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College Summit program helps students chart path for education Applications increase as seniors receive additional guidance

by Dennis Carter | Staff Writer

A year ago, Antoine Tate knew he wanted to go to college but he wasn't in any rush to send out applications — until someone showed him how. Now, the senior at Crossland High School in Temple Hills has applied to several East Coast universities.

“I knew I was gonna go to college, but I didn't really push myself,” Tate, 17, said. Tate's push toward higher education began this summer, when he enrolled in Crossland's mandatory College Summit program. College Summit is a nonprofit organization that targets students near the middle of the academic spectrum — students with B and C grades — who have the credentials to go to college but need guidance through the complex application process.

Tate's College Summit experience began with a four-day seminar at Howard University in Washington, where students from across the region came to sleep in Howard's dormitories, eat at its cafeterias, take notes in its lecture halls and absorb a crash course in college applications. In addition, Tate and more than 300 other seniors enrolled in the program meet every other day and receive lectures conducted by College Summit representatives, who coach students on preparing essays, requesting transcripts and teacher recommendations, and applying for financial aid.

Tate has applied to Howard, Penn State University, Morehouse College in Atlanta and New York University, his top choice.

“If I don't get into NYU, I'll probably cry,” Tate said with a laugh.

Tate's shift in expectations has become commonplace for Crossland students, Principal Charles Thomas said.

“They know they're going to college, and that changes the culture at the school and even in the neighborhood,” Thomas said. “People see seniors at Crossland as college students, not people who'll be out on the streets next year.”



Christopher Anderson/The Gazette-Star
Crossland High School senior Antoine Tate participates in the College Summit program, which helps high school students apply to colleges. Tate, pictured here at a Student Government Association meeting on Dec. 19, says the program helped him focus on getting into college.

Thomas said almost every student in the Class of 2007, which graduated in June, applied to a four-year school. Two years earlier, Crossland saw about 30 students — 10 percent of the graduating class — apply to four-year colleges.

The program was piloted at three high schools in the 2005-06 academic year and college applications jumped at the test schools. At Flowers, there was a 91 percent increase in the number of students who submitted college applications, according to school system statistics. At Crossland, there was an 84 percent increase, and Laurel High School saw an 81 percent increase.

“Now we don’t have people who slip through the cracks, and that was happening before,” said Thomas, who added that counselors helped seniors apply to college but couldn’t offer in-depth planning advice for every student.

The impact of Tate’s College Summit initiation didn’t stop when he left Howard and returned home to Temple Hills. A New York Times reporter read an essay penned by Tate at the university and interviewed him and his family. Three weeks later, Tate was featured in a front-page story on the College Summit program in the newspaper.

“It was the best day of my life,” he said. “It was my national press release; that’s what I call it.”

The Times article caught the attention of county schools officials, and in October, Tate spoke about College Summit alongside Prince George’s Superintendent John E. Deasy at his inaugural State of the School System address in Upper Marlboro.

“All youth are college material,” Deasy said. “And it’s our responsibility to show them that way.”

Currently, the program is offered at six Prince George’s high schools — Crossland, Oxon Hill, Laurel, Suitland, Charles H. Flowers in Springdale and DuVal in Lanham — but it is not mandatory throughout the county. School officials have repeatedly said the program will be expanded to more of the county’s other 18 high schools over the next year.

The program is offered in 20 school systems in 10 states across the country. More than 15,000 students are enrolled in the program nationwide.