

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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ABELL SALUTES:

The Retention Program of CollegeBound: "Keeping the dream of college alive by keeping the dreamer in college"

College sophomores Travis Willett (Towson University), Natasha Fung (Frostburg State), and Andrew Williams (University of Maryland, College Park) have to consider themselves lucky. They returned for the second year of college, but they almost didn't. The CollegeBound Foundation's Retention Program made the difference.

The difference between dropping out after freshman year and continuing on successfully to college graduation comes about because CollegeBound retention specialists Jamie Tang or Patrick Young immediately intervene, separately or together, when there is a sign of trouble.

CollegeBound's College Retention Program couples an award of Last Dollar Scholarship (up to \$3,000 annually) with the personal support of a retention counselor through graduation at nine Maryland colleges and universities. The program starts in June following high school graduation. CollegeBound meets with incoming students to ensure they are prepared for enrollment in the fall. CollegeBound retention specialists then visit each campus monthly to meet individually and in groups with students, as well as with key university personnel. There are e-mail and telephone check-ins as well as a 24-hour hotline for students.

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The cohort regroups mid-year in Baltimore and over the summer of each school year. Retention specialists work closely with students and student-support officers at each campus to address problems of college completion.

Since 1988, the CollegeBound Foundation has enabled numerous Baltimore City public high school students to attend college by providing both college advising and financial aid in 22 Baltimore City public high schools, and has served 20,000 of the city's most disadvantaged high school students. Dr. Craig Spilman, executive director of CollegeBound, says, "These young people dream about a college education. Sometimes that dream is threatened. We keep their dream alive by keeping the dreamer in college."

While significant numbers of Baltimore City students are accepted into college, National Student Clearinghouse college verification data show that less than 50 percent enroll in college immediately after high school graduation. Research consistently confirms that the failure to secure college funding is the overwhelming barrier to college enrollment for inner-city kids. The data also reveal that only one in 10 Baltimore City high school graduates earn a college degree within six years of graduating from high school. CollegeBound set out to meet this challenge by employing college-retention strategies designed to increase the college-graduation rates of Baltimore City public high school students. CollegeBound hypothesized that the mix of Last

Dollar Grant funding and college-retention interventions in partnership with the Maryland universities would enable more students to complete college.

In its quest, CollegeBound had encouraging data from the start. Available studies made clear that programs providing counseling on personal



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lifestyle-adjustment problems along with the traditional financial support have reduced college dropout rates. In fall 2006, with these data and a two-year grant of \$173,966 from The Abell Foundation, CollegeBound initiated a College Retention Program at nine Maryland colleges and universities beginning with 58 recipients of CollegeBound's Last Dollar Grants. In its fourth year, there are now four cohorts and 230 students participating in the College Retention Program on eight Maryland public university campuses and at Stevenson University.

Freshman to sophomore college-persistence rates for the first three cohorts of students in the Retention Program average 87 percent, versus the average of 78 percent of previous Last Dollar Grant award recipients who did not receive the retention services. This compares favorably to freshman-to-sophomore retention rates of 73 percent nationally and 80 percent in Maryland. For African-Americans students in Maryland, the retention rate is 70 percent. An important footnote: College-continuation rates (students who remain enrolled in college, but transfer to a different college) for retention-program students averaged 94 percent from freshman to sophomore year. All freshmen in the Retention Program's fourth cohort (high school class of 2009) are currently re-enrolled in the spring semester.

Three CollegeBound retention students from Baltimore City tell their stories:

Natasha Fung, Frostburg State: *"The transition from high school to college was a tough one for me. I came from Dr. Samuel L. Banks High School and was not prepared for what was to come my way. I didn't have any idea on how to study, how much time to spend on work,*

or where to start. I was overwhelmed. CollegeBound visits our school very often to check on the progress of the students. I feel the visitation is necessary because without it I would have probably fallen back into bad habits, and flunked out of college. CollegeBound gives me the support I need, financially, and also just when I need someone to talk to about how I am feeling about some of the classes I am currently enrolled in. At one point during my second semester at Frostburg, I felt like giving up, but CollegeBound was there to encourage me to use the services at the school to take full advantage of my education. Now I am enrolled in Student Support Services, which offers help with study skills and note taking. Without CollegeBound, I feel I wouldn't have received that extra push I needed to be successful academically."

Andrew Williams, University of Maryland, College Park: *"My experience with college has been an interesting one to say the least. I started out as an engineering major at the University of Maryland. I was progressing more slowly than I would have liked and was struggling with the aerospace program. The previous retention specialist, Daniel Russell, had been in contact with me and I spoke with him about the possibility of either changing my major or leaving the university for another location. I attended CCBC Essex (Community College of Baltimore County) from the summer of 2008 to the fall taking engineering classes. But the problem wasn't that engineering was too difficult, but I wasn't interested in it as much as I thought. So I changed my major to geology and returned to the University of Maryland. Geology is something I am much more interested in. The CollegeBound Foundation has been an immeasurable support, both financially and socially. The students and the retention specialists are like a family."*

Travis Willett, Towson University: *"CollegeBound helped me become a successful student in many ways. First, instead of just letting me do enough to get by, they persuaded me to do my very best in everything that comes my way. In addition, they provided me with counseling that led me to the tutoring center for help with my math class. Before I had the benefit of CollegeBound, I would try to do my math by myself. CollegeBound also gives me inspiration to find an alternative route on life, steering me in the right direction to find resources that might be available to me along my career path. For example, when I began college I was interested in computers and art. But I was struggling with math and I couldn't move to the computer classes that I really wanted without passing the math-class prerequisites. Even though I struggled with college for my first two years, CollegeBound was always there as my support. I could call Mr. Young or Mrs. Tang at anytime for advice or about any concerns. The CollegeBound Foundation has been my personal advising group from the beginning of school, and will continue to be my support until I finish."*

The Abell Foundation salutes the Retention Program of CollegeBound, executive director Dr. Craig Spilman, program director Jimmy Tadlock, scholarship coordinator Jamie Crouse, and college retention specialists Patrick Young and Jamie Tang—"who keep the dream of college alive by keeping the dreamers in college."