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Students get dose of college life through prep program

by Sarah Nemeth | Staff Writer

As the school year winds down, students in 10th and 11th grades begin to prepare for the academic journey ahead, whether through college or vocational school.

At Crossland High School in Temple Hills, a program piloted during the 2005-2006 school year has spawned greater interest in education furtherance among students and parents alike.

Crossland showed an 84 percent increase in college application submissions from this school year, a change that has made Principal Charles Thomas quite proud.

“It worked so well last year that we thought we’d do it again next year,” Thomas said. College Summit, a national nonprofit that helps high school seniors prepare for college, began in Prince George’s County at Charles H. Flowers, Crossland and Laurel high schools. This coming school year, it will also be offered at Suitland, Oxon Hill and DuVal high schools.

Students who participate in the class study things like resume writing, SAT preparation and how to write college applications throughout the year, said school counselor Sandra Craft.

The course culminates in a four-day workshop at Goucher College in Towson where students engage in rigorous writing practice and meet with college counselors to help them decide which college to attend.

“They write morning, noon and night but they’re having fun doing it,” Craft said. “And they just feel like for four days they are just somebody.”

The workshop also includes “rap sessions” where students meet with a youth counselor to discuss issues facing teens.

“They talk about everything,” Craft said. “The nice thing about it is the students realize they’re not the only one with a problem. And in doing that the kids feel like, ‘Oh, if [he or] she can do that, I can do it.’”

These days, many students are looking toward careers in the medical and legal fields and as entrepreneurs, said Brenda Harmon, chair of Crossland’s counseling department.

“[This helps] to make it real that college is an option, that college isn’t just for someone else,” she said, adding that Crossland has many students who are the first in their family to enter college.

“It’s really helping the parents and students get a different mindset,” she said.

Next year, all seniors will be enrolled in the program, while it will dovetail into an SAT preparation course already offered to juniors, Thomas said.

“We felt like it fit into what we were already doing,” he said. “By doing this they have two years of college preparation.”