



THE COLLEGE BOUNDER

FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE BOUND, INC.

8101 SANDY SPRING ROAD • SUITE 230 • LAUREL, MARYLAND 20707 • (301) 490-0911 • WWW.FGCB.ORG • FGCB@FGCB.ORG

CEO'S MESSAGE

Parents: Are You Thinking About College Affordability?

When high school seniors are in the process of actively applying to, thinking about, or even trying to decide if they want to attend college, it is important that students and their parents understand and think about college affordability. May 1st—College Decision Day—should not be the first time that families consider affordability.

If a student is accepted to their dream college, but has not factored in the cost, they may not be able to attend. A student who didn't plan to attend college may change their mind but find that they may have missed important deadlines impacting admission and financial aid.

Most parents, especially those with financial challenges, expect that if their child is accepted to a college, that they will receive a scholarship and some form of financial aid to attend. They are often not aware that you must apply for financial aid in a separate process from college admissions. Often students and their parents have also been told that there are many scholarships for students to attend college, but no one has explained the work involved to receive them.

Regardless of a student's academic profile or even the effort expended in applying for

scholarships, there is no guarantee of being awarded. This has been the case for many students and their parents, who apply for the "many scholarships," only to be disappointed by not receiving the funds needed to attend college. It is important to note that, even if awarded, many scholarships are only for one year. This creates a financial challenge for students in the following year when the funds are not renewed and may even result in disrupting their college attendance.

If a family is financially challenged and their student is accepted to a **full need college**, the student will be awarded the funds that the family cannot afford. However, there are only about **100 full need colleges** out of the more than 5,000 colleges in the US.

Parents must understand and inform their child that the College Bound Process is a partnership that must involve both parent and child. Because students can apply to colleges without their parent's permission, parents may be unaware of the schools to which their child applied, as well as the cost to attend those schools. Parents must be involved and aware throughout the process; not just when the college bill is due.

Students and parents become excited about college acceptances, but the challenge comes when the financial aid is not enough to cover for the cost to attend. This can result in great disappointment.

FGCB believes that every student should have a college affordability plan. It may help to combat disappointment if students and parents understand the realities of college costs and apply to colleges with affordability in mind.

I recommend that every student's college affordability plan should include applying to:

1. Their dream college (private or state)
2. In-state colleges or universities
3. A local community college

The college application process is as important to college affordability as completing the FAFSA and other applications for financial aid. Attending an affordable college may enable students to graduate with little to no debt. Particularly for students coming from financially challenged households, this sets them up for economic mobility and wealth building.

Joseph A. Fisher
Joseph Fisher
CEO and Founder



Joseph Fisher
CEO and Founder



First Generation College Bound was honored to welcome Dr. Falecia D. Williams, President of Prince George's Community College, as keynote speaker at our 31st Annual Celebration of our graduates.

As a first-generation college student herself, Dr. Williams was especially appropriate to provide meaningful insight and advice about how first-generation status can position students for success in academics and in life itself.

2021 Annual Celebration of Graduates

"We are more than the challenges we face," Dr. Williams said to students. "Being a first-generation college student has prepared you for success because you have learned not to let your circumstances define you."

Most of the data about first generation students centers around challenges, but Dr. Williams asked students to focus on their strengths. "We are resourceful, we are resilient, we are powerful beyond measure."

She encouraged students to see college as more than just a path to a career, but also

as a journey to find out more about their true selves and what they value. Dr. Williams shared that she sees her value not by the tangible successes such as money or position, but by her impact both on and off the campus.

Dr. Williams shared that some of the challenges that may create embarrassment for low-income students today, are the very things that will create the grit and the wherewithal on which they will one day stand with pride.

Dr. Williams went on to say, "Being a

2021 Annual Celebration of Graduates

- CONTINUED

first-generation student is an asset, not a hindrance. It is a blessing, not a curse. It has positioned you for success, no matter where your journey takes you."

The values and strengths that Dr. Williams spoke about were also exemplified in our student speakers. Despite uncertainty in his life due to a lack of financial security and the health struggles of his mother, Chief Bentil overcame the odds by setting goals beyond his comfort zone and committing to overcoming the adversity before him. Chief, a Laurel High School graduate, is now set to bring his unique perspective and academic commitment to Bowie State University this fall.

Selena Walker, our college speaker, also had to overcome steep odds to get to where she is today. She credits her patience, perseverance, and faith to overcome challenges and credits FGCB with helping her to secure the funding to completing the application process and attend college. After four years of hard work and commitment, Selena graduated with the class of 2021 from Bowie State University with her Bachelor's in Psychology. Now, she serves as an inspiration for her younger siblings, cousins, and everyone in the FGCB community.

First Generation College Bound founder Joseph Fisher closed the celebration with a few powerful words to invigorate the graduates and thanked our sponsors, administrative team, and College Access Team for the pivotal role they play in making our mission possible year after year.

Maryland Leadership Workshops

For a number of years, FGCB has partnered with the Maryland Leadership Workshops (MLW) to teach students to be advocates for themselves and the issues they care about at school and in their communities.

In their own words, a few of our students participating in the workshops, shared what they learned. Their feedback confirms the benefits of these leadership development and advocacy trainings for our youth.

"I decided to take part in the Maryland Leadership workshop because I was curious about what other students felt being a leader in today's society was like. I was not disappointed. The workshop exceeded my expectations."

- **Natalie Frimpong**

"My favorite part of the workshop was the part where we learned about self-

awareness. This was my favorite part because I learned some key things about being self-aware, such as how my values, background, and relationships impact how I see others and how I see the world. My key takeaway from this section was that I can be self-aware without being critical of myself or judgmental." - **Taya Dickens**

"I definitely learned the importance of respecting opinions, the workshops ranged widely on different topics, and everyone may have different thoughts/opinions that all deserved to be listened to and considered." - **Taylor Archer**



They are College Bound!

Preparing for your first year of college can elicit feelings of both excitement and nervousness.



Students share their thoughts, concerns, and expectations about starting college.

Students' expectations covered both the academic and social side of the college experience. They expect to have more freedom and understand that this comes with more responsibilities. They also expect college to be a time when they move toward discovering their ideal career path. On the social side, they expect to meet new people and to get involved in clubs and activities.

Among the things students were excited about are having free time after completing assignments! This can be a bit misleading. Although a high school student is in class for seven hours a day and a college freshman may be in class for 12-15 hours per week, on average, the college student is expected to spend an additional 12-15 hours per week on self-study to set themselves up for success.

Students were also excited about starting lifelong friendships, the independence they would have, being in a new environment, and let's not forget Homecoming!

Students were most nervous about completing coursework and time management understanding that no one was going to follow-up with them to make sure that assignment are completed. That is the other side of the independence students are seeking. They were also concerned about finding the most effective transportation to get to class. Still, some students weren't nervous at all because they feel prepared.

FGCB wishes all our students success in their college journey and we will stay in touch with you to encourage and support you throughout the process.

Thank you to Bistrat Mulugeta, Gracie Guerrero-Osorio, Cinthia Gutierrez, Kethya Kalaki, Jaden Snype, and Demetrius Green Jr. for sharing your thoughts!

Sharing Knowledge of College Access and Affordability

FGCB CEO, Joe Fisher, is committed to the mission of helping low-income and first generation college bound students to achieve social and economic success by obtaining a college degree. As part of that mission, FGCB has begun partnering with other programs in Maryland, working with a similar student population. These partnerships will allow other organizations to benefit from FGCB's more 30 years of experience with the college bound and college retention process.

One of those partners is It Takes a Village to Help Our Children, Inc., a nonprofit organization located in Crisfield, Maryland. Their mission is to engage the village to help build a better future for our children by providing activities designed to promote their spiritual, social, and educational well-being so that they can reach their fullest potential.

Through this partnership, FGCB provided training for It Takes a Village staff. Darlene Taylor, the organization's Executive Director, believes this training has helped the staff to "create a college going culture" among students. "We are helping students to overcome the barriers to college."



Distance Learning vs. In-Person Schooling

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, students participated in remote schooling from March of 2020 through August 2021 and again from December 2021 through January 2022.

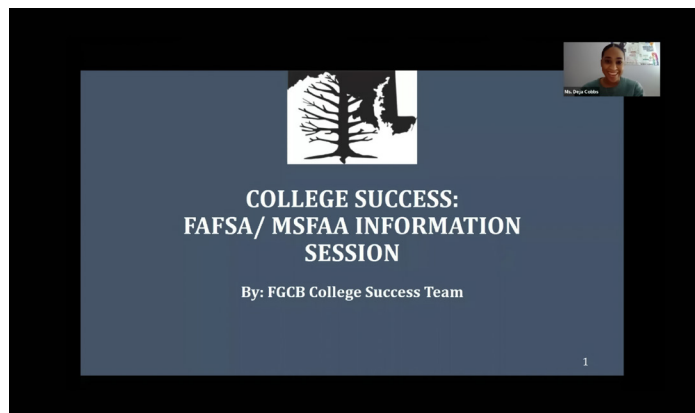
Even though both students and school personnel seem to prefer in-person learning, concerns about first the Delta variant and then the Omicron variant left school administrators with little choice but to suspend in-person learning during these times.

"Not being able to physically see [students] for more than a year was not good at all. They need much more support, which I was unable to provide as a result of distance learning," said Mrs. Carswell, a Prince George's County Public Schools staff member.

It was clear to FGCB coaches, who work directly with students that they needed more social and emotional support during remote learning. Adolescence is a time when students need the interaction with their peers to promote positive social growth.

"My advice," said Mrs. Carswell, is to keep moving forward and seek out support that can help remedy the academic and social/emotional deficits that may have occurred as a result of the pandemic."

FGCB coaches continue to partner with school personnel to provide the necessary support students.



Legislative Impact

Over the past year, First Generation College Bound has been pleased to see some changes that positively impact college affordability for low- and moderate-income students in Maryland.

Through our work with Maryland Advocates for College Affordability and Equity, FGCB, along with other member organizations engaged in college access and retention efforts, advocates for changes at the state level. The goal of the alliance is to continually address college affordability and remove barriers to accessing higher education.

Due to efforts of FGCB alum, Delegate Alonzo Washington, and the support of Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity, two bills were passed providing historic line-item funding.

The first is House Bill 98, Higher Education Outreach and College Access, which provides FY 22 funding for college-bound students affected by poverty to attend and complete college.

The second, HB 1245, MSDE Next Generation Scholars (NGS), provides college-bound services and financial aid to attend college in Maryland to students affected by poverty and who qualify for the Guaranteed Access Grant, a Maryland state college financial aid program. The Next Generation Scholars funding was due to expire in FY23. Due to the leadership of Delegate Washington and the support of the alliance, it has been approved as a line-item in the FY23 Maryland State budget. This approval will affect 14 NGS programs statewide.

FGCB requested to participate in Senate Work Session concerning Senate Bill 664, FAFSA Awareness. After the work session FGCB staff members, Deja Cobbs and Steve Whetstone met with Senator Ellis and his staff to discuss the importance of financial aid awareness for the low-income families served by FGCB. SB 664 passed and should positively impact outreach to high school students to complete the FAFSA (federal financial aid) and MSFAA (Maryland state financial aid) applications.



Where are They Now?

Following the success of FGCB's first Where are They Now event in 2020, a second event was held in late 2021 to catch up with some of our alumni and find out what they are doing now. Our speakers included Dr. Yolanda Lenzy, Dr. Dontra Scott, Mr. Reggie Black, and Mrs. Barbara Fletcher, each of whom brought their own brand of inspiration.

A common theme was how each of the alums had to find the courage within themselves to succeed after being discouraged from pursuing their dream by a college advisor.



Yolanda Lenzy, MD, MPH

- > Enrolled with FGCB in 1994
- > Laurel High School graduate, 1995
- > Bachelor's degree, American University in 1999
- > Doctor of Medicine degree, Univ. of Maryland, Baltimore
- > Occupation: Board-certified dermatologist, Chicopee, Massachusetts

Dr. Lenzy's interest in beauty and science dates back to her days at Laurel High School, where she co-enrolled in the cosmetology program and the University High School program. It was in the university program that she learned that she could combine her interests through the study of dermatology, a medical specialty focused on hair, skin, and nails.

During college, Yolanda discovered that she had an issue with test taking, which had not been previously diagnosed. Yolanda was discouraged from pursuing medical school due to her Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) scores, but she didn't give up. Yolanda encouraged FGCB students to "have a bigger vision [for yourself] than other people have for you" and to consider circuitous routes to get to your goal. Yolanda was admitted to seven medical schools and chose the University of Maryland, where she received a scholarship.

During medical school, she was discouraged from pursuing dermatology because it's a highly competitive specialty. She decided to get additional credentials including pursuing a Master of Public Health at Harvard University. It was while in Boston that she met the woman who would become her mentor and invited Yolanda to do a year of research in her lab. At the end of that year Yolanda was recommended to represent the lab at the Society for Investigative Dermatology.

"You don't always have every box checked—the highest scores, the highest grades—but you have to have that tenacity, that initiative, and that 'go get it-ness' to go after your dreams," said Dr. Lenzy.

Where are They Now?



Dontra Scott, DDS

- > Enrolled in FGCB in 2001
- > Bachelor of Science, University of Maryland, 2006
- > Doctor of Dental Surgery from Howard University, 2010
- > Certificate in Endodontics from NYU, 2014
- > Occupation: Owner/Partner at Heights Endodontics, Houston, Texas

Dontra first met Mr. Fisher as his teacher in middle school. While Dontra had never thought of college, Mr. Fisher encouraged him to research colleges, where he could play basketball. When the time came, FGCB helped Dontra with his college applications, financial aid, and taking the SATs.

He thanked Mr. Fisher and FGCB for recommending that he go to school in the state of Maryland, where the Guaranteed Access Grant and other financial aid covered his tuition, room, and board, preventing him from accumulating college debt for his bachelor's degree.

Dr. Scott admitted that college was much more difficult than high school. He got C-grades for the first time in his life and was discouraged from pursuing dentistry. Because his passion is helping people and improving their quality of life, he knew that he had to buckle down.

"You've got to have a goal and be willing to fail at that goal but learn from your failure and keep going from there," Dr. Scott said. From that point on, he got all A-grades except for one B-grade.

Mr. Fisher called Dontra regularly to find out how he was doing, and Dontra is still grateful for that ear and encouragement.

Dr. Scott concluded, "There are going to be obstacles. There are going to be challenges. You may even have some doubts. Why is First Generation trying to help me? What are they getting out of it? Mr. Fisher loves helping people and everyone in his organization loves helping people. If it wasn't for them, I would not be in the situation that I'm in now." Today, he is a board-certified endodontist.



Where are They Now?



Reginald Black

- > Enrolled in FGCB's homework club at age 6
- > Laurel High School graduate, 2002
- > Bachelor's Degree, University of MD Eastern Shore, 2006
- > Master's Degree, University of MD Eastern Shore
- > Occupation: Workforce Development Specialist, District of Columbia Government

"There is not enough time to talk about what First Generation College Bound means to me," Reggie began. Mr. Fisher often invited Reggie to attend financial aid workshops when he was in high school. At first the workshops didn't make sense, but eventually he began to understand. However, it was a visit to the university of Maryland one summer, where he was able to spend two weeks on campus, living in a college dorm, taking a college course, and eating in the dining hall that solidified his desire to attend college.

At college, he wanted to pursue marine science, but mediocre high school grades caused his advisor to tell him, "With grades like this, you should go home. Close my door." Reggie set out to prove the advisor wrong. He became the first sophomore to complete the program in 25 years and got straight A's. Reggie went on to work with two world renowned marine scientists and is twice published during his work with the scientists.

Mr. Black said that he embodied Mr. Fisher during a brief stint at a public charter school where he worked as a Career/College Navigator. The school was averaging two people per year going to college and in two-and-a-half years, Mr. Black sent 35 students off to college. He has seen some of those students go on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees and published three books.

"I still embody Mr. Fisher's spirit every day when I tell people that they can do whatever they set their minds to. And, they just have to understand and put things in place, for when those weaknesses rise up," advised Mr. Black. "How you overcome that is making sure that you have a support network around you, Mr. Black concluded.



Where are They Now?



Mrs. Barbara Fletcher

- > Mrs. Fletcher's grandson Markel Gary enrolled in FGCB's Way2GoMaryland program in 8th grade.
- > Parkdale High School graduate, 2019
- > Junior, Bowie State University (class of 2023)

When it came to academics, Markel always had a GPA of a 3.0 or above. However, he did have some attitude challenges with teachers. When Markel was entering his senior year of high school, he believed he would sign with and play football at a university on an athletic scholarship.

He did receive an offer but was advised by FGCB that the scholarship was not sufficient for him to attend the college without significant student loan debt. Mrs. Fletcher encouraged Markel to take the advice of his FGCB coaches, though his decision nearly came too late. It was the end of the school year, but with advocacy from FGCB, Markel was admitted to Bowie State University in just 24 hours. That same weekend he tried out for the football team and made it.

He received the full Pell grant and Guaranteed Access grant which covered his tuition and fees as well as room and board. He is now a junior at Bowie State and will graduate in 2023.

"Being advised by FGCB has been a blessing for Markel," said Mrs. Fletcher. He focuses on school and has a winning attitude, she concluded.



FGCB Staff Updates



Deja Cobbs

Director of Program Services

Deja Cobbs, a six-year veteran of the FGCB team has been named Director of Program Services.

Deja began her work at FGCB as the Way2GoMaryland case manager. Within a year, she became a college access coach and two years ago, she was promoted to Program Coordinator, overseeing the training of the college coaches. In her new role, Deja will oversee FGCB's College Success and Homework Club programs including supervising the staff, strategic planning, program management, and program evaluation.

Deja enjoys being a part of the students' journey; watching them learn and grow. She has seen her students not only graduate from high school but has seen her first class of FGCB students that she coached graduate from college as well.

Deja's vision is to bring greater awareness about FGCB programs and their success to the community, partners, and sponsors, so that the programs can grow and expand to assist more students and build greater partnerships. **"It's important for people to understand the social and emotional piece of what we do. Many people understand the educational component but may not understand the emotional piece that's required to keep students in school and keep them motivated."**

Deja would also like to create mentorship relationships between FGCB alums and those currently in college and between FGCB college students and high school students.

The entire FGCB team wishes Deja great success in her new role.



FGCB Staff Updates



Josue Melgar

College Access Coach

Josue Melgar joined First Generation College Bound to pay it forward because of the impact two high school teachers had on his life. Josue attended High Point High School where he learned the value of education. Two teachers at High Point altered the course of his education by challenging Josue every day.

Josue continued his education at Prince George's Community College earning an associate degree in psychology and later earning his bachelor's degree in Family Science at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Before joining FGCB, Josue worked with CASA de Maryland, where he supported high school students in the Mi Espacio afterschool program.

Josue hopes to see more students become the first in their families to get a college degree as he was the first in his family to do so. He hopes to encourage youth to pursue higher education and to leave an impact on them as his high school teachers did with him.



Amani Medlock

College Access Coach

Amani Medlock is a proud graduate of Baltimore City College High School and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. During her college journey, she discovered her passions, gained indispensable insight into college matriculation and retention, and gained skills that are valuable to her work with FGCB.

Prior to joining FGCB as a college access coach, she served as a mentor to Baltimore City high school students, guiding them through career exploration and providing college and job readiness skills through weekly professional development sessions. It was during her time as a mentor that she discovered the lack of education for students about the college bound process.

While Amani is trained and was working as a Behavioral Therapist, her passions led her to First Generation College Bound.

When Amani is not working with students, she is pursuing her interests in dance, trying new foods, and running.

FGCB Summer Intern



Samuel Nwuha

Summer Intern

During summer 2021, FGCB was delighted to welcome Catholic University of America student, Samuel Nwuha, to the FGCB team as our summer intern. As a first-generation college attendee himself, Samuel was drawn to FGCB because our mission reflected his desire to give back to the community.

Over the course of the summer, Samuel did just that! After his freshman year, it was clear to him that there are so many pieces that shape the college experience that no one really talks about. "Yeah, you can get into college and get accepted, but how are you going to afford it?"

During his time with FGCB, Samuel supported FGCB's matriculation efforts to ensure that students complete all necessary paperwork and submit fees to begin college in the fall without delay. He also supported FGCB's college retention efforts by helping our college students to grapple with financial aid challenges and other dilemmas that sometimes get in the way of college success.

Our Impact on Education



STUDENTS WHO HAVE ENTERED COLLEGE: **2,639**

COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENT: ASSOCIATE'S: 154, BACHELOR'S: 653, MASTER'S: 141, DOCTORATE/PROFESSIONAL: 16 TOTAL: **964**

CURRENTLY IN COLLEGE: **1,549**

STUDENTS FROM THE CLASS OF 2021 WHO MATRICULATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION: **162**

FINANCIAL AID AWARDED TO THE CLASS OF 2021: **\$2.7 MILLION**

STUDENTS WE ARE SERVING IN GRADES 1-12 DURING THE 2021-2022 ACADEMIC YEAR: **294**

Am I Perfect?

For students: repeat this positive affirmation; it may help you when you are facing challenges.

I was born into this world perfect, having a heart, soul, and mind; my spirit makes me special.

There will always be only one me, which can never be replaced.

I awaken each day perfectly seeing the light (not darkness) for another opportunity to learn and grow in my heart, soul, mind, and spirit.

I work in my purpose, helping others and practicing self-care during my life's journey.

Perfection can give me joy for the moment; striving with my whole spirit to get better will give me joy for a lifetime.

Along my life's journey, there will always be mountains to climb. I will celebrate the moments at the top.

I will also prepare once again to be challenged in the valley; keeping the light turned on to learn from these challenges.

Through these lessons, I will grow in heart, soul, and mind. I will get stronger energizing my spirit.

Once again, I will celebrate at the mountain top with great joy as my spirit has grown and I continue working in my life's purpose

For more inspiration, listen to Whitney Houston's song, "The Greatest Love of All"
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYzIVDIE72w

Am I perfect? I am learning to be the perfect me; there is only one me! Not to be arrogant. I recognize my value.

Only I get to decide!

Joseph Fisher

CEO & Founder

First Generation College Bound



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