

EVANSTON SCHOLARS



Rising seniors attend a fun, intense day at college boot camp.



Graduating seniors show their college pride.

Serving students from Evanston Township High School, Evanston Scholars (IL) is a homegrown program. It assists 174 students—high school juniors to college seniors—on their journeys to and all the way through college.

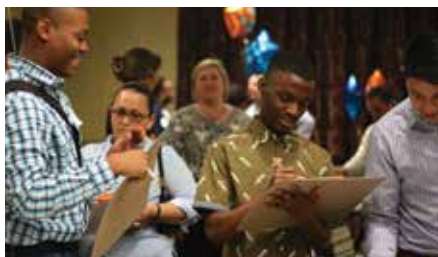
Supporting the journey to college success has always been the foundation of the program. “We are very much a ‘to and through’ program; the mission is college success and graduation, not just access,” said Alison Segal, the director of college access.

Evanston Scholars’ founder, Steve Newman, is a graduate of Evanston Township High School and was a teacher there for 20 years. “He saw so many ambitious and talented students graduate high school without a four-year plan or start college and then drop out because something got in the way of persisting,” Segal explained.

“Evanston is a very diverse place. Traditionally underrepresented groups comprise roughly 40 percent of the population. At the high school, nearly 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch and many will be the first in their families to pursue education and/or training beyond high school,” continued Segal.

Segal said to meet this need, Newman “conceived Evanston Scholars as a ‘to and through’ college program meeting needs unaddressed in the community.” The program’s students are 84 percent first-generation college students and 82 percent qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch.

The program recruits students in their sophomore year of high school through community outreach and information sessions in English classes. Applicants (who must have a minimum of a 2.7 unweighted GPA to be considered) undergo a comprehensive application process at the end of their sophomore



Seniors, parents, and mentors celebrate at the annual graduation dinner.

year of high school consisting of essays, the submission of a transcript, family financial information, and a teacher letter of recommendation. The staff interviews every applicant along with a parent/guardian to assess fit for the program. Students are also matched with volunteer mentors—college graduates in the community.

High school students attend workshops one Sunday a month, focusing on topics relevant to where students are in the admission process, with separate programming for juniors and seniors. Evanston Scholars staff come to the high school during lunch three times a week so students in the thick of applying can see someone as frequently as needed. “Some students come in three times a week and some every couple of weeks. It’s good one-on-one time to get things done,” said Segal.

In college, Evanston Scholars staff stays in regular touch with each scholar to support their academic and overall success. Mentor relationships

continue through sophomore year. College freshmen are also matched with peer mentors to support their transition from high school to university. Evanston Scholars helps students attain meaningful summer jobs and internships through an annual college scholar reunion/career information fair and organizational partnerships with area employers.

Students also participate in an annual day of service, summer programming, college visits, ACT tutoring, and application boot camps, as well as bi-monthly contact with their mentors. All the effort pays off.

Evanston Scholars have a 95 percent college persistence rate. “Our students are more than capable of college success,” said Segal. “Especially with Evanston Scholars in their corner for any questions or challenges that might arise.”

Segal is especially inspired by two college freshmen who came to the program as refugees from Sudan after 10 years of itinerant life. They made it to Illinois, and after just a few years of support from Evanston Scholars, they are both succeeding at highly selective liberal arts colleges.

“Each scholar’s path is unique,” Segal said. “What sets us apart is our high-touch and individualized approach. We’re plugged into the community and we take a really personalized approach with working with every scholar. Between the mentor and the staff and the family—we all collaborate to help the student. I think that any scholar in the program would feel that they had a team of people they could call on.”

—Hannah McIntosh Burke

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