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How to help teens headed to college

Baltimore has its challenges, but we also have our triumphs. Now is a time to celebrate the success of our city's next generation.

Dante Daniels, Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School Class of 2015, took the stage Friday to address his fellow city schools' graduates at the annual CollegeBound Scholars' Luncheon. He described his journey from Mervo to the U.S. Naval Academy, from which he graduated in May with a degree in electrical engineering.

Ensign Daniels soon will be leaving for Japan for three years to serve our country as a surface warrior officer. He is not alone. Every year, about 1,000 city schools' graduates head off to a four-year college.

Baltimore city schools' graduates are succeeding. Scholars who receive CollegeBound "last dollar grants" (need-based awards after financial aid from all other possible sources has been exhausted) graduate from four-year colleges at a rate of 60%. This is more than twice the national average for students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

These last dollar grants are, at most, \$3,000 per year. A college graduate earns about \$1 million more over the course of a lifetime than her non-college graduate counterpart. So, for a total last dollar grant investment of under \$20,000, a student's earning potential can be raised by hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The road to college is not easy for many Baltimore students ("Baltimore should model vocational education on Green Street

Academy," July 1). Many are the first in their family to attend college and face significant challenges. At CollegeBound, we work in city schools alongside school counselors and teachers to provide college advising. We take students on college bus tours, convene college fairs in the high schools, and help with the complicated financial aid and college application processes. And we award close to \$3 million in college need-based grants and scholarships to Baltimore city schools' graduates.

CollegeBound's new College Completion Program offers city schools' graduates continued advising during college, adult and peer mentors, on-campus liaisons, and workshops and community service activities across the city during college breaks. Of the almost 100 city schools' graduates in the program, 89% are still in college after two years.

We challenge readers of the Baltimore Sun to rally around the 1,000 Baltimore city schools' graduates about to head to college. Volunteer with a local non-profit that works with young people. Work with your college's alumni association — or CollegeBound — to be a mentor. Contribute to a scholarship. Hire a Baltimore student for a paid internship.

Many of our city's students are excelling in college. We as a community should do all we can to help alleviate the challenges that confront many of Baltimore's brightest and most determined students. They are our city's future.

Cassie Motz, Baltimore

The writer is executive director of the CollegeBound Foundation.