



Chapter I

“Here they come!” I gasp and press my nose against the window of one of the double doors of the school’s side entrance. In an instant, my mouth goes crackly dry, and I forget everything I want to say. *Think. Think!* “Um, hi, I’m Hope Roberts,” I practice under my breath. “And I’m running for sixth-grade class president.”

I watch the gleaming row of school buses pull up to JFK Middle. There’s about eight of them—the last of which puffs out black smoke when it comes to a stop.

“Ew,” I say, wrinkling my nose and momentarily aching for the environment.

Any minute now, the students pouring out of those buses—especially the sixth graders—will notice my sidewalk chalk arrows pointing them to the entrance by the sixth-grade lockers.

I grip the bar on the door and continue rehearsing. “I believe each of us has a unique role at JFK Middle, and as class president, I want to support you in yours.”

A few students start down the path to this entrance. They look shocked they can come in this way. It’s always locked! Grace calls it a crowd control thing, like how the science museum’s entrances are set up. It took days of convincing the vice principal (and watering her many office plants), but Ms. Reimer finally approved my request to open them up.

“Just for one day,” she said firmly.

Satisfied with my speech, I inspect my red sidewalk chalk lettering marking the shortcut to the sixth-grade lockers—courtesy of my new candidacy, of course. It reads: *6th Graders, Go a New Way* and *Go Hope Roberts for 6th Grade President*.

This is it—my official campaign launch! I want to make a difference at JFK Middle, and running for class president is a great way to do it. Thankfully,



my friend Grace has been helping me collect the signatures I need to get on the ballot. In fact, she's outside right now. I can imagine her at the carpool drop-off, petition in hand, directing sixth-grade foot traffic my way, like the amazing campaign manager she is.

In the week since I've decided to run, Grace has used her super-organized mind and famous spreadsheets to make sure we kick off this campaign strong. She helped me plan this launch to the detail, and so far, so great! It's still early in

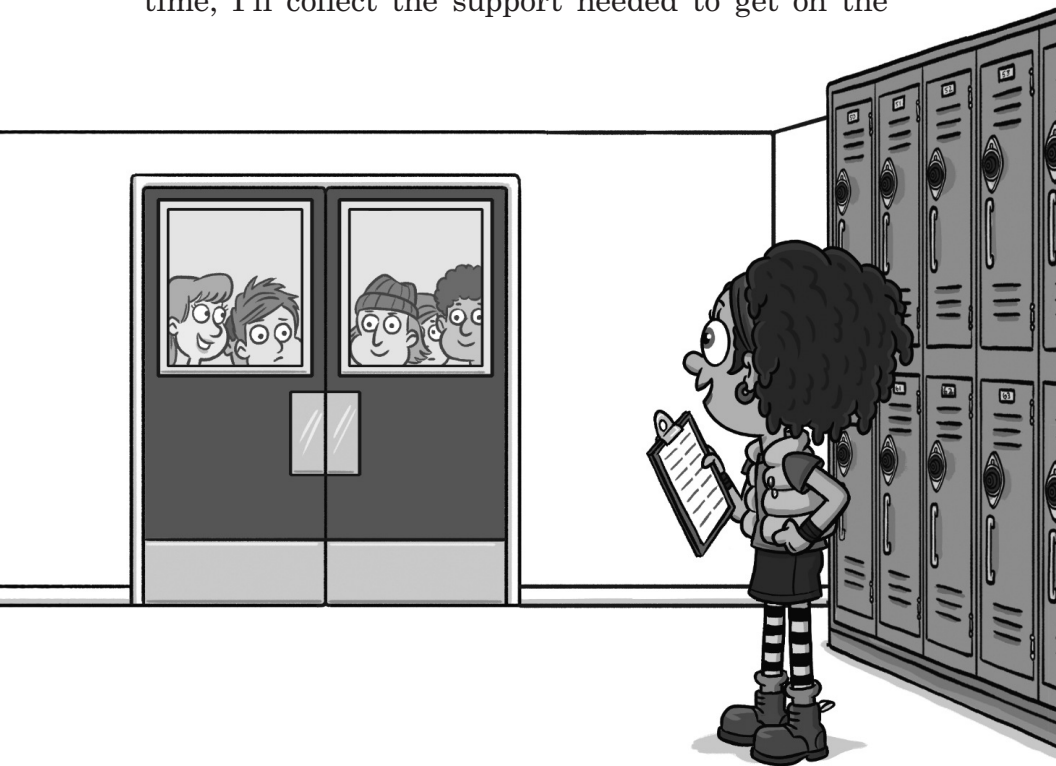
the campaign—election day is a month away—but some other candidates kicked off their campaigns a week before I did.

I study the campus activity while I wait for the crowd to notice the newly unlocked doors. Not long ago, this place was super unfamiliar, and a little bit scary. The ginormous fake tiger in the entryway seemed friendlier than half the kids wandering the halls. But I'm starting to get the hang of sixth grade. Science club is going great. My new friends Camila, Grace, and Henry are awesome. I've even gotten used to not sharing classes with my best friend, Sam. Sam's friends—Lacy, Golda, and Charlie—are now my friends, too. Just like my mom and older sister, I'm learning to carve out my very own place here. And even though I wouldn't have guessed it, I'm doing this by running for class president.

By the look of things, my campaign announcement is finally grabbing people's attention. The younger bus riders point to the arrows at their feet, break off from the crowd, and file in my direction. I get back in position, right next to my tall pile of campaign flyers set up on a stool in the middle of

the sixth-grade lockers hallway. Sign-up clipboard in hand, I stand at attention, just like my comic book hero Galaxy Girl on the cover of issue 23. My feet are set apart and my cape-ready shoulders are pulled back. I want to look presidential, and I think I've nailed it.

With seconds to spare, I play out the entire scene in my mind. The sixth graders will be so pumped they get to use this entrance, they'll cheer when they see me and happily add their signatures to my list. I'll confidently introduce myself to a ton of kids I don't know, without feeling nervous at all. In no time, I'll collect the support needed to get on the



school ballot. The golden number is fifty signatures, and if I count my friends' signatures—which I keep safe in my back pocket—I only need thirty-nine more. *I've got this.*

The loud voices get closer. I even catch glimpses of the kids leading the pack. It's the moment of truth.

But as the double doors swing open, a gust of wind blasts through the long hallway, sending all my flyers . . . flying. Panicked, I drop my clipboard and start grabbing at the swirling paper that's now everywhere. I cringe as a few loose sheets smack people in the face. *Oh no!*

I'm a future astrophysicist and daughter of a



NASA scientist. *How* did I miss that the door at the other end of the hall is pinned wide open? These are the perfect conditions for a classic wind tunnel.

Now instead of cheers, a ripple of laughter breaks out. I can imagine what a wacky sight I am. I must look like one of those game show contestants in a money grab chamber. Except I'm not at all feeling happy or lucky—just majorly embarrassed. Try as I might, I can't block out the giggles or the comments.

But wait . . .

"Ha ha, awesome!" erupts one kid.

. . . is that an entirely bad thing? I listen closer.

"How cool is this?" shouts another.

