 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Posted on Tue, Jan. 27, 2009

Ronnie Polaneczky: CCP program helped Earleena find 'direction'



By Ronnie Polaneczky
Philadelphia Daily News

Daily News Columnist

EARLEENA Sewell was one of those urban high-schoolers who stayed below society's radar.

She wasn't high-achieving enough to warrant special academic attention at John Bartram High School. Nor was she a troublemaker whose chronic acting out demanded chronic intervention.

She was never truant, and her grades weren't bad.

Although, Earleena says, "I got A's and B's just for showing up. I wasn't challenged at all."

She had no idea what she'd do after high school. No one in her fractured, low-income family had gone to college, and it never occurred to her to attend, either.

"I had no focus," she says. "I went to school just to see what my friends were wearing. It was like a fashion show."

The city's schools are filled with Earleenas: good kids who muddle through, from families for whom muddling through is a way of life - because they haven't the resources or opportunities to do anything more hopeful than survive.

So their desires go unexpressed, their gifts unseen.

And they stop dreaming.

So it's thrilling that Earleena, now 20, will graduate with a degree in history from Temple University this December - almost two years sooner than most college students her age.

She then plans to get master's degrees in business and psychology. The education will help her

start an organization to help teens stay involved in their churches, long after their parents stop making them attend Sunday services. Once that's established, she'll become a minister. "I have direction now," she says. "I'm a different person."

Community College of Philadelphia deserves props for Earleena's rebirth. When Earleena was in 10th grade, she enrolled in a new program at CCP called Advanced Tech at College (ATC).

The program brings well-

behaved, low-income, academically decent students like Earleena to CCP's Spring Garden campus for their final two years of high school. They take their required high-school classes there, while also replacing their elective high-school courses with mostly technology classes.

They earn college credit for the latter - up to 30 over the program's two years.

They return to their high schools for graduation. But by then they've dipped their toes into college life - an experience that exposes them to a world beyond their limiting neighborhoods and high schools.

"Our goal isn't to bring in the kids who are going to attend college no matter what," says ATC's academic coordinator, Willette Whitaker. "We want students who, with a little extra encouragement and exposure, may decide to go to college."

Of the 119 students who've taken part in ATC since its 2004 inception, 89 have gone on to college; the rest are finishing their high-school requirements.

ATC is funded by a five-year federal grant, in partnership with CCP and the Philadelphia School District. The grant ends this year, a situation that Whitaker says is "concerning, but we're actively working on it."

That's important, because ATC is free, a huge boon.

A new report by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children shows that 71 percent of the state's college class of 2007 graduated with an average debt of nearly \$27,000. Among the country's public colleges and universities, Pennsylvania's are the sixth-most-expensive. That's for students who at least have the desire to attend college.

Can you imagine how the cost would hold back low-income students like Earleena, who come late to the idea of attending post-secondary school?

"Going to CCP was very maturing for me," says Earleena, who attends Temple full time and works full time at a social-services agency. "I was surrounded by college students and adults who already knew what they wanted, and they were very focused."

She hit some bumps at CCP. "My mouth and attitude got me into trouble," she says, grinning broadly. But CCP counselors helped her understand that she was expected to meet the program's high academic standards.

"I had a lot of issues to get past," she says, "emotional stuff. A lot of us did. Where we come from, life isn't easy."

Today she's an honor student who surrounds herself with only positive people who support her hard work.

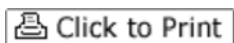
"I'm going places," she says. "All I think about is my future."

That's right: She's dreaming again. *

E-mail polaner@phillynews.com or call 215-854-2217.

Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/philly/hp/news_update/20090127_Ronnie_Polaneczky__CCP_program_helped_Earleena_find__direction_.html



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright | Philly Online, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Any copying, redistribution or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the express written consent of Philly Online, LLC is expressly prohibited.