

VICC volunteer

Highlights of the St. Louis Student Transfer Program

parkway program engages VICC students in college planning

classes prepare them to be competitive in the application process

by Peggy Magee

When Parkway North senior Candice Bassett found out about everything that went into applying to colleges, she nearly gave up before she started. “Testing, applications, a resume, essays, letters of recommendation and all the deadlines, I was so stressed!” she confides. “I worried about how I was going to balance all of it with my schoolwork and activities.” At first the requirements seemed so overwhelming, she even thought, “I guess I’m not going to college.”

But, indeed, she is now in her first year at Clark University in Atlanta, studying vocal performance and business. She had applied to four colleges and was accepted to all of them.

What saved her, she says, is the college preparation program that she and about 14 other students at her high school were enrolled in during their senior year. “It was truly a blessing to me. I received help with scholarships as well as the entire planning process. My nerves were eased.”

The free program, for recommended minority students, is offered at each Parkway high school and put on by consultant Peggy Hull of Superior Support Services, with whom Parkway has contracted for the last three years. Beginning this fall, Hull will offer classes to juniors as well.

The class meets once a month for eight months during academic lab period and is described by Hull as a “hands-on, how to” approach to preparing students “to be competitive in all areas of the application process.” It covers everything the students need to do for college applications, including financial aid and scholarships. Most importantly, Hull empowers them to take responsibility for getting it all done. “Many of my students don’t have a clue about where to start. I give them step-by-step instructions, nag them when necessary and sometimes even hold their hand.”

That hand holding comes in the way of answers or clarification Hull happily provides when students ring up her cell phone at all hours. Or when she telephones their parents to remind



At the end-of-year reception for Parkway’s college prep program, West senior Fred Roberson, proudly displays his certificate of completion. The class meets once a month for the better part of the school year and covers everything students need to do to apply to college. It is put on by Peggy Hull of Superior Support Services, with whom Parkway contracts. With Fred, who was accepted to Missouri Western State University, are Peggy Hull, right, and his guidance counselor, Linda Jolly. Photo by Peggy Magee

(See VICC students in college planning)

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Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation

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more of a good thing

other college prep opportunities in parkway

Teaching high schoolers about resources to help in their college search and how to showcase themselves to colleges is at the heart of the Parkway/SLU college prep program, put on free of charge each summer for minority students in the Parkway district, according to Kevin Mabie, the English teacher from Parkway Central who runs it with the help of three other Central teachers and an intern. The four-week class meets for four hours each weekday morning in state-of-the-art classrooms at St. Louis University.

This past summer—its second year of operation—the 35 enrolled students researched colleges and created their own websites which highlighted information about their top five choices. They completed practice college applications and composed essays and were graded on both assignments. They also studied, took tests and learned test taking strategies, all in preparation for mastering the ACT and SAT. The

class “textbook,” the annual Kaplan/Newsweek “How to Get into College” Guide, is provided free to each student as is breakfast, lunch and transportation.

“SLU is a fantastic partner in this program,” notes Mabie. “Not only do we have use of their great space, but they give tours of the campus and make presentations about financial aid, career services and study abroad opportunities. Sure, they plug their own school, but they

also promote the concept of college in general.”

Mabie’s students are also issued a SLU identification badge that allows them access to the library and recreational center. Parkway South junior Devon Wash and a couple other students had a good time playing basketball after class, he says. One of the things Devon learned is that “college is not only learning and studying all the time, but also activities, clubs, sports, all of that.”

VICC students in college planning (continued)

them about filling out the federal financial aid form and even offers assistance in completing it. Then there’s the one-on-one advice on essay content or paperwork/deadline organization she provides outside of school hours. “In class I sometimes announce, ‘I’ll be at the Lewis and Clark library at 9 a.m. this Saturday.’” Whoever needs her help, shows up. “Some kids just procrastinate or are not good with timelines, and so I do what it takes to help them get the job done,” explains Hull.

In some cases, that may involve advising students to cut back hours at their part-time

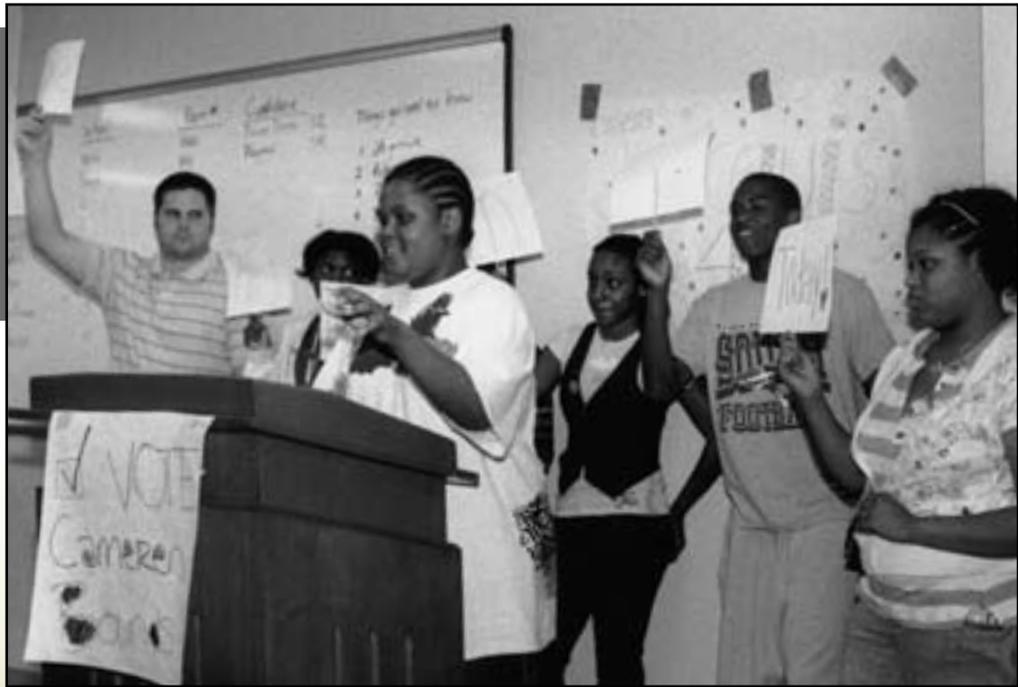
job because working on a submission for a college scholarship, which could save them thousands of dollars in tuition, is a better use of their time than working a job where they earn \$6 an hour. She urges them to put aside at least three hours a week for college admissions preparation. “I tell them to think of it as ‘I’m planning my life’ time. I remind them to look ahead to their future.”

Because some students don’t have the grades to qualify for scholarships, Hull spends a class teaching them about student loans. “I tell them taking out a loan far outweighs not going to college at all, but

I warn them: ‘Don’t take out a loan unless you plan to finish your task,’” meaning coming away with a degree. She also talks to students about keeping in contact with their school’s financial aid office throughout their college years. “Let them know you’re working hard, earning good grades and that you could use more financial assistance.”

Each year, Hull accompanies her students to a local college fair where they learn about their many options and what to look for in a college. It also improves her own bank of knowledge in determining what colleges to suggest to

High school students in the Parkway/SLU college prep program collaborate with rising ninth graders from the Parkway/Harris Stowe summer program (also for minority students but with math/science emphasis) in a mock presidential election. Groups of multi-age students elected a candidate from their ranks, came up with a platform and launched a campaign. "Because educated people know current events," noted teacher Kevin Mabie about the purpose of the activity. Here, teacher Drew Jennings, left, and other supporters rally behind their presidential candidate Cameren Bounds of Parkway South High. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman



Although Devon admits the academic sessions were not his favorite part ("too much like school"), he says he now knows the importance of reviewing for the test and mastering the material. Overall, the class was so valuable that he hopes to take it again next summer when Parkway's plan is to offer two different sections simultaneously—section one for rising juniors

and section two for rising seniors, some who may have already taken the course but want to pick up more pointers and skills. Mabie says the goal is to have 100 students enrolled next summer.

Also part of the plan is to stay in touch with this summer's class. "We hope to take a college tour of Mizzou and in January SLU is hosting Parkway FASFA

Day on their campus where parents can receive help."

For Parkway West junior Allegra Merriweather, the program was a "great opportunity" because "it opened our eyes to the fact that college is right around the corner and we had better plan for it now. Reality has hit."

which students. One student had a less than desirable grade point average. Hull went around to each college and said, "Here is what he has, can you help?" A match was found and the young man was accepted into college.

At an end-of-the-year reception for class participants and their families, students praised and thanked Hull as they each announced the colleges where they had been accepted. The students' pride was clear to Charlotte Ijei, Parkway's director of pupil personnel and diversity, who was there to celebrate with them.

Ijei is pleased that Parkway is able to offer classes that supplement the work of school guidance counselors. "Our counselors do an excellent job of helping students with the college process but because of the number of students they serve, it is unrealistic to think they can walk students through every step of the process, one at a time. Ms. Hull's program facilitates a one-on-one focus that includes working closely with the student and parent in obtaining funds to pay for their college plans."

Parents, too, vocalized their appreciation for Hull's class.

"Peggy provides students with a basic starting point," reports Chinesa Coleman, mother of Jalisa, now at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, adding that many young African Americans don't know where to begin when it comes to exploring careers and selecting colleges.

"Peggy underscores the importance of scoring well on entrance exams, documenting community service and writing essays that speak to character and values.

"I would say Peggy Hull is a coach and a motivational coach at that."

clayton education

exposes student to "so much"

by Peggy Magee

When Krystal Bell looks back on her middle and high school years spent in the Clayton district, her enthusiasm and appreciation for the entire experience are unmistakable.

Excitedly, the May graduate talks about all her teachers who went "above and beyond," fueling her passion to expand her mind and giving her the time and attention to make that happen. "There are so many that I don't want to name them for fear of leaving someone out," says Krystal, now at Occidental College in Los Angeles, one of eight colleges to which she applied and was accepted.

A bright young woman with supportive parents, Krystal would have likely excelled at any school, but not having the distractions she might have encountered in the city certainly helped pave the way for her success, she says. So did the "very high expectations" of her teachers which stretched her beyond what she might have otherwise achieved. The close friendships she formed with some of them yielded her ongoing guidance and support, which she greatly valued.

The programs and opportunities Krystal was exposed to "opened my eyes to so much," she notes, almost in awe. Her involvement with the Making It Happen program at Wydown Middle, a partnership with Washington University student tutors, was so positive that she continued with the program even as a high school freshman. Also in middle school, she learned about careers, financial responsibility and networking from working professionals as part of the Sky's the Limit program, a collaboration with Mathews-Dickey. As a high school senior she reconnected with the program, as is customary, and was named a college scholarship recipient.

Even after school and on summer break, Krystal took advantage of academic offerings. Through the Missouri Scholars Academy, she spent three weeks one summer studying on the Mizzou campus. "I worried that it might be boring being surrounded by all these smart kids, but it was enlightening and motivating." An afterschool writing program at Wydown instilled in her a love for the written word and prepped her for AP English at Clayton High.

Several other AP courses were part of this National Honor Society member's workload, including AP United States History, whose class field trips brought her to museums she had never been. And at the urging of her Shakespeare teacher, Krystal attended the Shakespeare Festival in Forest Park this summer. "It was easy to follow because we had studied six works by Shakespeare."

Extracurricular activities were a big part of Krystal's high school years. Her involvement in the Community Service Club culminated with her serving as co-president her senior year. She was also active in the Black Student Union.

Krystal not only embraced her school community, but has enjoyed being part of the larger Clayton community. She describes the Clayton public library as her "home away from home" and any shopping she did was in or near Clayton. Until she left for college, she had worked part-time at the First Watch restaurant in Clayton.

"I love the fact that wherever I go in Clayton, I always run into people I know. It's somewhere that I really feel at home."



One of the things Krystal Bell liked best about Clayton High is the close relationships she had with the faculty. Here, she visits with Carolyn Blair, her college counselor, who was advising her about what to pack before heading off to Occidental College, where she now attends. Krystal describes Blair as her "mentor," admitting, "We're supposed to sign in to talk to our counselor, but sometimes I'd drop by five or six times a day and I never signed in." Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

volunteer

A newsletter published by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation to spread the word about the positive things happening in the voluntary transfer program and to offer educators a glimpse at innovative programs helping students succeed at area schools.

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Message from the CEO



Message from the CEO

Then and Now

When the push for providing a free public education originally began during the mid-nineteenth century, America looked a lot different than it does now in almost every respect. At a societal level, many of the changes that have ensued are largely superficial -- fashion, housing, sports, religion, politics -- while others are more substantial and have, for better or for worse, altered the very fabric of society itself -- technology, medicine, immigration, entertainment, transportation and communication, just to name a few. Whether as a cause or an effect of these changes, family structure has also evolved into something drastically different. In one form or another, each of these changes has entered the school house door and has taken a seat in your classrooms, not so quietly or patiently expecting to be accommodated. Indeed, your friendly and wise elected officials have essentially mandated as much.

This troublesome evolution was the subject of a recent presentation by Jamie Vollmer that I attended. Mr. Vollmer is a businessman and a "reformed" critic of public education. I say reformed because his past vocal indictments of public education led to his eventual enlightenment. He is now as strong an advocate as he previously was an antagonist.

His metamorphosis was largely due to his gradual realization of what society in general, and parents in particular, have increasingly come to demand from schools. The multi-grade one-room schoolhouse expected to educate all has given way to elaborate facilities with kitchens, pools, stadiums, theaters, clinics, vo-tech equipment, computer labs and every other manner of convenience. Reading, writing and arithmetic have been squeezed by ESL, character ed, special ed, gifted, life skills, ad infinitum. According to Mr. Vollmer, and it's hard to disagree with him, schools have practically become second parents to the students -- expected not just to raise their academics but to raise them.

Like it or not, that seems to be what American society has been inexorably moving toward for decades. As individuals, we can't control society's expectations but we can control how we respond to them. When you chose to be an educator, you took on a commitment to meet a child at whatever level he or she was. And this is where they are. You aren't just a teacher, you're a counselor, a policeman, a mentor, an advisor, a role model and yes, in some cases and some situations, practically a parent. You don't just teach subject matter, you influence choices, affect lives. I think you'll see the students and programs profiled in this issue of the *Volunteer* can attest to that.

Which begs the question -- is this what you signed up for when you decided to become a teacher? Why, yes, I think you did.

We all did!

Bruce Ellerman

Highlights

VICC bus fleet *earns highway patrol honor*

Celebrating their "Total Fleet Excellence Award" recently presented by the Highway Patrol to the VICC bus fleet are, from left, Tami Webb, VICC Transportation Operations Manager; Jeff Schwepker, First Student manager; Dan Gillman, Atlantic Express manager; and Kenneth Rhone, Durham School Services manager.

The award is an honor program of the Missouri State Highway Patrol, which every spring inspects all school buses in the state. This year, 295 school districts (which includes VICC) earned the Total Fleet Excellence award by obtaining a "first pass" approval rating of 90 percent or higher on all their buses. VICC's rate was 92.13 percent. All VICC buses will display 2008 Total Fleet Excellence stickers for the 2008-2009 school year.

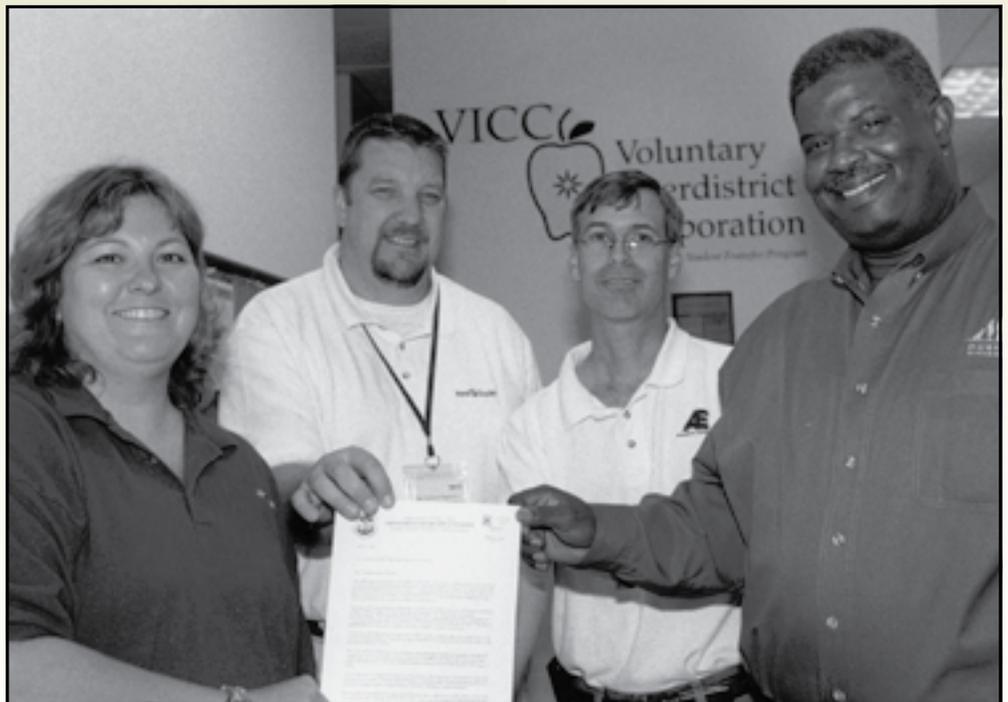


Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman