“From freshman year, make college the norm.”
What are some of the challenges you’re facing on your path to college?
In the first week of school, we all made a list of our fears—getting in, affording it, not knowing if our GPA and ACT are high enough, not knowing how to start a scary and stressful process. But our counselors have emotionally prepared us to go through the process. We’ve always been supported in getting accustomed to going to college and having that as an expectation.

What can high schools do to help students along their paths to college?
You have to start Day 1: “Welcome to high school... where we will prepare you for college.” Give students confidence. We all want to succeed, so you need the atmosphere that gives every single student the confidence to hit the submit button on their college applications and say, “This is who I am, and this is what I’m going for.”

What keeps you focused and motivated to make it through college?
I find hope in people trying—people saying, “Yes, it’s going to be difficult, but it’s going to be worth it in the end. It’s going to be valuable.” The numbers are there: a postsecondary education does help you. Right now it seems like a little bit of a struggle, staying up late nights filling out applications, but it’s going to be worth it in the long run.

Jessica Vargas