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parentlink

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“Poster Child” for VICC Program at Brentwood Work of Student, Parents and School Pay Off



Jamil Noble, who is able to attend all four years of college completely free of charge thanks to two Mizzou scholarships, visits with Brentwood High guidance counselor Teresa Wheeler on a return visit to his school over the holidays. His school district, his parents and Jamil himself all played a part in the success he has achieved.
Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Jamil Noble is an example of a scenario that every school would like to see more of – that is, when parents, faculty/staff and the student each take on the necessary responsibility and work as partners in the education process. Because when this happens, the result is almost always positive, as in the case of Jamil, a voluntary transfer student from the Brentwood school district who now studies business at Mizzou. He is the recipient of two separate scholarships, the Brooks Scholarship and the Pettus Family Scholarship, that combined provide him a four-year college education, plus room, board and incidentals, at no cost.

“Jamil should be the poster child for the VICC program,” notes Edward Johnson Jr., Brentwood High assistant principal, citing the teenager’s academic accomplishments, leadership and strong determination to make something of himself. “He always put forth the effort and took his education seriously. He is now reaping the benefits of that.”

His hardworking and responsible nature can be traced back to his parents, Betty and David, Jamil says. Before the start of school at Mark Twain Elementary, he often accompanied his mother to her managerial job at Subway where she put him to work on small chores before it was time to take him to school. At age 16, Jamil too began working at Subway, a job he is able to return to on his breaks from Mizzou.

Both of his parents are firm believers in the value of an education.

Early on, they began regular library visits with Jamil and always made sure that his homework came first before anything else. Parent/teacher conferences “were a must for me,” says his mother. “I always wanted to know what Jamil was doing in school and get to know his teachers, also find out what opportunities were available for him and what I could do to help him.”

His father also introduced Jamil to his work life and passed along advice and tidbits of wisdom. One that Jamil took to heart was “a closed mouth doesn’t get fed.” Although he tends to be quiet and reserved, he made a “wholehearted effort,” as he describes it, to advocate for himself, ask questions and network. He was especially proactive about the college application process. When he got the names of people who could be of help to him, he always followed up. When he applied for scholarships, he called or emailed the contact person to get clarification on the essay question or to communicate his interest and qualifications.

It was beneficial that Jamil worked as a student aide in the guidance office at Brentwood High during his senior year. There he observed how the college counselor Teresa Wheeler advocated for her students when speaking with college admissions representatives. It was also convenient for him to ask Wheeler to look over his college applications, give input on an essay or get direction on going after scholarships and financial aid.

Not wanting to burden his parents with hefty tuition bills, Jamil notes, “I was really determined to go to college for free.” He was aware that his school record (National Honor Society, Student Council), extracurricular activities, community involvement and work experience could translate into scholarship offers. But he took nothing for granted. “I put my whole heart into making each component of my application stand out.”

The small Brentwood district also fueled Jamil’s success. Guidance office secretary Wanda Stratton reports, “I think our teachers took note of Jamil’s ambition and motivation and steered him toward challenging classes and positions of responsibility. We had high expectations of him and he did not disappoint.”

At Mizzou, Jamil studies hard and excels just as he did at Brentwood. He has gotten involved in a few organizations but his top priority is to maintain the high academic standards necessary for his scholarships and entry into the accounting program.

And so Jamil stays focused on his school work and distances himself “from people and places that may get in the way of the plan I have for myself.” That plan involves charting out a good future that includes giving support to younger minority students.

His advice to other pupils is based on what has worked so far for him. “Success is all about the choices you make and the company you keep.” His guiding philosophy is, “If you want to go some place in life, you have to work at it.”

He does, every day, and he is already seeing the fruits of his labor.

By Peggy Magee

Former Metro High Student Makes Headline News Transfer Experience Shaped his Outlook

A former VICC student who now runs a startup solar energy business in Kampala, Uganda was one of the passengers aboard the Detroit-bound Northwest Airlines flight that was nearly brought down by an alleged terrorist on Christmas Day.

Roey Rosenblith, a 2000 graduate of Metro High School in St. Louis, was traveling from Africa to his parents’ home in Chesterfield for a holiday visit when the harrowing experience occurred. In the days that followed, he posted an essay on the Huffington Post website describing his ordeal. He fielded questions from international media outlets. And he enjoyed more than ever spending time with his family knowing full well how lucky he was.

After the holidays, Roey returned to his work in Uganda where he operates Village Energy (Uganda) Limited, a business venture he started with his Uganda-born partner, Abu Musuuza. He and his staff travel through impoverished villages of Africa selling small affordable solar lighting systems, made from recycled products, to African households, the majority of which lack electricity.

It’s a lifestyle far different than most of his college friends from the University of North Carolina where he studied biology and environmental studies. But Roey has always leaned toward the unconventional.

For high school, he chose Metro High, near downtown, over Parkway Central, a school much closer to home. At Metro, he thrived being part of a diverse school and community. It was much more to his liking than “the somewhat cloistered experience” he had felt in his home school district.

In a partnership that Metro had with Missouri Botanical Garden, Roey and his classmates learned environmental science and then taught it to inner city children. High schoolers from county districts were also involved and Roey was surprised by their unfamiliarity with city locations and the lifestyles of those they served. He appreciated his own level of understanding that made him comfortable with the situation, enhancing his enjoyment.

His experience at Metro served him well in other ways. “I got a great education,” he said, noting that he especially loved the smallness of the school and the one-on-one attention. “I remember Cynthia Beasley’s English class and how much my writing

improved. She was as hard as nails and slaughtered my essays.” I liked my chemistry teacher Peggy Lathrop quite a bit too. What I liked most about her is the challenge she presented us with, as well as the respect that went with fulfilling that challenge.”

Roey says he tends “to be attracted to people who are completely different than me—roommates, girlfriends, business acquaintances.” He attributes that appeal to his experience at Metro where he was introduced to people from all walks of life. “It forced me to say it’s ok to be surrounded by people who are not just like me. It’s better than ok; it’s good.” By Peggy Magee



Roey Rosenblith, a 2000 graduate of Metro High, at right, shows people from the village of Usariver his solar energy system, which can power a radio and enough lamps to light up three to four rooms. Roey operates Village Energy (Uganda) Limited, headquartered in Kampala, Uganda. He was a passenger aboard the Detroit-bound Northwest Airlines flight that was nearly brought down by an alleged terrorist on Christmas Day.

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School Counselor Shares Tips on Getting to College



At Mehlville district's College Night for transfer families, held at a city library, transfer students Kahlid Ali Moore, far left, and Anthony Gooch, far right, and their moms get advice and questions answered from college guidance counselor Joanna Van Der Tuin. Standing is Brian Lane, Mehlville assistant superintendent and contact person for VICC families, who coordinated the event. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Advice on how to navigate college planning was given to Mehlville VICC families recently when a counselor from Mehlville/Oakville Guidance Services met with them at a city library. Counselor Joanna Van Der Tuin talked with parents and students about the search and application process, paying for college, applying for scholarships, ACT/SAT entrance tests and the importance of a student's grade point average.

There is still time for seniors to get enrolled in a college and, for juniors, now is prime time to begin preparing, according to Van Der Tuin. "There are so many different choices and families need to determine which college is best for their student," she notes, adding, "A college that is right for one student may not be the best choice for another."

Some Basic College Planning Tips for Students and their Parents from Joanna Ver Der Tuin:

for juniors

- ▼ Begin to narrow down the kind of college you want (in-state or out-of-state; big or small; liberal arts or specific area of professional study; private or public) and research colleges that fit your criteria.
- ▼ Find out when college entrance exam dates are offered and get registration dates on your calendar. Avoid late penalty registration charges.
- ▼ Determine how to best prepare for the test. Ask about classes that may be offered.
- ▼ Attend any college workshops your district offers to become knowledgeable about the process.
- ▼ Use the summer to get started on college visits and applications and to begin thinking about college essays.

for seniors

- ▼ Get help from your college counselor to identify colleges whose application deadlines have not already passed.
- ▼ For financial aid consideration, complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon as possible.
- ▼ Sign up to take college entrance exams (for first time or to improve your score). Or the Accuplacer test if you are applying to a junior college.

By Peggy Magee

Attendance Tied to Achievement, VICC Study Finds Another Year of Attendance Gains for Transfer Students

A strong correlation exists between attendance and achievement, the VICC's annual attendance study once again indicates. The major conclusion of the most recent findings is also not so surprising; that the overall attendance rate of voluntary transfer students continues its trend of annual increases. That rate, 92.38 percent, is higher by several percentage points than those for the students' neighborhood schools in the city, though still slightly below the state average of 93-94 percent.

"It is highly encouraging to see that attendance rates continue to improve, especially given the long bus rides and early pick up times that our students experience," notes Bruce Ellerman, recently retired VICC chief executive officer. He attributes the positive news to "the commitment of our families and the reliability of the transportation program."

The purpose of the yearly study, begun six years ago at the suggestion of the VICC Parent Advisory Committee, is to determine what variables (age, gender, economic status, geographic location, etc.) have the greatest impact on transfer student attendance and to identify any developing trends.

Of the three factors that most affect attendance, a student's grade point average has the strongest influence (at the middle and high school level.) The other factors are school district and age. The attendance rate for students with a 3.0 GPA or better is over 95 percent; for students with 2.0-2.9 GPA—almost 93 percent; and for students below 2.0—about 88 percent.

Also in keeping with past trends, smaller school districts generally show slightly better than average transfer student attendance rates, particularly at the middle and high school level. And, as in the past, attendance rates tend to decline with age, with elementary attendance being the highest (93.95 percent) and high school the lowest (90.59 percent).

Factors that show little or no impact are the attendance area in which students live, the gender of the student, the distance from home to school, bus ride time or economic status.

Regarding the correlation between attendance and achievement, Ellerman reports, "We are continuing to research whether better attendance leads to greater

achievement or whether greater achievement leads to better attendance." Either way, he encourages good attendance, "because if students are not there, they cannot learn."

Besides impacting student success, attendance affects the financial support from the state, as each percentage point of attendance generates about \$460,000 in additional funding for VICC and the participating school districts. "These extra monies help to make new transfer opportunities available each year and help to enable the transfer program to continue to operate with stability and financial security," he says. By Peggy Magee



Message from the New

David S. Glaser

CEO

Academic Excellence! It is one of the hallmarks of the students who participate in the voluntary transfer program. We regularly review test scores of our students and this data consistently shows that the academic achievement of voluntary transfer students exceeds the results achieved by African-American students at the state or national level.

However, test scores only tell part of the story. I've recently had the privilege of attending three award ceremony programs celebrated by the Rockwood and Parkway school districts. These award and recognition evenings gave me the opportunity to meet students and their families and see first hand the successes so many of our students are experiencing. At Parkway's celebration, 179 middle and high school students were recognized for earning a 3.5 grade point average or greater—including seven high school students who have earned a 4.0 or better—and 140 third, fourth and fifth grade students were recognized for earning all A's and B's. These high achieving students represent a significant portion of Parkway's voluntary transfer enrollment! Similarly, Rockwood recognized 277 students in middle and high schools for attendance and academic achievement and 144 students at their elementary ceremony. These students model the success that is possible for all students who commit themselves to taking advantage of the opportunities available through dedication and hard work.

High achieving students participated in and led these ceremonies by serving as MC's, keynote speakers, musical and artistic entertainment, greeters and in other roles. Hundreds, if not thousands, of parents, grandparents, friends and other supporters also attended the ceremonies to demonstrate their ongoing

Needing Help with Your Child, His or Her Success in School

The staff of the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) includes five counselors who are ready and willing to help you with your child's academic success, including such items as

- Academics
- Attendance
- Discipline concerns (including suspensions)
- Assistance with school communications

For help, please contact one of our counselors, who are generally assigned according to the first letter of your child's last name:

Vickie Williams (A - D) 314.721.8422, ext. 3011
vwilliams@choicecorp.org

Laverne Mitchom (E - H) 314.721.8422, ext. 3020
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Mary Meehan (S - Z) 314.721.8422, ext. 3016
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Additional Road Improvements Could Alter Some Bus Routes

Following the successful completion of the New I-64/40 highway construction, normal traffic patterns are returning and many bus routes have been returned to the newly renovated highway. However, MODot and the VICC Transportation Department are gearing up for two new projects that could impact some bus routes, mainly those traveling to and from Parkway and Rockwood Area 1 schools.

The I-270 Dorsett/Page project involves construction of a diverging diamond interchange at Dorsett and I-270, which is currently underway and expected to be completed in December 2010. The project also includes construction of a northbound I-270 dual lane circular ramp to westbound Route 364 (Page). This project has also begun and is expected to be complete in winter 2011. There will also be bridge rehabilitation work at the Marine Avenue overpass on I-270.

Concurrent with these improvements is the Route 141 relocation project which will move Route 141 further to the east between Ladue Road and Olive Boulevards, raising the roadway out of the flood plain and improving traffic flow.

Families whose students' routes will be changed by these improvements can expect to receive a letter from Tami Webb, VICC transportation operations manager, along with revised bus cards in advance of any time changes to the route. "Our goal continues to be to provide you with the best and safest transportation program available," she explains.

More information on these road improvements is available at
<http://www.270dorsettpage.com>



Before retiring as chief executive officer of the VICC, Bruce Ellerman announced that the most recent VICC annual attendance report again showed an increase. Under Ellerman's direction, the VICC has remained on sound financial footing and continues as a stable and viable option for city students.

support and encouragement. Their attendance indicates the strong family support the students have received which has been and remains key to their success. These evenings of celebration served as a wonderful reminder of why we exist—to partner together with local districts and their schools to provide opportunities for student success and to eliminate the achievement gap.

Rockwood and Parkway are by no means the only districts who honor and recognize student achievement. I recently learned that Kirkwood High School recognized almost 80 high achieving African-American students as part of a Black History Month celebration. Of those honored, three transfer students were singled out for having the highest grade point averages in their respective classes. I imagine most, if not all, of our participating districts have similar opportunities to recognize academic success.

I hope that you also enjoy reading about the individual success stories of the students profiled in this issue of the *Parent Link*. Whether it is a student from the Brentwood school district attending Mizzou on a full scholarship or a former student from the St. Louis Public Schools running his own company benefitting others in poor countries without local sources of electricity, or the personal story you and your family are experiencing by participating in the VICC program, we all have a success story to share. Have you shared your story with anyone lately?

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