

GHS program makes college dreams real

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By MARY BETH PINNELL

College Forward, a new program at Georgetown High School, will kick off next week with information sessions for students and parents.

The program, provided by a non-profit organization that serves several Central Texas schools, provides free college preparatory services to academically motivated students who need extra help and financial support.

"What I saw here was a need at school to provide extra support and assistance for students who wanted to go to college," said Alan Oakes, who works with at-risk students.

Mr. Oakes said the first class of candidates has been chosen and

will learn about the program next week.

Like Upward Bound, a federal program that helps students plan for a higher education, College Forward has several admission requirements.

Candidates must be juniors, in good academic standing and in the top 60 percent of their class, have good behavior and qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program.

A new class of juniors will be selected each fall and continue through the program their senior year of high school.

"This experience will be the bridge between high school and college, so they understand the demands for college," said Mr. Oakes, adding that the program continues to support students into their freshman year of college.

By the first week in February, members of this year's class will be paired with college students from Southwestern University, who will help them start their college search based on interests and academic level.

Students also will research scholarships and financial aid packages, receive extra SAT and ACT preparation, and get help with filling out college applications and preparing admissions materials.

Weekday sessions will be spent in the high school's newly revamped Go Center, which serves all GHS students with computers and other resources.

Students also will visit colleges across the state and complete a

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Alan Oakes
GHS At-risk Coordinator

community service requirement each semester.

College Forward estimates the value of the program is about \$7,000 per student if it were conducted through private counselor coaches, Mr. Oakes said.

He said the benefits of the program are two fold.

"Statistically, when students see a future for themselves, they do better in high school and so when they're working with a mentor and focusing on the future, that's what [teachers] see . . . Their grades and everything goes up," he said.

The program is exciting, he said, because it will give every student at GHS an equal opportunity to go to college and succeed.

"We know you can be outstanding, we know you can make it to college and we want to help you do that," he said. "And give you the attention you need and deserve."

The district is hiring a part-time College Forward liaison who will work with students after school.

More information is available at www.collegeforward.org.

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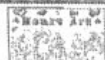
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