I Want To Go To College

By the Students of the Canton City Schools

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The young boy was of slight build. In fact, he could have easily been mistaken for a sixth grader, rather than being in the 8th grade.

He came into the conference room with his father, whose own build in an adult frame easily mimicked that of his son. Both were expectant, but the boy was obviously nervous. As he sat down, he fidgeted moving from side to side in a chair that was clearly too big. This was one more step in a series of steps which began with an application form, went on to the writing of an essay, and now was culminating in an interview with a stranger.

I tried to put them both at ease. This was a big step. The boy was interviewing to become one of only a hundred students to be admitted to Early College High School in the fall of 2006.

The official name of the school is Early College High School on the Downtown Campus of Stark State College of Technology on the Timken Campus of the Canton City Schools. A long name for kids high on hope. Locally, it’s popularly called Early College and for over a year it has riveted the attention of the community. Early College is an opportunity for low income students to pursue a dream many of them and their parents consider out of reach. It is the opportunity to get a college education at no cost. Further, you do it while in high school. Students can earn a high school diploma and up to an associate degree simultaneously in four years.

“There are plenty of grants and student loans,” critics often say. “So what’s the problem? Why don’t these urban kids want to go on to college?” The bottom line is that we’ve not made college access easy. We really haven’t made it easy for low income kids whose parents never went to college. These are the “first generation” kids. Barriers ranging from FAFSA forms to admissions and placement tests, to deciding on a major, coupled with fear of “being indebted” and having to pay off large loans all come to bear. This is just the beginning – for the college world is a new world and hard for the uninitiated to understand. Here at Early College, we’ve streamlined the process. We’ve made college doable.

“Who is your hero? Who do you look up to,” I ask. It is a question from a sheet, cold and almost impersonal, for all interviewers are to ask the same questions to promote fairness and equity in the admissions process. The boy thinks for a minute. “My father,” he says. “Because he’s 40 and he’s going back to school too.” I ask the father and it’s true. I don’t pry into what he’s currently doing for a living. That’s not my place. Yet, I see the same enthusiasm in the eyes of both. This is a family who values education.

There are a lot of suburbanite myths about urban kids and their families. Myth one is that no one in the inner city values education. The reality is that many here value it with a passion seldom found in well to do communities or among the more privileged. The key is “value”. In the suburbs, education is almost taken for granted. In the high end suburbs, going on to college is a given. There is also the myth, never spoken-only acted upon, that poor equals dumb.

I go on with my questions. “What are your academic strengths and weaknesses.” The boy looks pale. Well I like math and science, but I received a “B” in science on my last report card. He said it nervously, then his father cut in. “He’s a little ashamed about that grade. You see, it’s the first B he’s had since the third grade.” Here was a child used to being on the honor roll. Going on, it becomes clear that he loves learning and wants to work...
Only a handful of Early Colleges promoting access for low income, first generation students exist around the county. They are there because of the vision of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—a vision sustained by Jobs for the Future, and in Ohio, by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation. They are on the “cutting edge” and, hopefully, will be policy drivers of what must become a long term societal debate—how to provide access to college for all.

The kids don’t understand this politic. For now, it is their dreams which are here and they are real. The students applying for Early College in Canton are looking to the future. This is their story, told in their words.

“I want to go to college.”

hard. His career plan is to become an engineer and eventually to become an astronaut. Back in the 60’s, as America journeyed to the moon, a lot of kids had that dream. I didn’t think anyone still wanted to be astronaut, but the young boy is serious. As near and as certain as a 13 year old can be, he’s planned it out. He even knows where he wants to go to complete his four year degree. Father and son both thank me for the interview. They leave expectant. Over the next two hours, I see six more parents and students. The hope is there; the dreams are present for all.

The question society needs to ask is, “what’s the price of a dream” for kids like this boy and thousands of others. To the Canton City Schools and its partner, Stark State College of Technology, the answer is obvious. All will do whatever possible to help kids like these realize their dreams.

Yet, school districts and public college have limited resources. Others—the public, the state, and the federal government—must eventually support them.
I Want to Go to College!

There are many reasons on why I think I should be chosen for the Early College Program. One very important reason being that there are so many young adults in the world today who have no goals, no dreams, and have lost their way in life. I do not want to be one of those people. I feel that I have heart, dedication, intelligence, the will, the drive, and the courage to succeed in life and make a difference.

They are kids, on a journey towards becoming adults. The temptations are many in the inner city and the opportunities are few. Ultimately, these children as adults can become a great resource for their community or an ongoing liability. Already they know they are at a crossroads in life but they see a light. That light comes from the lamp of opportunity known as Early College.

The following excerpts are taken from essays written by students seeking admission to Early College in Canton. Essays here, as in any college, are part of the application process. They were allowed 500 words and were told to discuss one of the following topics:

Tell us three reasons you should be chosen for admission (you may want to consider discussing commitment, the importance of education, career choice, personal goals, family situation or self discipline).

Or... Imagine it is the year 2015. What kind of job do you have? How much education do you need for your job? How did attending early college help you get your current job?

In total, the essays present a surprising picture of the challenges faced by these youth, how they value family, community, and education. They chronicle their hopes and aspirations. They belay the notion of urban stereotypes. Their words are their exact words, save for some minor corrections for clarity. Grammatical errors are kept intact.

Some of these students were younger than others when they wrote these words. You will see the young teen and the emerging adult at the same time. Some of their goals, thinking, and language lack the sophistication of an 18 or 19 year old or the creeping cynicism of many older adults.

Please remember that as you read these excerpts. Also, try to see things through the eyes of these young adults. Though many are inheritors of the inner city, they are just as much a part of the future as their suburban counterparts. This is not just their future; it is our future they are talking about.

They are applying to be the first members of their families to go to college and they are excited.

These are kids living often under very difficult conditions, but they and their families for the most part support one another and endure. Occasionally, parents, families, and friends are not supportive here, as in the suburbs. This hurts these kids, yet they go on.
I Want to Go to College!

I am writing this essay to first of all say that I am excited for the future generation to have this kind of opportunity while still in high school...in the year 2015, I see myself traveling to my business that Early College made possible.

Since no one in my family went to college it'll amaze many people that I am getting a better education...

My mother graduated from high school but she didn't get the opportunity to attend college. I was born after she graduated and she had to work to support me.

I have always planned to make my family proud of me and always dreamed of being the first in my family to receive or better yet earn a degree. No one that's in my family that I know of finished college, so I want to insure them that I can do it. The ones who think I can't make it I want to prove them wrong.

...if I am lucky enough to get this chance I will be the first person in my family to get an associates degree or a bachelors degree ... I will take this opportunity very, very seriously.

I am a member of a single parent home where money is very, very tight. My mother works very hard to take care of me and make ends meet...when I heard that I could attend college while attending Timken, I became very excited.

Early College High School in Canton opened in 2005 due to the dedication and commitment of:

Our students and their families
The faculties of SSCT and the Canton City Schools
The Boards of Stark State College of Technology and the Canton City Schools
The Stark Education Partnership

The Early College High School Steering Committee

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and the Early College High School Design and Support Team

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They have come to the doorstep of Early College.

…I have seen how people are living out on the streets not doing anything with their lives. I don’t want to experience that living of life. I don’t want to worry about where I find food and how I am going to pay my bill. I would like to be part of the early College Program because my dad never finish high school he drop out in the 10th grade and I don’t want to be like him.

My mother is a single parent with seven children and one grandchild and she does her best to support us all but with the help of the Early College program my mother will be excited to learn she will have one less child to get stressed over about going to college …

Another reason I would like to be a part of your program is that when I was a little girl, my dad died and now it is just me and my mom and my two brothers. Now my mom does not have a job so if I do not get chosen for the program, I do not know how I am going to afford college. My mom has told me we will find a way, but I do not know how. I really want to go to college.

All of my life I have been told by my father that I will never amount to anything. I will end up dead at a young age, a welfare recipient, a young mother, and a high school drop out. The thought of me attending college never crossed his mind. He always doubted my academic excellence. He discouraged me from pursuing my career of becoming a lawyer… through it all, I persevered…I kept my self confidence and rarely missed school. I earned good grades. I managed to stay on the honor roll. I continued doing my best. I never stopped believing in myself.

I see many teens giving up on life. In order to survive financially they start selling drugs, others have children at a young age. When I speak to them I realize they have no desire to change their ways because they feel stuck. If I am accepted into this program I will be surrounded with students with the same desires and goals as my own to get ahead in life.

I would like to attend the Early College High School for three main reasons. The first reason concerns my environment. I am surrounded by violence. I think that violence is unnecessary because as humans, we should learn how to get along with each other. There is fighting and gang activity in my neighborhood. I am afraid for my life because I am surrounded by death. Growing up, I have seen my friends die by the gun and violence. Being a student in the Early College High School would help me become smarter and a better person. It would help me to make wiser decisions regarding my future....
They value education.

Young as they are, they get the connection which eludes so many adults... education is the gateway to the future.

So many people fail to take advantage of the great opportunity of education in our great nation. Some feel that education will always be there when they are ready for it. That is not so! You have to seize the opportunity and do something great with it! Don’t get me wrong, it’s never too late to learn, but the earlier the better. You need a head start so that you can be the absolute best that you can be.

There comes a time when you take your education for granted and do not realize it. I think education is important for everyone. Many people do not have the chance to get a good education. I take every opportunity to get a good education. I think it is very important to get a higher education in this day and age, an education is key to success. Education is a long trek, but with the reward is worth every minute of it.

Have you ever felt that you had all the education you needed by just attending one high school?

I have dreamed of becoming a pediatrician since the age of five. I have continually worked hard to keep my grades up in order to do that. Despite my many extra curricular activities, I have maintained a 3.75 grade-point-average.

One more important thing is that I see people like my mom, my dad, and my step dad are all limited in their employment opportunities due to their lack of a college degree…

The reason why I should be picked is because I value for education…I feel that I want to prove myself to all the people who doubted me and do not think I am capable of making it anywhere.

They have a sense of commitment to family, friends and community...in the future, they see themselves helping others.

As an adult, I want to be the kind of person other people look up to. I will help my family members and help other people… I want to be chosen because I don’t want to throw my life away like some of my friends are doing…I want to be the opposite of my friends. The main reason is because I want to be a nice, smart and honest role model for my younger brother, so that when he gets older he can tell his kids or grandchildren that his sister finished college at a real young age.

In the year 2015, I saw myself walking through the front door. Then I looked around and saw a lot of kids hanging around although that was the “ideal”. As I went to the elevator, I pressed the button to get to the 5th floor. When I got off the elevator two boys approached me smiling and laughing. One boy took me by the hand and started guiding me to one of the tables in the room. When I approached there were two children dueling with yu-gi-oh cards. If you haven’t guessed it yet, I will tell you. I’m running a corporation. It’s name is “Ancient Times”. The reason why I decided to do this was because I wanted to keep kids out of trouble and jail.

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These kids and their families counter youth & urban stereotypes at every chance.

Life has many opportunities. Many times people look at single parent homes as a negative thing. Not only am I from a single parent home, but the woman I call mom is not my biological mother. She’s a woman who was my biological mother’s foster parent. She has legal custody of me and treats me like a queen. She tells me that I am special and tells me that I was blessed by God. I was created for purpose and destiny.

Granted, my family members never went to college, but as far as my family is concerned, they are quite brilliant. My mom encourages me to do my best in school. She is the one reason I try to do my best that I possibly can, and try to set goals at high standards. My dad and grandpa play another important part in my life. Thanks to them I’ve set a career goal for myself …I believe that by going to Early College High School, and with the personal help of my family, there is no goal that I cannot accomplish.

I am committed to education because of my family. My family brought me up knowing right from wrong and I want to thank them for that. My mother has always taught me that education is very important. Its good to play sports and to go into the professional leagues but when you have an education, a broken leg or arm can’t take away the knowledge that you have learned. You can always fall back on your education.

Before I knew what college was, I always said that I was going to college. My mom instilled this in me. She has a new Habitat House that I helped her get by getting all A’s on my report card that earned credit hours…my mom is very inspiring.

Many people stereotype black children that are from the black community as misfits or drug dealers. Today kids think that school is just a game… I on the other hand think school is very important toward my future. I know have the opportunity to be chosen for Early College…

This program will prepare me to change what society thinks about the youth of our generation. I am mature and understand that I have to get an education to make a better future for me and encourage my peers to do the same.

I haven’t missed a single day of school out of all eight years I have attended. I know that I can push myself to do all the work and attend school everyday on time…I’m a very hard working student. I push myself to do things I may not see as enjoyable. I don’t let very many things get in my way.

I want to be a good role model for my brother and sisters. I will try to do my best not to lose my temper at my brother and sisters when they make me angry because I don’t want them to act that way when they get older.

I want to set new standards for my fellow brothers and sisters who want to see others and myself live peacefully. I want to show the world that African-American children can be very well educated and still be themselves.

They see themselves as ready

…I would like to be chosen for admission because deep down inside this is my only opportunity to become a successful African-American young woman. I have set so many goals for myself, and every single goal I have set for myself is very important to me. Being chosen for this program would mean the world to me and it is the world to me. I am willing to do my best and work hard to achieve every one of these goals. I know it will be tough but I am committed to taking that risk.

Unlike most kids I sit down and read or study instead of watching
I am an ambitious female and I always finish what I start. I’m committed to being the best, not only for myself but my siblings and peers.

I know that teenagers like me need to set an example for younger children…in my future I see myself doing great things; things so great that every young person looks up to me as an example of great success. I want to be a role model for the kids younger than me, so they can say “when I grow up I want to be just like…” To have a child say that they want to be just like me when they grow up makes you feel good and makes me want to work even harder.

...I feel that I would be a good candidate for the new Early College High School. I’m the eldest of ten grandchildren and the eldest child in my immediate family. Attending this school would be encouraging to my cousins and siblings. I’m a highly motivated individual with a positive attitude. I feel that I’m a reliable and encouraging person who will also be encouraged by my peers to succeed in this type of a structured setting....

T.V. School is a major part of my life. I never got held back and I never intend to. I have major plans in my life and attending college is one of them.

Most of the young people I know that are employed in my community, work at fast food restaurants or in department stores. I clearly realize that I don’t want to limit myself to that type of employment. In order for me to achieve my dreams I have set higher goals for myself and must achieve them.

...If I am chosen as a member of the first graduating class from Early College, I am certain that I will be greatly challenged academically. Mental challenge appeals to me. Being forced to think harder, search for alternate solutions to problems, and brainstorm with other students would push me to excel intellectually. At times, I just feel that there should be more challenges for those of us currently enrolled at school… While I don’t believe that I would have an easy time with my studies in Early College, I do believe that I would be prepared for the academic challenge demanded....

& motivated to work hard.
I hope you take my words to heart and understand that I would be a great choice, but a risky one even though I have the drive to do it. I have not put the effort into my grades. Now I promise you that I will from now on. I just realized that I am in need of an education and without it I am nothing. Will you please help me succeed?

I went to middle school where I was often picked on...I got into fights...suspended and a lot of other things. Many times I felt like I was small because all those times I felt like a loser because I didn’t fit in. This jeopardized my grades when I could have been an A student I was a C student...one day in math class I heard of this program...a new Early College program.

Even at this age, they are thinking about what they want to do with their lives. Career aspirations often change through the adolescent and early adult years. That is natural. What is more important here is that they are thinking ahead. Knowing that they have an opportunity for college, they are setting their targets high. There is one other thing. The desire of these young adults to give back to society and their community is very pronounced. This is an idealistic young generation. May they always hold to that idealism.

I’d like to talk about my grades that I have this year. I know they aren’t great this year, but I’m trying very hard now. I’ve been doing all my homework, and staying after school now if I have a problem with an assignment or understanding something. I am sure that I can pull my grades up by the end of the year...

When I get older I want to be a lawyer, and take care of my family the way they took care of and supported me...I want to make a name for myself. If I’m chosen for early college that will be a blessing for me and my family. To whoever is paying for this I thank you and God bless you, you’re an angel to me.

Helping people has always been a dream of mine. Making a difference in the lives of others makes me feel better as a person...I see myself assisting the doctor in saving lives. Growing up, I have played the role of nurse with my older brother as we pretended to operate on the dog. One day I would like to earn the highest degree in the medical field.

This is something that I’ve strived for since I was a young girl in elementary. I always dreamed of going to college to become a doctor, nurse, or someone who worked big time in the hospital field. I never feared of how many years I would have to go to college to accomplish that.

I want to major in journalism because I like to find out things about people. I like to be organized and learn about the world around me. I would like to work at Jane Magazine. I also want my own magazine company. I want to be known around the world.
Another goal of mine is to build my own Video Game Designing Company. I choose this career field because I enjoy playing and reading about new games. An individual should choose a career they enjoy. Money isn’t everything. Making others happy and enjoying your job is more important.

It’s the year 2015. I’m working in a neo natal nursing wing. This is my second year as a nurse and I absolutely love it! This has been my career choice since I was 10. Everything has gone pretty smooth. There have been ups and downs being a neo natal nurse. I’ve helped so many babies but there were a few that I could do nothing about. I wouldn’t be here yet if it wasn’t for Early College High School…I want to be the one to care for these babies. I love life and would welcome the opportunity to help these babies get the chance to live a long and happy life too. I realize that there is not always going to be a happy outcome but I’ll try to prepare myself for that.

After I make it to college I want to graduate as a pilot. I want to be a pilot because I want to serve my country by being a pilot for the Navy…

Being a lawyer has been a dream of mine for the past three years. I want to make a difference in our society. I feel that it is important to get the criminals off the streets so people can feel safe. I want to learn as much as I can about the law so I can help people change the laws that do not work and make new laws that would work.

Some are thinking **even higher yet …**

I’m going to make something of myself when I grow up. This program will help me get an early start. I have ambitions of being a doctor or president of the United States of America. When people tell me no or you can’t because you are an African American and you will never amount to anything, that just gives me an even better reason to succeed at becoming the president.

And others are ready to **give Thomas Friedman a run for his money …**

I believe our country is at a turning point for young adults to realize how important education is to our future. Not only is it important to us for our future…it is the most significant factor to the success of our advancement as a nation. For example, our nation will need more applicants in the medical positions, government/political agencies, technologies and many other positions. Each career can help our nation economically, federally, and/or individually. In other words, lets say that a scientist that was very well educated discovered a cure for a deadly disease. He could have possibly saved thousands of lives in America or even the world. Other careers and positions with higher education can have an affect on the world also.
Ninety-nine of the students whose words you have been reading began the Early College program in the summer of 2005. They were enrolled for six hours of college coursework. Unlike some other early colleges where students often wait to take college courses, the Canton program is structured with a cohort approach and geared towards early college coursework success. These courses employ a team teaching approach with both college professors and high school teachers. College is very, very real—from the start.

How did the kids do? David G. Richards, Stark State College of Technology Professor, Information Technology taught one of the summer courses.

I have been a professional educator for 22 years at the college level. I created, modified and have taught Computer Applications for Technical Professionals for 15 years. Even though I supported the concept of Early College, after my first experience I am now a full fledged believer. I believed that I had too much information to present and that they would not be able to handle the independent assignments. I soon found out that I needed the college text with the more difficult coursework that I would normally use when the students quickly became bored with my skill-based assignments. They proved very quickly that they were capable of the mastery level assignments which did not offer step-by-step instructions. We presented and they mastered every concept and skill that is taught in the college courses presented at Stark State College of Technology.

If you’ve read these words, then perhaps you can understand why we don’t believe in “delayed gratification” in Canton. This school and opportunity means far too much to the students, their families, and this community. We are asking these kids to work hard and expecting much from families as well. It has to be real from the start. No, the courses are not “watered down,” and after the initial six hours, the students will take another six hours during their freshman year. The number of college courses will sequence over four years, allowing successful students the opportunity to graduate with their diploma and an associate degree.

In the summer of 2005, 97 students earned 570 credit hours or a total of 5.88 credits per student. Fifty-six students had a college GPA of 3.0 or better.