

Bound for college and beyond

College Bound sticks with students throughout high school and college.



Rannie McCaston, Stephanie Edwards, Elyse Hart-Shelton, Kelly Petty, Jr.

By Jessica Basset
Of the St. Louis American

Because of an inspiring program geared toward helping area students, Kelly Petty Jr. is bound for college. His peers in the program know him as “Mr. College Bound.”

College Bound, a not-for-profit organization, was created to provide promising high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds with the academic enrichment, social support and life skills needed to succeed in four-year colleges.

It is the only program in the St. Louis region with a year-round curriculum that includes career exposure, community engagement, test preparation and academic enrichment so that students not only get to college, they succeed in college.

“College is not about taking a test, it’s about taking your place in the world,” said Lisa Orden Zarin, executive director of College Bound.

Zarin founded College Bound in 2006 with the belief that changing the lives of young people meant showing them the power of higher education.

“I was raised to believe that education is the engine for change,” said Zarin, whose mother was an elementary school-teacher.

“If something is wrong in the world, it’s each person’s responsibility to do something about it.”

College Bound fulfills its mission through the application of “The Three

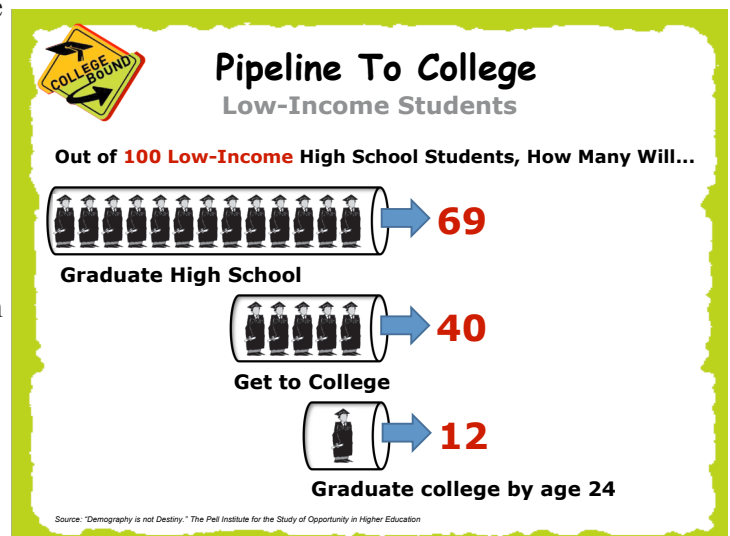
P’s” (Preparation, Placement and Persistence), beginning with rising sophomores and continuing with graduating seniors.

Right now, College Bound operates in two high schools, Clyde C. Miller Career Academy and University City High School, and serves 175 students.

Typically, students are low-income, experience family hardship and are the first in their family to go to college.

Data show that not having a family member who has attended and completed a four-year college poses many obstacles for students who are otherwise capable.

Zarin said if a student does not have the academic foundation and social support, they will enter college but they won’t graduate. College Bound’s ultimate goal is to get students to graduate from college, she said.



Therefore, College Bound sticks with students throughout high school and college.

During the school year, students meet every week before or after school for Kaplan ACT preparation, life skills, financial literacy programs, service learning, character education, field trips, and writing and communication workshops. On Sundays, students get academic tutoring and multicultural enrichment at Washington University.

In the summertime, students engage in community service projects with Habitat for Humanity, college fairs and leadership conferences at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Rising juniors will embark on a three-week personal and academic enrichment camp at the UM-St. Louis, while rising sophomores will spend a week at Whitfield School developing critical thinking and time management skills.

The goal is to connect students' classroom experiences with their real world experiences, Zarin said. Students get exposure in everything from learning how to ride the Metro bus and to finding free things to do around the city.

"Our whole orientation tends to be around experiential learning and connecting the dots from the home, the classroom, the family; to the world and to others," Zarin said.

College Bound's approach to learning is guided by six essential values:

- Put it all on the line
- Believe in the power to create change
- Fail fast, learn fast, collaborate
- Find the joy, dwell in the gratitude
- Get out, explore
- Serve and engage

Zarin said the values are used to inspire students to become leaders in

their community and take pride in the workforce.

"We teach them that you have a place in the world, you have a destiny and you have a purpose," Zarin said. "You're not going to find it only by spending eight hours in the classroom, it's also by talking to someone who will inspire you."



Rising CB Sophomores learn critical thinking and study skills at Whitfield school.

Fun, but beneficial

This is Haidera Whilhite's first year in College Bound. She was attracted to the program her freshman year at Career Academy because of her desire to one day make it to college. The honor roll student has dreams of becoming a psychotherapist.

"I noticed that they were doing a lot of activities," Whilhite said. "It seemed very fun, but at the same time beneficial."

Petty said the program has taught him responsibility and accountability.

"Sometimes, they just call us instead of our parents," Petty said, "It's up to us to get the information and transportation to the different events."

Before joining College Bound, a majority of students reported that they wanted to go to college but didn't think it was affordable.

Therefore, college-bound juniors meet regularly with a college counselor to learn about financial aid and the college application process. This year, all 39 students in this year's graduating class have been admitted to four-year colleges.

One of those students is Eric Oliver, who will be attending Lake Forest College in Chicago for computer science.

He joined College Bound at the end of his sophomore year at U. City High.

"They gave us a packet and told us about the college process," Oliver said. "I said that was something I need to be involved in."

If it were not for College Bound, Oliver said he wouldn't have had the opportunity to see presidential hopeful Barack Obama in St. Louis

or attend a biomedical symposium in Orlando.

"They want us to see the world, not just college," Oliver said.

Petty said College Bound coupled with his pathway class at Career Academy has made him think seriously about his future. Although Petty hasn't completed high school yet, he is already looking forward to his college graduation.

"I'll be in it for the long run," Petty said. "I'll be the first on my father's side to finish college."

College Bound

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