



Press Release

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Contact: Selina Ayala-Patlan
Valerie Martinez
(909) 445-1001

MUSD's Trail-Blazing College Preparedness Program Earns Prestigious Golden Bell Award

College Bound Today Honored for Partnership and Collaboration

MONTEBELLO – College Bound Today, a team-mentoring program that navigates Montebello Unified students through the college application process, has earned the prestigious 2015 Golden Bell Award from the California School Board Association (CSBA). The college-preparedness program helps predominantly low-income, first-generation college-goers achieve unprecedented college admission.

The Golden Bell, under the Community Schools through Partnerships and Collaboration category, was presented to the District Dec. 5 at the annual CSBA conference in San Diego. The awards promote excellence in education and school board governance by recognizing outstanding programs and governance practices of school boards and county offices of education throughout California.

Additionally, College Bound Today (CBT) received a \$1,000 sponsorship from Industry Leader Business Affiliates as well as an award under the County Offices of Education category – making the organization the only one to receive three awards at the conference.

“Nearly 100 percent of College Bound Today graduates have attended or will soon attend college, with over 85 percent of those graduates going directly to four-year universities,” Montebello Unified Board Member Edgar Cisneros said. “As a College Bound mentor, I have seen first-hand the tremendous impact it has had on students and families who are experiencing higher education for the first time.”

CBT began its exclusive partnership with the District in February 2009, at Schurr High School, with just 30 students. It has now expanded to all four of MUSD's comprehensive high schools, at no cost, with 584 students having completed the program through 2015.

In October 2014, the District signed a five-year memorandum of understanding to expand CBT to accommodate more students and mentors.

“If there wasn't a program like College Bound, I would probably be struggling to find out how to apply for college, what the requirements are and how to apply for financial aid,” said Lily Feliz, parent of Schurr High junior Sarah Zaragosa, in a CBT-produced video that was submitted to the Golden Bell committee. “I'm very excited to start learning more about this process.”

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CBT recruits sophomores with a 3.0 GPA and assigns them to a team with nine student peers and three volunteer mentors. Students, mentors and parents attend workshops one Saturday a month during the school year.

Among other informational sessions, students obtain assistance with the college and financial aid application process, are given help in drafting personal statements and receive a free, 30-hour SAT or ACT prep course as juniors.

“The all-encompassing nature of College Bound Today fuses highly motivated and determined students with teachers, counselors, community members, parents and like-minded students to contribute to a stronger college-going culture in our community,” Superintendent of Schools Susanna Contreras Smith said. “We sincerely thank the CSBA for recognizing the hard work and success of our CBT graduates, their volunteer mentors and our Montebello Unified staff.”

The CBT mentors – many of whom are bilingual and work as local teachers, attorneys, doctors or business owners – also reach out to parents to include them in the process, encouraging them to participate and accompany their children on field trips to Southern California colleges and universities. Mentors also keep parents apprised of their child’s progress.

Many of these students, like Schurr High alumna Zeyla Zazueta, are the first ones in their family to attend college.

“Being the first one to graduate from high school and go on to college and graduate from there has been a great impact on my family,” Zazueta said. “They are so proud of me!”

Of the 581 CBT graduates: 197 have gone on to UC schools, 205 to CSU, 96 to private colleges with 78 to 2-year community colleges. 410 of the graduates are first-generation college-goers and a total of 466 come from low-income families.

CBT was founded by Dan Clement, a retired litigator, and Todd Clark, a former educator, together with MUSD officials. It operates collaboratively by incorporating high school principals and staff, community members and volunteers, as well as students and parents in the ultimate goal of getting all students participating accepted into college.

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone’s efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District’s number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at www.montebello.k12.ca.us.