local company.

I chose to work as a liaison to be a support person for the Latino community here at Chantilly High School. Being a voice, being a person who can help all the ones who feel invisible. It gave me the idea and the inspiration to work in schools. His motivation is the reason why I do what I do.

I will end my speech with one last quote. From one of my favorite artists of all time.

Frida Kahlo- "At the end of the day, we can take a lot more than we think we can."

So keep working, keep trying, and for whatever reason never give up.