

Area students TAP-ping into college dreams

By ALEX ROSE

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CHESTER — That's six weeks down. Now, for the newest crop of Chester Upland School District students enrolled in The Achievement Program (TAP), there's only four years to go before achieving the program's ultimate goal — college enrollment.

The 20 students in TAP's new cohort gathered with family at Chester Eastside Ministries on the last day of their six-week summer introductory program last week to reminisce on all they'd already done, which TAP Executive Director Nicola Tollett

Jefferson said was a mix of hands-on practical learning in math, science, humanities and critical thinking.

Students came to East Side Ministries at Ninth and Potter streets Monday through Thursday during the program, where staff and board members Diana Campbell, Marshall Muhammad, Janice Hoffman Willis, Rev. Bernice Warren, Marc Turner, Jennifer Atchison, and Kearny Warren joined Jefferson in prodding the young minds toward success.

When not focusing on academics, students were inundated with information on learning techniques and college preparation — filling out college applications, talking to college students, hearing what admissions boards are looking for, and the like.

Students also took field trips to the National Constitution Center, Drexel University, the Academy of Natural Sciences, the Mann Music Center, and Island Beach State Park — the first time some of the students had been to the shore (and the first time Jefferson braved the waves, she admitted).

TAP was successful in retaining 80 percent of the original 20 students who became involved with the program



Chester Upland students enrolled the district's TAP program are flanked by board members Kearney Warren, far left, and Jennifer Atchison, far right.

students talk to prospective colleges and search out scholarships and other programs.

"I think it just made it in the back of their minds that, yes, this is what I want to do," she said. "With the first group, most of them, they were the first in their family to go (to college), so I think they needed that constant reassurance."

It's also important to have parents and guardians on board, said Jefferson, who is planning to have them sign a contract indicating commitment to the program.

"So far, I think we have a good group of parents, very supportive," said Jefferson. "It's just a matter of understanding what they need to do, or what needs to happen, for their child to reach this particular goal, which is going to college."

TAP is a member of the New Beginnings Nonprofit Incubator at Resources for Human Development Inc. (RHD). While RHD provides technical assistance and 501(C)3 sponsorship, TAP is responsible for generating its own funds from fund-raisers and local donors, such as the \$10,000 grant it received from the Nelson Foundation, and \$5,000 from the William Penn Foundation.

in 2002. All of those who stayed graduated in June and are on their way to institutions of higher learning such as Widener University, Hampton University, Cheyney University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and more.

"One of the main things (with TAP) is kind of intangible, and that is to make college normal, just to change their idea of what's normal and what's a given," said Jefferson.

To do that, she said, TAP staff are constantly on the students' backs, asking if they want to go to college, drilling the idea into them again and again. They also help stu-

Jefferson said she hopes to be able to expand in the future to two staggered groups of students, where older students can help younger ones, and begin an international component.

The students will now attend TAP as an after-school program with more trips and other surprises in store, including a component on financial responsibility. The schedule for that hasn't been established yet, because TAP will have to work around school-oriented extracurricular activities, said Jefferson.