Jamil Noble, who is able to attend all four years of college at no cost 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.

“Poster Child” for VICC Program at Brentwood

Work of Student, Parents and School Pay Off

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 bomb was detonated. In the days that followed, he posted an essay on the Huffington Post website describing his harrowing 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.

For the holidays, Roey returned to his work in Uganda where he operates Village Energy (Uganda) Limited, a business venture he started with his Ugandan-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 been learned 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 schools from county districts were also involved and Roey was surprised by their unfamiliarity with city locations and the lifestyle 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 four years 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.” He liked his 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 from me–roommates, girlfriends, business acquaintances.”

He attributes that appeal to his experience at Metro where he was exposed 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
Advice on how to navigate college planning was given to Mehville-V ICC families recently when a counselor from Mehville-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 college experience.

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:

- 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 not sure of your possible.
- Decide what you want to study and research colleges that fit your criteria.
- Contact the Financial Aid Office for information on scholarships and other financial assistance.
- Begin to narrow down the kind of college you want to attend.
- Use the summer to get started on college visits and applications and to begin thinking about college essays.
- Use college decision checklists to help you make your choice.
- Complete scholarship applications and research scholarships that fit your profile.
- Begin to narrow down the kind of college you want to attend.
- Use the summer to get started on college visits and applications and to begin thinking about college essays.

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 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 of 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 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.

Attendance Tied to Achievement, V ICC Study Finds

A strong correlation exists between attendance and achievement, the VICC’s annual 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 slightly lower than 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-ups times that our students experience,” notes Bruce Ellerman, recently retired VICC chief executive officer.

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 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 achievement and attendance, 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 Interdistrict

David S. Glaser

School Counselor Shares Tips on Getting to College

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 the 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 - M) 314.721.8422, ext. 3200 lmitchom@choicecorp.org
Jennifer Christy (N - R) 314.721.8422, ext. 3021 jchristy@choicecorp.org
Mildred Scott (S - Z) 314.721.8422, ext. 3027 mscott@choicecorp.org
Mary Meehan (S - Z) 314.721.8422, ext. 3016 mmeehan@choicecorp.org

Additional Road Improvements Could Alter Some Bus Routes

Following the successful completion of the New 1-64/40 highway construction, normal traffic patterns are returning and many bus routes have been returned to the newly renovated highway. However, MDOT and the VICC Transportation Department have identified two new projects that could impact some bus routes, mainly those travelling 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 Mine Road 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 floodplain and extending it 2 miles into the city.

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