



Milestones

Helping aspiring scholars find their way

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Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

This spring we are proud to announce that three members of the CDI Scholars Class of 2009 have been recognized by major national scholarship organizations. First, **Michael Mekonnen** (Paint Branch HS) has been named a Ron Brown Scholar! Michael is one of only twelve high school seniors selected from a national applicant pool of over 10,000 for this prestigious distinction, named for the late Secretary of Commerce who, under the Clinton administration, was the first African-American to hold the position. As a Ron Brown Scholar, Michael will receive a \$40,000 scholarship, plus mentoring, community service and internship opportunities. For more information about the Ron Brown Scholar Program, please visit www.ronbrown.org.

Following on the heels of CDI's first Gates Scholar in 2008, *two* 2009 Scholars – **Ana Coello** of Einstein HS and **Brian Koskey** of Wheaton HS - have been named finalists for the Gates Millennium Scholars Program (www.gmsp.org). In addition to this scholarship news, the Class of 2009 has been accepted to many wonderful schools including Yale, Babson, Carnegie Mellon, MIT, and UVa. Now it's time to make final decisions!

Meanwhile, the CDI Scholar Class of 2010 – our fourth and largest cohort – has joined the program this spring and is participating in a myriad of activities. Twenty-two Scholars from six partner high schools were selected from an initial candidate pool of 180 students. This is a record number of nominations from high school counselors and a testament to the growing reputation of CDI's impact with our students and families and among their peers.



CDI Scholars participate in community service by cleaning-up Rock Creek Park.

One aspect of the CDI program that offers critical and long-term benefits to Scholars is the tutoring and test prep services provided *pro bono* courtesy of Marks Counseling Associates. On page 2, Tutoring & Test Prep Director **Nitin Sawhney** shares how his team has tailored their approach over the years to achieve maximum results. The Class of 2009 has achieved the most marked improvement on standardized test scores yet, with record increases on both the SAT and the ACT.

Also in this edition of *Milestones*, we have included *Parents' Voices*. On page 3, **Mrs. Angelica Regalado** expresses her gratitude to CDI for helping her family through the college application process. In *Community Voices*, CDI's partner, **Dr. Chris Garran** (Principal, Walter Johnson HS) shares his impressions about CDI. Finally, please welcome our new Office Coordinator **Jamyl Jenifer**, an alumna of Spelman College and the Peace Corps.

Warmly,

Theresa O. Atta

Our Mission

- To identify and support gifted, low-income, primarily first-generation-to-college students and help them to plan for, apply to, attend, and graduate from a selective, four-year college.
- To build leaders and scholars by mentoring students' personal and academic development.
- To leverage CDI's expertise in educational and college counseling by offering *pro bono* consulting and training assistance to other similar organizations.

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Financial Aid

In January, **Wendy Maldonado**, Financial Aid Outreach Counselor for Montgomery College, conducted a financial aid workshop for CDI parents. This workshop served as a follow-up to the Scholars' FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and financial aid workshop facilitated by **Larry Griffith**, Vice President of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF).

Ms. Maldonado first guided parents, step by step, through the FAFSA, providing them an opportunity to fill out the paper worksheet. She emphasized the importance of filing the FAFSA on time to meet federal, state and institutional deadlines; for example, to be eligible for aid from Maryland the deadline is March 1 of each year. Additionally, she spoke about aid available from the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Ms. Maldonado also explained what the estimated family contribution (EFC) means and how it is used to create a student's financial aid package. Parents had the opportunity to ask questions about the different types of aid offered, such as grants, scholarships, loans and work-study.

Ms. Maldonado also coordinated College Goal Sunday on the Takoma Park campus of Montgomery College, where CDI staff volunteered, helping families fill out the FAFSA. CDI thanks Ms. Maldonado for her invaluable guidance.

Support CDI!

It is now possible to make a contribution to CDI online. Please visit us at

www.collegiatedirections.org

and click "DONATE" on the left-hand menu bar to access our secure form. CDI is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations are tax-deductible. Thank you!

Skill Building: Closing the Gap

Mr. Nitin Sawhney is the Director of Tutoring & Test Prep for Marks Counseling Associates and offers pro bono test preparation for the CDI Scholars Program. In the passage below, he describes CDI's teaching methodology.

In 2008-09, our Scholars' SAT scores improved 230 points, from the Junior PSAT score to the final SAT. For those who took the ACT, scores improved an average of 5 points, which equates to an increase of approximately 300 SAT points. With our help, Scholars also improved their AP and Subject Test scores by wide margins.

Impressive as these results may seem, we are even happier with the improvement we have seen in Scholars' confidence and study skills. Because many of them are non-native English speakers, improving reading, grammar and writing skills is vital for academic, as well as test prep, success. In order to build these skills, we have developed a variety of strategies and tools.

We split the tutoring program into three main time periods (spring, summer and fall), created smaller classes (an average of four students per class), and offered foundational classes to Scholars who needed additional assistance in math, reading or writing. We also taught a range of SAT Subject Test classes.

On the first day of the 2010 Scholars' test prep classes, I taught my ACT class about subjects and verbs, sentence types, and punctuation. Throughout the 22 week course, Scholars will review and practice these skills in context. After each class, Scholars will read three to five *Washington Post* or *New York Times* editorials and be quizzed on grammar, vocabulary in context, and reading comprehension. Our research shows that each *Post* and *Times* opinion page typically contains 100-150 difficult words that have appeared on past SATs. Later in the course, students will progress to longer pieces from the *New Yorker*.

Not only does this approach to reading improve SAT and ACT scores, but it also builds cultural literacy. In one week last year, our students read about eloquence and rhetoric in the presidential campaigns of Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama, about human rights activists and a new class of computer warriors in the Middle East dubbed "pajamahuddeen" because they fought religious fanaticism by penning progressive political pieces, and about the possible eviction of the "Travelers," a nomadic group of Irish origin who have built illegal homes in the British countryside.

Our aim is not only to improve the Scholars' standardized test scores, but also to help close the cultural, economic, and opportunity gaps between them and their more affluent peers. We teach skills and strategies that in turn boost their confidence, better positioning them for success in college and beyond.



Nitin Sawhney, Director of Tutoring



New! Parents' Voices

Mrs. Angelica Regalado, mother of **Marco Regalado** (Wheaton High School, Class of 2009), talks about what CDI has meant to her family.

CDI has been a blessing for my son, Marco Regalado, Jr. and me. I am grateful to Mrs. Marks for having started the program. I also appreciate the dedication Ms. Atta, Ms. Hilton and the rest of the CDI staff show by helping the Scholars complete the college application process. Since it is my first time going through the college process, I do not know the necessary information to apply for college or to solicit financial aid. The entire process is a great worry, from deciding where my son should apply, to filling out the FAFSA, especially for someone who does not know which steps to take. With CDI's assistance, each step in the process has been a little less confusing. I am so thankful for the love and guidance CDI has shown my son, because without their continued assistance I do not know where I would be, probably pulling out my hair! I truly hope that CDI impacts the lives of other families just as much as it has impacted mine. Thank you, CDI!



Mrs. Regalado and son, Marco

Scholars' Voices

CDI Scholar, **Michael Mekonnen** (Class of 2009) from Paint Branch High School, reflects on the college application process.

I never realized how difficult the college application process could be. However, this fall I realized that applying to college is as demanding and time-consuming as an Advanced Placement class! There is a lot to college applications: various forms, long essays, short essays, fees, interviews, and more. It certainly is a huge responsibility, in addition to everything else I had to manage senior year. While I was going through the process (which I admit was quite exhausting!), I actually learned about myself and was able to reflect on how much I have accomplished in the past four years. The process felt like a rite of passage because I had to make decisions that would shape my entire future. I had to make several tough choices such as where I should apply, what to major in, and whether to live on campus. All these decisions are a foreshadowing of the fact that life from now on will involve much more responsibility and individuality. The hard work is paying off, I am happy to report. I have received a lot of great news, and I am anxiously waiting to hear from all of the colleges to which I applied. While the college application process was a lot of work, it was all worth it. Nonetheless, I have to say that I experienced only half the pressure as CDI helped me every step of the way. For that, I say THANK YOU to everyone at CDI.

New! Community Voices

Walter Johnson High School was among the first to partner with CDI. Below **Dr. Christopher Garran** shares his impressions of CDI and the work it does with students.

As the principal of Walter Johnson High School, I am indebted to CDI for its work on behalf of students for whom doors are often shut and access is often limited. Since 2006, CDI has worked with 14 Walter Johnson students. CDI has guided these young people through the college admissions process and helped them gain access to higher education.

For these students, CDI opened doors that otherwise would have remained closed. Given our current economic climate, it is even more imperative that programs such as CDI continue their work. After all, in a very real, tangible way, their work is helping close the achievement gap and aiding traditionally underrepresented students gain access to higher education.

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Class of 2010 Student & Parent Orientation

On Friday, February 27, CDI held an orientation for its 22 new members, the Class of 2010, who come from six different high schools: Wheaton, Walter Johnson, Einstein, Kennedy, Paint Branch and Springbrook. During orientation, the Scholars participated in activities that allowed them to get to know each other and begin their journey in the CDI Scholars Program. On April 10, CDI also hosted an ice skating party for the Class of 2010, where older Scholars welcomed the new Scholars to CDI.

In addition, CDI organized an orientation for the parents of the Class of 2010 on Saturday, March 28. Parents had the opportunity to meet other 2010 parents and receive more detailed information about upcoming events. Three of the 2010 families have older children in the CDI Program. Along with other veteran parents, they spoke about what CDI has meant to their families.

As always, we are looking forward to working with the new members of the CDI family.

Recent Events & The Road Ahead

March 28	Class of 2010 Parent Orientation
April 4	Community Service: Rock Creek Park Clean-up
April 6-13	MCPS Spring Break
April 6-22	Class of 2009 College Decision Family Meetings
April 7	Cultural Event: National Air & Space Museum
April 10	2010 Welcome Party: Ice Skating
April 26-28	PCACAC Spring Conference in Portsmouth, VA
May 1	Students' Response Date to Colleges
May 2	SAT Test Date
June 1	Paint Branch HS Graduation
June 3	Wheaton HS Graduation
June 4	Kennedy & Walter Johnson HS Graduations
June 5	Albert Einstein HS Graduation
June 6	SAT and Subject Tests
June 13	ACT Test Date
June 20	CDI Annual Board Retreat



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