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Hello my name is Uma Abdullahi and I am an ambitious young lady, but I haven't always been this way. Three years ago I never would have imagined myself here today because it just didn't fit the status quo; but now I stand before you proving that the status does not exist. My freshman year I was the type of student who thought school was just a place you have to go to and if you don't fit a mold, your voice wasn't valued. The more I thought about it, the more I realized my voice matters because I say it matters. I transferred to Madison High School my sophomore year and did a complete 180. I became an AP scholar, boosted my GPA, and received my first scholarship. I got involved and made changes that I felt were necessary, especially on education because it's important. I have worked hard with raising awareness within the city of Portland and with Mayor Sam Adams as a liaison to increase graduation rates with minority students and students of poverty. I have spoken at events to help low income students get more funding for SUN Schools as well as the youth pass that PPS students have on their ID cards.

Most importantly, people in my new home of Portland have showed me to never underestimate the power of youth because we are the future. When you shield us from things like knowledge, you shield us from power because knowledge is power. I'm so passionate about education because like many of the other things that my family left back home, education is one of the very few things they have today; no one can take that from you. And many people in other countries and even parts of the U.S. would do anything for a good education and I want people to know about the reward of education. We all have a golden opportunity, let's take advantage of it.

Imagine everything you have and everything you have worked hard for. Now, picture it gone. That is what happened to my family and many other refugees in Somalia and other parts of the world, even today. We were forced to leave our home with nothing but the clothes on our backs. We left all of our belongings (materialistic items), and that helped me realize that when you don't have your iPhone, Uggs, clothes, or the newest designer handbags, who are you? What have you contributed to this world? Because it's not what you have, it's what you have done. I'm not upset about the way my life turned out and although I can't change the past, I'm aiming to change the future. I was born into nothing but hopes and dreams of a better life like we once had. And although my family had nothing, they once had the life of helping those that were less fortunate. Believe it or not, the people who my family helped, ended up getting out of a life of poverty, and helped us get out of a lifestyle of bloodshed and famine in a war stricken country. I'm happy with my life and the way it has turned out. Although, I can't change the past, I'm aiming to change the future. I don't volunteer for a pat on the back or a 'good job'! I do it because it's what I love.

You could say my family had a well of salt which was the second largest salt factory in Somalia, but we were still hard working people just like many of the people at Madison. As I walk through the halls of Madison, I see all types of people from different parts of the world with so much to offer. We're like a mini microcosm of the world, all wishing to be the change we wish to see in the world, and I know it will happen.

Madison High School produces people like me. I'm standing here alone today, but I know this is for generations of people who felt inadequate. I'm here to show you, that you are adequate.