

# **PRESENTATION OF THE 18TH STUDENT ADVISOR TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**APRIL 28, 2025**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING**

## **Presenters:**

Mahitha Ratakonda, Elgin High School

Logan Iott, South Elgin High School

Thomas Akemann, Larkin High School



**Superintendent's Student Advisory Council**  
**Recommendation of the**  
**18TH STUDENT ADVISOR**  
**TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**April 28, 2025**



**Dhanvi Dhandapani**

**2025-2026**

**Student Advisor  
to the**

**Board of Education**



**Aashna Gandhi**

**2025-2026**

**Alternate Student Advisor  
to the**

**Board of Education**

**Dr. Suzanne Johnson**

This evening, I am pleased to introduce three members of our Superintendent's Student Advisory Council who will present to the Board the recommendation for our 18th student advisor the Board of Education.

- ➔ **Mahitha Ratakonda of Elgin High School**
- ➔ **Logan Iott of South Elgin High School**
- ➔ **Thomas Akemann of Larkin High School**

The students will briefly describe the process the Student Advisory Council followed in making their recommendations and then share with the Board information on their top candidate.

## Mahitha

Good evening Dr. Johnson, Mrs. President, and members of the Board of Education.

On behalf of the entire Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, let me thank the Board for the opportunity to be involved in the selection of the student advisor to the Board. This was a process that we took very seriously.

Like us, I am sure you will find that the two finalists for Student Advisor to the Board are both outstanding candidates. Either of them would be an excellent addition to the Board. The process of selecting the Student Advisor to the Board has been just one of the important tasks we've worked on this year.



## Logan

The process we followed was completely student-driven. However, we do want to thank Dr. Johnson for the guidance and support she provided us throughout the year. In the Winter of 2024/25, high school principals were asked to solicit nominations for the position which would be submitted to the school's Principal Advisory Committee. The Principal Advisory Committee for each school was given until January 27, 2025, to select and submit the names of the two student nominees, along with the following information:

- A letter of reference from a faculty member/principal;
- The student's transcript demonstrates that the candidate is in good standing;
- A student-written essay explaining why the student would be a good nominee for the position of Student Advisor to the Board of Education.
- A resume highlighting their education, accomplishments, job or volunteer experience, skills, and any other points of interest.



## Thomas

We received a total of 10 student nomination packets that were complete and submitted by the deadline, including students from each of the following high schools: Bartlett, Elgin, Larkin, South Elgin, Streamwood and DREAM Academy.



The meeting we held to narrow the candidates concluded with a decision to interview five candidates based on the strengths they each possessed. In March, the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council interviewed all five candidates. During our interviews, we looked far beyond student performance in narrowing our list. Our goal was to select those students who could represent the voices of all high school students and who had the inner drive to make a difference.

Based on our review of each candidate, and the interviews we conducted, we are recommending to the Board of Education, in order of preference, our two finalists:

1. Dhanvi Dhandapani - Bartlett High School
2. Aashna Gandhi - Elgin High School



## Mahitha

***Dhanvi Dhandapani***, a junior at Bartlett High School, began her U-46 career 12 years ago when she was in Kindergarten at Hilltop Elementary School.

As a junior at Bartlett, she exemplifies academic excellence by ranking in the top 2% of her class. Her passion and drive for creating an inclusive and responsive educational system for all students has only grown stronger after witnessing how life's challenges can be transformed into meaningful opportunities. As the next student advisor to the Board of Education, Dhanvi is determined to make sure her peers voices are always considered when it comes to making decisions about their futures and in shaping the education system that serves us all.



## Logan

Dhanvi is a well-rounded, and self-motivated young adult. As the founder and president of Thread Together, she turned her love for crocheting into a vehicle for community service, teaching over 30 participants and partnering with the National Association of Down Syndrome. Together they donated over 100 crocheted pieces to local hospitals sharing a vision of giving back.

She demonstrates her dedication to leadership as the Vice President of the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA). She launched a mental health awareness campaign, delivered an award winning speech on youth mental health and raised \$1000 to reduce program costs for her peers.





## Thomas

Whether tutoring students, balancing two jobs or participating in the Perry Initiative Program by performing mock orthopedic surgeries alongside surgeons and medical students, Dhanvi consistently demonstrates empathy, patience and a willingness to serve. Her desire to pursue a career in orthopedic medicine is not only to make a lasting impact, but also advocate for the mental and emotional well-being of others, which reflects her holistic approach to leadership and service.

Dhanvi's unique perspective, unwavering dedication and collaborative spirit will benefit the board and the students she represents. It is our honor to present **Dhanvi Dhandapani** as our candidate for the 2025-26 Student Advisor to the Board of Education.



## **Mahitha**

**Aashna Gandhi**, a U-46 student since fifth grade is a valued member of Elgin High School currently serving as the president for both the Elgin HS's Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) and South Asian Student Association (SASA) clubs. She brought the first ever culture show and is the co-founder of the inaugural international fair.

Her gifts and talents are reflected by her volunteerism and internships with a medical technology and IT consulting company. Additionally, she teaches at a dance studio and is the Secretary of the Red Cross Club. Aashna is an outstanding individual with leadership qualities and a passion for making a difference in both her community and school.

It is our recommendation to appoint Aashna Gandhi as the 2025-26 Alternate Student Advisor to the Board of Education.



## Logan

Let us emphasize again, though, that each of the candidates we reviewed would make an excellent Student Advisor to the Board. Our deepest appreciation goes out to those students who were nominated and agreed to participate in this process.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the hard work of the entire Superintendent's Student Advisory Council for dedicating additional time out of their schedules to review applications and conduct interviews.

Thank you.

