

# Scholarship effort dreams big for Detroit | Detroit Free Press | freep.com

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Start small and dream big.

That's how the Detroit College Promise started.

Now in its third year of awarding college scholarships -- some as small as \$50 -- the grass-roots program is dreaming bigger.

Nat Pernick, a Huntington Woods doctor, founded the scholarship program, which relies on fundraising.

In 2009, its first year of operation, the program gave awards to six students at Cody High. This year, awardees number 115, with the ultimate goal of offering every DPS graduate \$10,000 -- \$2,500 per year for four years -- beginning with the class of 2015, Pernick said.

"We always say this is our goal," he said. "We don't have the money, yet."

Pernick's dream is to help revitalize Detroit by offering scholarship money. He has raised \$150,000 to date. "We have to work hard if we want to attract people to the city."

All four-year, DPS graduates who plan to attend a Michigan public school are eligible; they just have to apply. So far, eligible applicants have not exceeded available money, and Pernick hasn't had to choose some students over others, yet. He said donations are needed.

The Detroit College Promise is among several programs nationwide that attempt to copy the Kalamazoo Promise, a privately funded program that provides four-year scholarships to all students who graduate from the Kalamazoo Public Schools. That scholarship, however, is funded by unnamed benefactors and more than \$17 million has been distributed.

## Every bit helps

Marsha Glass and her husband of Detroit feel the middle-class pinch.

They have one child in college and another headed there this month. They don't qualify for government grants to defray the \$21,000 cost for their daughter, Jailyn, to attend Grand Valley State University.

Facing the prospect of loans, the couple was happy that Jailyn received a \$500, one-year scholarship from Pernick's fledgling scholarship program. It's a modest amount, but every bit helps, the parents said.

"We are very appreciative of every scholarship we get," Marsha Glass said. Even "gas money to get there," she joked.

Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, on the advisory board and director of educational performance at the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, said the program needs to build credibility to attract big donors.

The average tuition cost -- not including room, board and books -- for an undergraduate student in 2010-11 at a four-year public college or university in Michigan, was \$9,733 per year and for 2011-12 it's \$10,416, according to the Michigan House Fiscal Agency. College seniors who graduated in

2009 owed an average of \$24,000 in student loan debt, up 6% from the previous year, according to the nonprofit Institute for College Access & Success.

The program has awarded only 165 scholarships since 2009 in part because students choose a college that isn't eligible or do not complete the application, Pernick said.

### **'Guaranteed money'**

"Other scholarships leave you hoping and wishing and checking the mailbox," said Renaissance High graduate Dale Dorsey, 18. "This is guaranteed money."

Dale, who plans to use his \$500 award this fall toward the cost of attending Grand Valley State, said he thinks larger awards will motivate more students to consider college.

"Some people stop trying in school if they think they won't have the money to go," he said. "This is a good incentive."

Another potential hurdle is likely fund-raising competition with another scholarship. In June, the district's emergency manager, Roy Roberts, announced a new funding drive to support a scholarship for DPS graduates to attend a two-year college program.

DPS spokesman Steve Wasko said he did not have an update on that fund-raiser but praised Pernick's program as "an asset to DPS's student recruitment efforts."