

## APH The Student Experience, by Kai Owens

I'm Kai Owens, a legally blind advocate, student, athlete, and drummer. I am 16 years old and attend a mainstream public school where I am in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Mainstream schooling can be a challenge sometimes, but I believe it prepares me for the future by letting me learn how to better advocate and deal with problems.

Over the years I have gone through many changes in my visual field and in the techniques that I use to accomplish my work and goals. I currently have very limited vision and complete my class work via assistive technology and braille. My current day at school consists of four blocks. I come into the school in the morning with the use of a mobility cane, and then, I walk to my first class of the day: literature. I've found that this class is usually the easiest because literature is accessible with very little prep; I do almost all of my work in class on a laptop with the use of the JAWS screen reader and documents in Microsoft Word. Then I go to my math class, analytical geometry. In this class, accessibility challenges are present, such as issues obtaining braille packets I use for the worksheets and finding calculators that are properly accessible, as well as other materials. However, my math teacher Mrs. Bettinger is very good at verbally explaining what she is doing on the board. Next, I attend drama class where everything is rather accessible, although some acting games are difficult because they rely heavily on vision. Finally, I attend my Braille and assistive technology class with my TVI Mrs. Bussey and my parapro Ms. Williams. In this class, we trouble shoot accessibility problems, learn new technology, and work toward future IEP goals.

My favorite class has always been science because I am very interested in earth science, biology, and more. I plan on going to college for some type of environmental or meteorological studies. My favorite teacher is Mrs. Hibbs, my biology teacher from last year. She played a major role in figuring out ways for me to participate fully in science, she continues to help by sharing her accessible teaching methods with my future teachers. She also personally invited me to become part of the STEM club.

Being a mainstream student can be stressful and challenging because of accessibility issues and getting new teachers prepared every semester. There are also issues with IEPs not being followed and not having the proper materials at the right time, but I enjoy my school. I like being a part of a community that is not all blind. It allows me to expose other people to the blind community, and it gives me a chance to leave my comfort zone because I'm forced to become more vocal about issues and become better at problem solving. I think this experience will prepare me for the future because the real world is not trained on accessibility, and I'll need to be able to explain my situation and inform others of the tools necessary for my success.