

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To Whom It May Concern:

During the 2010-2011 school year, Baltimore City Public Schools had the privilege of working with Nina Marks and Theresa Atta at Collegiate Directions, Inc. (CDI) to support the college guidance work in the three Citywide high schools, which draw Baltimore's highest-performing students. While the Citywides students were successful in passing state assessments, their performance on a number of college-going indicators gave me pause. Enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses was low, as were the scores on the associated exams, as well as the SATs. Additionally, students were all too often restricting their college options to local, non-selective colleges that were far below their academic capabilities.

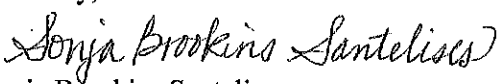
After nine months of work, including weekly meetings with the schools' principals and college guidance teams, I can gratefully attest that Nina and Theresa had a significant impact upon college-going in these schools. I have seen a marked increase in the variety and the selectivity of colleges to which our students applied this year; CDI amplified our counselors' ability to suggest colleges that would be a good match for students' interests and preferences. As I write, in fact, a group of Citywide students are in New England, exploring a number of colleges they had never considered. Additionally, CDI helped to introduce systems and strategies to promote continued improvement at these schools. Working alongside school teams, they delved into the data to develop systems for tracking advanced course participation, AP and IB test results, and college application and matriculation.

Nina and Theresa brought to their work an understanding of rigorous instruction, a deep knowledge of the college admissions process, and an awareness of the obstacles facing first-generation college students. They purposefully set out to understand the context of Baltimore and the strengths and weaknesses of each school's college guidance processes. With this information, they developed a curriculum that addressed key skills needed to guide students successfully to and through college; this curriculum was a 'living document' that was revised throughout the year based on feedback from the district and the schools, and as a result, it was and remains a rich resource. Most importantly, Nina and Theresa possess a nuanced familiarity with colleges across the country, their admissions standards, and their financial aid processes; this expertise made CDI invaluable in building the counselors' skills in helping students wisely navigate the college process.

During the year, one of our schools faced unexpected circumstances in their college guidance department. CDI exhibited immense professionalism in this situation, providing sound advice and willingly contributing additional support to the school with a passion that I would only have expected from district staff. Their willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty exemplifies the quality of their work and their commitment to expanding college opportunities for students in meaningful ways. I highly recommend their valuable work to other districts.

It would be my pleasure to speak further about CDI's work. Please contact me for any additional information.

Sincerely,


Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Academic Officer

