



Press Release

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MUSD College Preparedness Program Sees Nearly All Participants Head to College

MONTEBELLO – In a time of graduations and congratulations, College Bound Today (CBT), a college preparedness program within Montebello Unified, has something special to celebrate as well: 120 of its 121 graduates are headed to college in the fall. Of those students, 108 will be attending a four-year institution.

"College Bound Today began at Schurr High School six years ago in an effort to ensure our largely Latino student population is exposed to the vast post-secondary educational opportunities available to them right here in Southern California," said MUSD Board of Education President David Vela. "Over the years, this program has been consistently and tremendously successful in getting students to college, regardless of economic or academic status."

The partnership -- founded by Dan Clement, a retired litigator, and Todd Clark, a former educator, together with MUSD officials -- is unique and specific to Montebello Unified. 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.

CBT, entirely free for students, works with principals and personnel from all four MUSD high schools to recruit 10th-grade students who have a GPA of at least 3.0. Many students enrolled in the program are first generation college goers who come from low income families.

Once enrolled in the five-semester program, a student is assigned to a team with nine other student peers and three volunteer mentors, many of whom work as teachers, attorneys, doctors, engineers, bankers or business owners in their day job. The teams meet at school sites on Saturday mornings, four times each semester throughout the school year. Many of these mentors are bilingual and are able to communicate with parents whose English is limited.

Involving parents is a major component of CBT and begins with two events: a meeting at the high school campus and a field trip to California State University, Los Angeles for an informational session and tour, both alongside their students. For many parents and their students, this experience is their first real introduction to collegiate life. Additionally, parents can attend a panel discussion, featuring parents of past CBT graduates, where they can learn about their students' upcoming transition.

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"The goal here is to not only educate the students on the advantages and opportunities of post-secondary education, but to also educate their parents on how they can best assist their student in the transition from high school to college," said Clement, CBT co-founder. "By bringing their families into the fold, students have a higher chance of gaining admission to college."

Throughout the course of the program, students travel to 10 other colleges and universities throughout Southern California; obtain mentor support with the college and financial aid application process, which includes creating a customized list of colleges for each student and assistance with drafting personal statements; participate in peer learning; and receive 30-hours of SAT prep.

"For many of these students and their families, CBT is a crucial step in the process of moving from high school to college as it caters specifically to the Montebello Unified community," said MUSD Superintendent of Schools Cleve Pell. "We work hard to ensure that as a District, we implement effective and innovative partnerships that educate and enrich the lives of our all of our students; CBT couldn't be a more fitting example."

Since its inception, CBT has graduated 384 students, with all but three going on to college. The goal, says co-founder Dan Clement, is to increase the number of students involved, especially those coming from low-income families, and to get more participants straight into a 4-year university.

"One of the elements that makes CBT so unique is how effective and cohesive this program truly is for our students -- virtually all CBT participants apply, get accepted and attend college," said MUSD Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras-Smith. "We applaud and sincerely thank each one of the CBT co-founders, all of the volunteer mentors and MUSD staff involved, and the families and parents of our CBT graduates for their commitment to our students as they pursue their academic potential."

Zeyla Zazueta, a Schurr High School alumna and the first CBT student to graduate from college, says the program contributed greatly to helping her achieve her educational dreams. She recently graduated from Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles in three years, and will attend USC in the fall to pursue a masters degree in social work.

"The College Bound Program at Schurr High School was a great help getting me to where I am right now," Zazueta said. "I can't believe how much I have accomplished."

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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.