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Detroit College Promise scholarship program expands

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The Detroit News

Detroit — A program that hopes to one day provide full college scholarships to all Detroit Public School students has expanded districtwide.

“We got a lot of interest and people wanted the program to cover their schools,” said Nat Pernick, executive director of the Detroit College Promise scholarship program. “We figured if we expand, then the money will flow. Hopefully it will follow quickly.”

The nonprofit organization, modeled after the Kalamazoo Promise, initially offered the program to Cody High School’s graduating class of 2009. It was expanded to five additional high schools for the class of 2010 — Cass Tech, Central, Douglass, Pershing and Trombly.

Scholarship amounts depend on how much money the program has available. Nineteen students in Cody’s class of 2009 are receiving \$500 for each year of college, up to \$2,000. Forty-five students who graduated in the spring received \$500 for one year of college. The money is sent directly to colleges and universities.

Pernick said he expects the student interest and the donations to increase over time.

“As more people start talking about it, it will be more accepted,” he said. “This is a program where we’re building it up over time.”

Anthony Adams, president of the Detroit school board, praised the expansion of the program. “Any program designed to help Detroit kids go to college, I’m 1,000 percent behind,” he said. “We need more foundation involvement and programs like this to help our kids’ success in life.”

DPS parent LaTonya Williams plans to enroll her son Anthony, a sixth-grader at Bunche Elementary School, and hopes the expanded program will encourage him and other students to work hard in his studies.

“I think it will help them excel so they have an opportunity to get a scholarship,” she said. “Maybe they’ll take their education a little more seriously.” The group’s next fundraising goal is to offer each student \$2,500 for each year of college, up to \$10,000, Pernick said. He wouldn’t say how much money the foundation has as it begins a fundraising drive.

So far this year, 1,700 students have signed up for the program. Students are required to submit a one-page application and their college financial aid letter.

High school students must enroll in the program by Dec. 1. Future students will be required to enroll by Dec. 1 of their ninth grade year.

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