

# The Washington Times

## Getting a step up to college

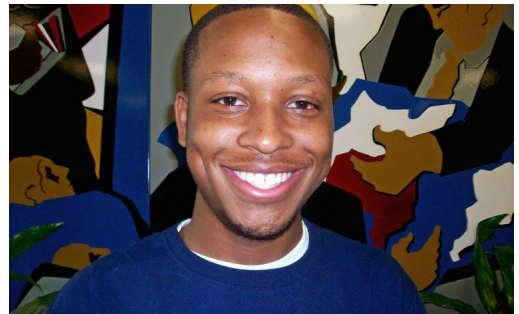
### National program helps Prince George's students move on

By Renee Tinsley SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES | Tuesday, May 5, 2009

#### CITIZEN JOURNALISM:

Davidson Piere-Piere is looking forward to a bright future. The 18-year-old Haitian native is finishing up the final weeks of his senior year at Crossland High School in Prince George's County with his sights set on either attending Howard University in the District or Bowie State University in Maryland.

Mr. Piere-Piere has choices. He's not alone. Mr. Piere-Piere was among the estimated 400 high school seniors from Prince George's, Baltimore, Arlington and Alexandria schools who gathered Friday at Howard University for an awards ceremony sponsored by College Summit, a national nonprofit program that helps high schools raise their college enrollment rates.



Peer Leader of the Year Award Winner- DeAnthony Hall

During the award program, Madeline Wingate-Alfonso of T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria was presented with the "Educator of the Year" award for her role as College Summit adviser and coordinator. Ms. Wingate-Alfonso has used the College Summit curriculum to teach more than 100 students, including Rosalie Artis, 17, president of College Summit Peer Leaders.

Another honor was presented to DeAnthony Hall, 17, of Renaissance Academy in Baltimore, who won the Peer Leader of the Year award at his school.

Prince George's County entered into a pilot program with College Summit nearly four years ago and is seeing some of the fruits of its labor.



Peer Leader Rosalie Artis and Ms. Phyllis Coley of Renaissance Academy in Baltimore, MD- Deloitte Award for Creating College-going Culture Winner

The program takes incoming high school seniors during the summer for an intense four-day program to get them on the road to be college-bound. From there, students like Mr. Piere-Piere take what they have learned back to their schools in the fall to help fellow classmates get college-minded.

"The work that we are doing is really focused in building the capacity within the schools so that they can inspire more students to enter college," said Donna Fleming, executive director of College Summit National Capital Region.

Crossland High School is among eight Prince George's County schools to participate in the College Summit program.

"We have found that when you make things student-centered, student-driven, student-focused, oftentimes, you will get greater results. Students many times are harder on each other than we can be on them, so this is a teacher tool. ... This peer-to-peer model," said Leelanee Malin, the program coordinator at Largo High School.

Mr. Piere-Piere is a peer counselor at Crossland, who was named peer leader of the year at his school. For eight months, he met weekly with other students and educators to prepare for the college entrance exams such as the SAT and ACT, to fill out college applications and to write college essays.

"To us, it starts with the students because students listen to other students so that's why there's such a big focus on peer leaders and getting them leadership training," Ms. Fleming said.

"American students often take education for granted," Mr. Piere-Piere said. Where I am from, grade school is a luxury. I used to walk miles to school, and we had to pay for it. Now, after being here for six years, I'm like: 'Wow, look at all these opportunities.' ... So I take school very seriously."

He added, "For a lot of kids out there, they don't think they can go to college. College is a new experience. This program is teaching us the process of how to go to college and all the dos and don'ts once we get there."

Prince George's County has a high school graduation rate of more than 80 percent in 2008, according to data on the Maryland Report Card's Web site, [www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org). Of those students, who drop out of school, many do so before they reach 10th grade.

Figures from the College Summit program show that nationally, 82 percent of the students who participate in the program enter college. The number for Prince George's County students in the program is 80 percent, the organization states.

"I think [student peer program] is the wave of the future, especially when we are talking about closing the gap between high school rigor and college rigor," Ms. Malin said. "My experience this year has shown me that when you have a formula to show a student about how to plan for the future, they are much more able to receive the information."

According to the program's Web site, College Summit started in 1993 in Washington, D.C. J.B. Schramm, a teen center director, had worked as an academic adviser at Harvard while in graduate school and had seen that admissions officers were hungry for low-income talent.

But he continued to see students who never made the jump to university. The students with mid-tier credentials lacked the "know-how" and support that those whose parents had gone to college enjoyed.

In addition, Mr. Schramm had grown "tired of seeing students 'graduate' from his teen center to the street," so he decided to help admissions offices see students the way he saw them.

He enlisted a top-notch writing instructor and an urban youth worker to design a system to help and offer support to bright, low-income students as they prepare for college.

Ms. Malin has become a believer.

"College Summit in my opinion is that ready-made formula," she said. "Senior year can be so overwhelming. ... Just from that whole transition from adolescent to adulthood is one thing ... but to have to apply to college and not really know how to navigate that process can make things even more difficult and College Summit has provided a solution."

The College Summit program is funded in part by donations, and the county pays \$200 for each student. The program will be expanded for the 2009-10 school year. Students in ninth through 11th grade will now be able to participate in the program.

"We think capturing students even earlier will help even more students to realize that college is indeed an option," Ms. Malin said.

*Renee Tinsley is a freelance writer living in Prince George's County.*