



## **The Princeton Club of Rochester**

**Maham Abbas**  
**Junior, Webster Schroeder High School**

Students committed to improving race relations can be incredibly resourceful and creative in finding ways to do so. Maham demonstrates this in an exemplary way with her leadership roles. She finds two keys to breaking down biases and barriers are communication and a willingness to learn. As president of Webster Schroeder's Diversity Club, Maham developed a student panel to help address stereotypes and promote racial and cultural harmony. After months of planning, she and more than 50 educators and students gathered for a professional exercise that included identifying, examining and *challenging* those stereotypes with the goal being to eliminate them through conversation and reflection. Maham says part of the success came in what was *not* said:

“It was crucial, especially for the final part of the activity, to allow for silence. It was in this silence that participants, as well as the audience, were able to sit in their implicit biases and reflect on how they would turn internal thoughts into external action. People were hesitant to share, but once the discussion started rolling, the activity carried a lot of energy.”

Maham was inspired to do the training by her experience at the ROC2Change Summit, where she shared her belief that adults should acknowledge student perspectives in order to gain more empathy and understanding of their racial challenges. Teacher Katherine Pazmiño says Maham was the driving force behind the event.

“Maham recruited volunteers, planned logistics and created content that would educate teachers and administrators. The resulting panel discussion addressed issues of race, immigration and religion in an enlightened environment.”

The result is that teachers on campus are working to be more conscious about how they speak and interact with their students, and they're working to make their classrooms more culturally responsive. Maham says she realized that most participants weren't aware of their own implicit biases and genuinely wanted to change. She says:

“Communication is a huge part of trying to break down the barrier of stereotypes. Cultural diversity helps us recognize and respect ‘ways of being’ that are not necessarily our own, so that as we interact with others, we can build bridges to trust, respect and understanding across cultures.”

Message received, Maham! Congratulations on your continued leadership roles and successes!