

Ikonkar Kaur Khalsa

Student at Lindsay Unified School District
in Lindsay, California

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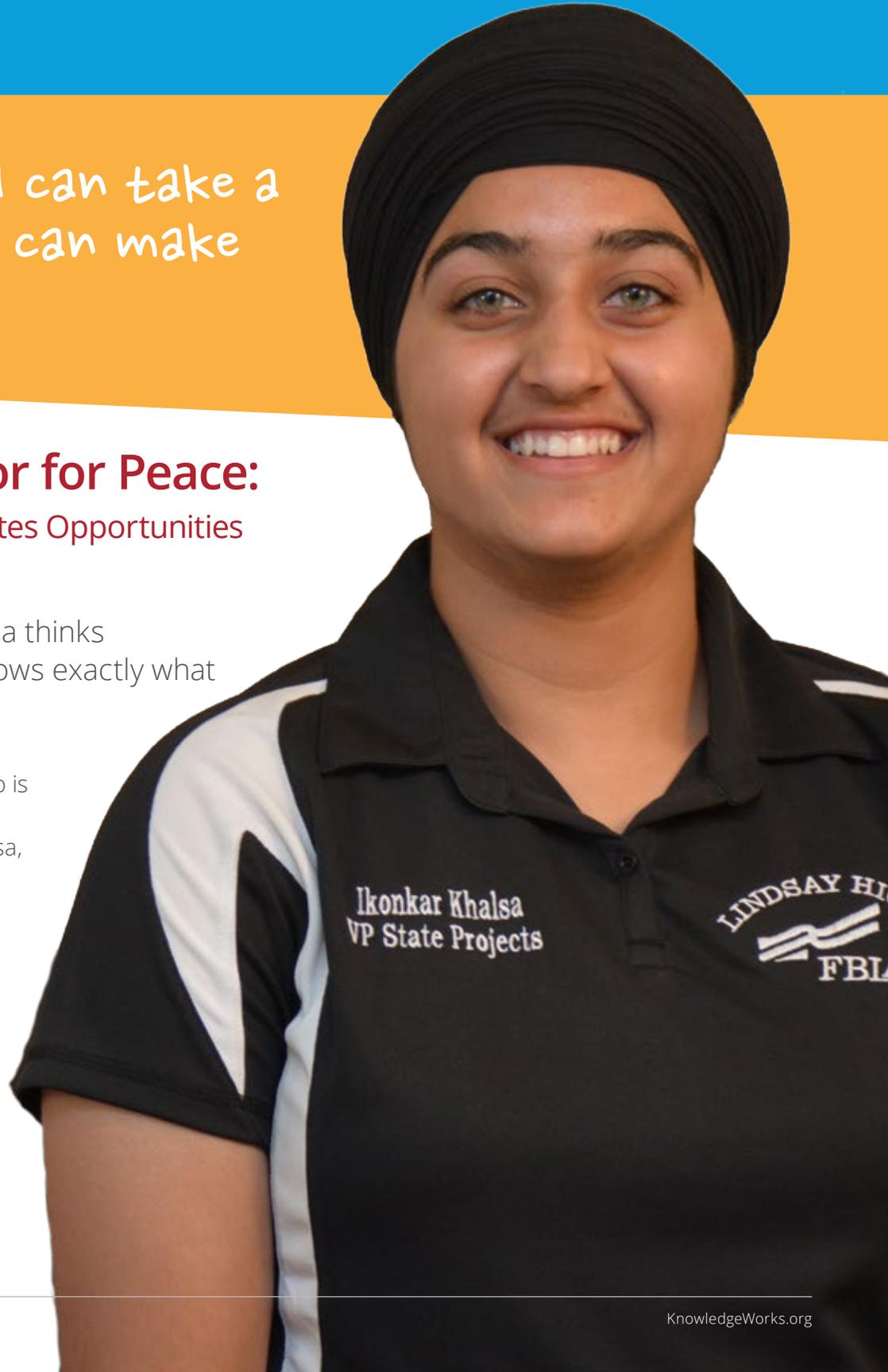
An Ambassador for Peace:

How One Student Creates Opportunities
for Understanding

When Ikonkar Kaur Khalsa thinks about her future, she knows exactly what she wants.

“I don’t want to be a person who is hidden in the world, not doing anything for anyone,” said Khalsa, who intends to pursue a future in law enforcement. “I want to fight against injustice. I want to protect people.”

Khalsa is a junior at Lindsay Unified School District (LUSD) in Lindsay, California, and she isn’t willing to wait for graduation to begin the work that matters to her. Passionate about traveling



and a self-proclaimed “multi-tasker” who revels in keeping busy, Khalsa has taken advantage of the flexibility offered by LUSD’s competency-based learning model to pursue her passions while also staying on top of her studies. LUSD’s culture elevates the importance of supporting the student as a whole, and providing the kind of environment and applied learning opportunities that encourage lifelong learning – and the power a learner has to chart their own course.

“I can do my lessons before school, after school, I can be working at midnight,” Khalsa said, explaining how being able to work at her own pace, when and where she can, allows her to miss school time to participate in community service with her church, to travel to nearby Bakersfield or Fresno to lead conversations on tolerance and diversity, and to be a learner ambassador for her school when other districts are visiting. “I have the opportunity to take my learning into my own hands. I’m meeting new people, seeing new cultures, so that when I get to college, I won’t have culture shock,” Khalsa said.

The flexibility Khalsa has about when to pursue her studies is matched by being able to take what she’s learning when she’s volunteering and traveling and use it to demonstrate mastery in core academic competencies. She’s currently interning with Mangini Associates, an architecture firm in nearby Visalia, and leading a team of student interns for an engineering design competition. The work they’re doing has counted towards their engineering and math requirements, as well as providing them critical hands-on experience in the community.

But it’s the ability to travel, learn and grow, and help others to learn and grow, too, that Khalsa feels most passionate about. A member of the Sikh religion, Khalsa feels she is in a

unique position to help others endeavor to be as open-minded as she tries to be. When she visits new places, it’s with eyes and ears open, and a commitment to helping those in need.

“I have always been in a safe environment, but when I travel, I see that people need help,” Khalsa said. “I feel like I need to give back because that’s who I am, that’s how I was taught. Whatever is happening that’s wrong, we can’t put a blind fold on. We need to stand up so that the problem never happens again.”

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On a recent trip to Bakersfield, Khalsa had the opportunity to speak to a rash of hate crimes that had been committed against fellow Sikhs, and to respond to incidents of bullying in schools. Opening up a dialogue was at the heart of what Khalsa hoped to do to reach understanding.

“When I stood up and wanted them to listen to me, I learned that I had to listen first. I needed to know what they were thinking, their mindset, what they weren’t understanding,” said Khalsa on the conversation she led between both instigators and victims. “We’re hating for no reason. When you stand up and you listen and you speak with peace, that’s what makes the world safe. Water takes down fire.”

That trip to Bakersfield wouldn't have been possible without a competency-based learning model that accounts for the passions, pace and interests of students. Khalsa has the freedom to be a student leader, manager, and athlete, and to develop the open mindset that she feels is so critical to her betterment as a person and as a future law enforcement official. Because for Khalsa,

having educators encourage her to try new things, "spread my wings," and explore means she's ready to meet whatever comes next.

The independence she's practiced in school has taught Khalsa not just about the world, but about herself. "I know that I can take a stand, that I can make a change."



DEVELOPING THE SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Students like Khalsa can pursue their passions and demonstrate what they know at the same time, making everything an opportunity for learning and growth because, according to KnowledgeWorks Director of Teaching and Learning, Robin Kanaan, it's the "whole learner" that matters.

"When learners can tap into what drives them, they can own their learning," Kanaan said. Experiences like Khalsa's, which allow her to develop essential civic-minded skills like understanding her own biases and impact, and learning to listen to

and appreciate the perspectives of others, contribute to her success not only as a learner, but in college, career and life. "That level of ownership, student agency and respect for themselves and others is something learners carry with them forever."

KnowledgeWorks is focused on ensuring that every student experiences meaningful personalized learning that allows them to thrive in college, career and civic life. We develop the capabilities of educators to implement and sustain competency-based and early college schools, work with state and federal leaders to establish aligned policy conditions and provide national thought leadership around the future of learning.

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