When I left BELL in July of 2017, I had planned to put together a local food and music festival for the summer of 2018. The event was to be called The Freshtival, intended to raise money for environmental causes and charities (such as the NRDC), and spread the joy of local eating. Unfortunately, The Freshtival never came to fruition: Soon into my junior year, I realized that I didn’t have the time to put together such a festival with my numerous academic and musical pursuits. I was still determined, however, to forward the cause of environmentalism in my school and community. I decided on a two part action plan to address the lack of quality environmental education in my school system, and the lack of environmental activism in the student body. My plan involved convincing my school to offer AP Environmental Science, forwarding environmental education and awareness among my peers, and founding and operating an environmental club at my school that could facilitate discussion, execute projects, and work on improving the environmental responsibility of the school and community.

In the beginning of my junior year, I grew frustrated by the fact that my school didn’t offer an AP Environmental Science Course. Though they did offer a Standard Environmental Science course, most of the brightest kids in the school would never think of taking it, due to the lack of rigor in the course, and the pressure to take as many AP and honors courses as possible. I saw this as a flaw in my high school’s curriculum, and petitioned to get an AP Environmental course offered for the 2018-2019 school year. Gathering 50 signatures, I successfully convinced
the administration that the course would be a popular offering, and this year, they are offering two sections of the class.

Though petitioning for AP Environmental Science was a piece of my new action plan, the main focus of it was in starting an environmental club at my school, The WHS Environmental Activists Club. I lead the club alongside two of my peers, and we hold weekly meetings where we discuss environmental issues, and plan projects in the school and community. We began operating in January of last year, and there are about ten committed members. Our first project was a simple bake sale, where we raised $150 for the NRDC. Since then, however, we have begun to get more creative with our endeavors. Over the summer and into this school year, we are growing vegetables and herbs in the school garden, which we are selling at the monthly farmers market at Lachat Town Farm, a community garden in my town. We are donating all of the proceeds to the NRDC. We sold at our first market just last week, on August 31st, and raised $153. We are selling at two more markets, one in September, and one in October. In periods in between markets, we bring our ripe produce to The Open Door Homeless Shelter in Norwalk, CT.

Recently, we have started working with the Sustainable Weston Committee, a town sponsored environmental committee. My fellow leaders and I attended a committee meeting where we discussed ordinances they have proposed to the town to ban plastic shopping bags, and to ban the use of any products derived by fracking. We plan to gather a group of concerned students to voice their opinions at the town hall meeting where the selectmen will vote on these ordinances.
We are also currently in the process of applying for a beehive grant through the Bee Cause Project, a program which grants a number of beehives to schools around the country, and provides consultation, guidance, and educational materials. The beehives provide students with a hands-on platform to gain the science skills necessary to approach environmental issues.

We have attempted to initiate a number of projects which have failed to gain any traction due to administrative vetoes. It is these projects which have made me realize the qualities which are required of a successful environmentalist: patience, resilience, and an unflagging commitment to the cause. In many cases, environmentalists will be facing opposing parties that are unconvinced of the importance or practicality of what they are trying to forward. This happened when I tried to implement a composting program at my school. In a meeting with the principal, I could not convince her that the merits of composting outweighed her concerns: that it would be too much effort for the kitchen staff to transfer their waste to a composting area, and that students would not care to differentiate compost bins from trash bins. I have learned through experiences like these that advocating and living by environmental principles is an uphill battle—but it is a cause which I believe is more than worth the struggle.

I would advise new leadership students to be honest with themselves, and their time limitations, when they devise their action plans. I was overly ambitious with my idea for the freshtival, and when I had to admit to myself that it couldn’t be done with my busy junior year schedule, I was rather disappointed. In hindsight, had I planned a more feasible project from the beginning, I could have avoided such disappointment, and circumvented the hassle and frustration that trying to work with unrealistic time limitations caused me. That being said, a
healthy amount of ambition should be strongly encouraged, as students should strive to make their projects as excellent as they can possibly be.