

\$1

ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter



TYUS JONES

The Timberwolves rookie and MN native talks life as a teenager in the NBA, Flip Saunders and more. ■ Page 10

ALSO INSIDE

The state of transgender rights ■ Page 19

Marijuana use in high school ■ Page 23

More on school climate ■ Pages 22–27

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Students, teachers and officials weigh in on the problem's complex roots and debate how to keep schools safe. ■ Page 20



ILLUSTRATION BY MINA YUAN

REAL STUDENTS. REAL STORIES.

ThreeSixty

JOURNALISM

Volume 6 • Issue 3

Contributors in this issue: Aaron Young, St. Paul Johnson HS • Aidan Berg, Minneapolis Southwest HS • Alejandro Hernandez, Minneapolis Roosevelt HS • Annrose Jerry, Blaine HS • Bayan Algazi, St. Paul Harding HS • Daniela Garcia, Edina HS • Danielle Wong, Eastview HS • Erianna Jiles, Como Park Senior HS • Jennifer Delgado, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School • Kristy Ornelas, Coon Rapids HS • Louisa Akoto, Coon Rapids HS • Marissa Abara, Wayzata HS • Melisa Robles-Olivar, Minneapolis Southwest HS • Mina Yuan, Wayzata HS • Sebastian Alfonzo, St. Paul Central HS • Selam Berhea, Blaine HS • Shay Radhakrishnan, Math and Science Academy • Skyler Kuczaboski, St. Paul Harding Senior HS • Talia Bradley, Minneapolis South HS • Va Yang, St. Paul Johnson Senior HS • Zekiah Chaudhry, Minneapolis South HS

Special-use photos: University of St. Thomas • Minneapolis Roosevelt and Minneapolis Roosevelt High School Theater • Courtney Perry • David Sherman/Getty Images • Cristeta Boarini • St. Paul Harding High School

ThreeSixty Journalism

Mail 5057, 2115 Summit Ave.

St. Paul, MN 55105

www.threesixtyjournalism.org

<https://www.facebook.com/threesixtyjournalism>

<https://twitter.com/threesixtymn>



Bao Vang,
Engagement Coordinator



Chad Caruthers,
Executive Director



Miles Trump,
Program Manager

Board of Advisors: Brian Belmont, Belmont Partners; Mike Burbach, St. Paul Pioneer Press; David Cazares, Journalist; Duchesne Drew, Bush Foundation; Chris Havens, Best Buy; Doug Hennes, University of St. Thomas; Dale Kurschner, Twin Cities Business Magazine; Scott Libin, University of Minnesota; Dennis McGrath, Himle Rapp & Co.; Lida Poletz, Weber Shandwick; Sara Pelissero, KARE 11; Toni Randolph, MPR; Colleen Stoxen, Star Tribune; Amanda Theisen, KSTP; Wendy Wyatt, University of St. Thomas

Ex officio member: Dr. Terence Langan, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of St. Thomas

Copyright 2016 All Rights Reserved

ThreeSixty Magazine will be published three times during the 2015-16 school year.

ThreeSixty Magazine design and layout by Diana Boger.

Email threesixty@stthomas.edu with comments, letters and questions about participating in ThreeSixty.

ThreeSixty Journalism is a nonprofit program of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. Donations from individuals like you provide a significant amount of ThreeSixty's operating budget. To contribute, please visit <http://threesixtyjournalism.org/donate>.



STAFF PHOTO

Students from St. Paul Harding High School, volunteers and staff participating in ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp pose for a photo in April at Harding. Students in College Essay Boot Camp, a pilot program that took place at Harding and Minneapolis Roosevelt high schools this spring, completed a college essay during a five-day period over their spring break.

To read more about ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp, go to page 4. To read students' essays, flip to page 15.

CONTENTS MAY



Alumni Spotlight Sara Pelissero went from budding high school journalist in the Urban Journalism Workshop (the former name for ThreeSixty Journalism) to multimedia producer at KARE 11. ■ 5

Social media with a purpose Students share social media wisdom with peers at ThreeSixty Journalism's first-ever Youth Social Media Summit. ■ 6

'A crash course in solitude' A ThreeSixty student details life on her own after her single parent was seriously injured in a car accident. ■ 7

Swimming forward A ThreeSixty student writes about the life lessons he received through a setback—one of several—in swimming. ■ 8

Tackling the achievement gap Generation Next, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit led by the previous mayor of Minneapolis, is working each day to close the education achievement gap. ■ 9

ThreeSixty Focus on... Tyus Jones

The Minnesota Timberwolves rookie—and one of Minnesota's all-time great high school basketball players—talks to two ThreeSixty journalists about his rookie season and more. ■ 10

The gap year Thinking about taking a year off before college? A gap year can be beneficial, experts say, but it's not for everyone. ■ 12

You're accepted A ThreeSixty student receives a welcome surprise when she finds out she's accepted to an out-of-state university. ■ 13

Football and concussions Measures have been taken to make the sport safer and manage concussions better, but some medical professionals have called for an end to the sport in schools. ■ 14

Powerful college essays During their spring breaks, students from Minneapolis Roosevelt and St. Paul Harding high schools completed ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp, a pilot program that helped students write college essays in five days. ■ Read several of their essays on page 15.

School climate From transgender rights to school violence, from marijuana to racial divides, from school plays to college aspirations, ThreeSixty students report and write a series of stories that help shed light on the complex issue of school climate. ■ 19

About the ThreeSixty Scholar Award

Each year, high school seniors who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholar award—a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study communication and journalism at the University of St. Thomas. Currently, there are four ThreeSixty scholars attending St. Thomas.



Amira Warren-Yearby, 2015 Scholar
Warren-Yearby, a freshman, has been active on campus in Swing Club and Black Empowerment Student Alliance, in which she was voted onto the executive board as the Marketing and Public Relations Chair this spring. She also has focused on teaching and mentoring students, and began teaching dance to

students at St. Paul Humboldt through Twin Cities Mobile Jazz. This summer, she will take a filmmaking class at St. Thomas and will teach social studies at Breakthrough Twin Cities.



Deborah Honore, 2014 Scholar
Honore, a sophomore, returned this semester from a January trip to Ethiopia, where she filmed a documentary on the relationship between Ethiopian churches and poverty in the country as part of a college project. While she edits the documentary this semester, Honore is working for the University of St. Thomas

videographer and focusing on school. Next year, she hopes to study journalism and new media as part of a study abroad program in Morocco, as well as travel in January to South Africa.



Simeon Lancaster, 2013 Scholar
Lancaster, a junior, returned in December from Morocco, where he spent four months studying journalism and freelancing with Round Earth Media. This spring, he's worked as a student executive and assignment editor—one of the top designations—at TommieMedia.com, the University of

St. Thomas' student-run news organization. He's also making plans for more international travel.



Grace Pastoor, 2012 Scholar
Pastoor, a graduating senior, has spent the spring semester running TommieMedia.com as its director. She also has served as an assistant adviser to high school students on The Rubicon, the St. Paul Academy and Summit School newspaper. Pastoor, who had a reporting internship

at the Duluth News Tribune last summer, was recently hired as a full-time crime and courts reporter at the Bemidji Pioneer. She starts at the end of May.

ThreeSixty welcomes four new board members

SINCE DECEMBER 2015, ThreeSixty Journalism has welcomed four new members to the ThreeSixty Board of Advisors: Amanda Theisen, a senior producer at KSTP-TV; Toni Randolph, editor for new audiences and weekend editor at Minnesota Public Radio News; Colleen Stoxen, deputy managing editor at the Star Tribune; and Chris Havens, manager, communications at Best Buy.

“Toni, Amanda, Chris and Colleen strengthen an already impressive leadership group,” said ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers.

Chris Havens

Havens joined the Best Buy Communications team in June 2014 after spending more than a decade in newsrooms, including the Star Tribune in Minneapolis. He has leveraged his journalism expertise to significantly improve Best Buy's employee communications vehicles, creating more timely and in-depth stories and helping to launch a new external blog targeted at consumers. His job, as a manager in Communications, is a mix of coaching, planning, editing and writing, in addition to keeping an eye on what's happening in the communications field.

A graduate of the University of St. Thomas journalism program, Havens has nearly 15 years in journalism, with roles at newspapers in Minnesota and South Carolina. Twelve of those years were spent at the Star Tribune, where he was an editor of the online home page, a reporter covering St. Paul and Ramsey County government, and a copy editor/layout editor for news and sports. Before that, he was a night general assignment reporter in Duluth, Minnesota.

“I'm thrilled to be working with ThreeSixty Journalism and the enthusiastic students who participate,” Havens said. “Curiosity, critical thinking and communication skills are the foundation for success in any endeavor, and ThreeSixty provides the perfect opportunity to develop those areas.”

Colleen Stoxen

Stoxen joined the Star Tribune as a copy editor in 1987, when the Twins landed in



Chris Havens



Colleen Stoxen



Toni Randolph



Amanda Theisen

the World Series. She has worked as the newsroom's Front Page Editor, Nation/World Editor, Deputy Metro Editor and NewsBreak video host. She is responsible for news operations, including personnel, hiring and recruitment, and coordinates companywide with Human Resources, Finance and News Production.

Before working at the Star Tribune, Stoxen was a copy and layout editor at the South Bend Tribune, Modesto Bee and a reporter at the Grand Forks Herald. She has a journalism degree from the University of North Dakota and grew up in Bismarck.

“I'm delighted to have the opportunity for an up-close role with ThreeSixty,” Stoxen said. “In connecting with the program via the Star Tribune, I've seen how dedicated the staff is to mentoring a new generation of journalists, which we truly need. The kids are so sharp and a great burst of energy, and helping aim them toward a bright future in news is an honor.”

Toni Randolph

Randolph is a longtime supporter of ThreeSixty and its programming, and was the 2014 recipient of the ThreeSixty Widening the Circle Award—given annually to honor an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to the next generation of journalists, particularly while promoting inclusion and diversity.

“I'm excited about serving on the ThreeSixty board,” Randolph said. “It's another way that I can help students who have an interest in journalism. The young people who are involved with ThreeSixty are smart, talented and enthusiastic about their work. They have a strong desire to learn, and it will be my honor to continue to work with them in their classrooms and workshops and, now, in

my role on the board.”

Randolph, an award-winning journalist, has been with Minnesota Public Radio since 2003. Prior to her current assignment, she was a reporter covering a variety of subjects, including homelessness and immigration. Before moving to Minnesota, Randolph worked at WBUR-FM in Boston for more than seven years. She covered Massachusetts politics, airport security and the clergy sex abuse scandal. Randolph began her public broadcasting career as news director at one of her hometown public radio stations in Buffalo, N.Y., shortly after earning her M.S. from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

Amanda Theisen

Theisen has been at KSTP-TV since 2006, producing a variety of morning and evening newscasts. She is also involved in many of the station's special projects. She produces “At Issue with Tom Hauser,” KSTP-TV's weekly political show, 30-minute in-depth health specials and stories for the station's “You Solve” series that partners with Crime Stoppers of Minnesota. Prior to working at KSTP, Theisen was a reporter/photographer/editor at WSAW-TV in Wausau, Wis.

“I'm really excited to be part of the board for this great organization,” said Theisen, a longtime supporter. “I'm so impressed with the students who are part of ThreeSixty and their level of commitment to the program. Besides training future journalists and communications professionals, ThreeSixty is giving the students the skills necessary to become critical thinkers and to make meaningful, thoughtful contributions to their

BOARD continued on page 13

College Essay Boot Camps: Powerful stories, powerful results

A refugee's story about realizing the value and importance of education in America.

A son's story about the grit and determination he drew from his mother's persistence to immigrate to the United States.

A student's story about learning to keep a cool head despite the negative stereotypes aimed at her Islamic customs.

In ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp, more than 30 juniors from Minneapolis Roosevelt and St. Paul Harding high schools wrote these kinds of powerful, compelling personal narrative stories that they can now use in the competitive college and scholarship application process.

The pilot program, which ran from March 28 to April 1 at Minneapolis Roosevelt and from April 4 to April 8 at St. Paul Harding, is part of ThreeSixty's effort to enhance students' college readiness, access and success by helping every student write an adaptable, polished essay to use for college and scholarship applications. The five-day workshop was comprised of mainly College Possible and/or AVID students from both schools, and took place during both schools' spring breaks.

"It was as impactful of two weeks as I've seen," said ThreeSixty Executive Director Chad Caruthers. "To hear our students' stories, to work one-on-one with them on writing clear, concise essays, and to see the joy and accomplishment on their faces when after just one, albeit an intensive one-week, they have a polished college essay — that will be hard to top."

During the program, students worked with "writing coaches"—professional writers who each volunteered more than 10 hours of their time during the week—on writing their essays. Students also were taught a personal narrative writing curriculum, which included writing principles such as central idea, powerful introductions, outlining, strong verbs and tone, sensory details, specifics and dialogue, and editing. On the final day of camp, students traveled to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, where they had an opportunity to read their finished essays out loud during a final celebration and learn more about St. Thomas.

College Essay Boot Camp was modeled after an eight-week personal narrative writing program that ThreeSixty piloted over the 2014-15



Students at Minneapolis Roosevelt High School work with volunteer professionals during ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp in March at Roosevelt.

STAFF PHOTO

school year at St. Paul Harding and Johnson high schools.

A special thanks to volunteer writing coaches Bob Franklin, Nicole Garrison, Beena

Raghavendran, Chris Snowbeck, Beatrice Dupuy, Maggie LaMaack, Nancy Crotti, Jordan Osterman, Laurie Stern and Natalie Daher, as well as guest speaker Teron Buford.

Brandi Powell to host Great MN Get-Together

Award-winning KSTP-TV Anchor/Reporter Brandi Powell will host ThreeSixty's annual fundraiser on Friday, Oct. 28, 2016 in Woulfse Alumni Hall on the University of St. Thomas St. Paul campus. The event is a great opportunity to mix and mingle with media and other professionals while enjoying a reception, short program and live auction. Last year's Great Minnesota Media Get-Together attracted nearly 200 attendees, with more than \$55,000 raised for ThreeSixty.

Originally from Minnesota, Powell joined 5 Eyewitness news in January 2014. During her 11 years as a journalist, she's worked in newsrooms across the country, including in San Diego, CA; Austin, TX; and Bismarck, ND. She earned a North



Brandi Powell

Dakota Associated Press Award for best Series/Documentary in 2007. On assignment in Guatemala, she covered political, educational and cultural exchanges between North Dakota teachers and Guatemalans via The God's Child Project. She also earned a North Dakota Associated Press Award for excellence in Political Reporting in 2006.

"We're so excited to have Brandi as host for the 2016 Get-Together," said ThreeSixty Engagement Coordinator Bao Vang. "She has an incredible breadth of experiences and is a great role model for ThreeSixty students."

Powell is a member of National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and serves on the Board of Directors for Twin Cities Black Journalists (TCBJ). She earned her Master of Arts degree in Anthropology from George Washington University and

her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

ThreeSixty Journalists earn 7 MNA awards

Six graduates of ThreeSixty Journalism—including four who now attend the University of St. Thomas—and one current high school student received 2014-15 College Better Newspaper Contest awards for their work with ThreeSixty during the Minnesota Newspaper Association Banquet on Jan. 28 in Bloomington.

The seven MNA awards matches ThreeSixty's total for the 2013-14 college contest and includes two first-place prizes, four runner-up awards and one third-place finish.

Madie Ley, a sophomore at St. Thomas, won first place in Arts and Entertainment Story with "Rocked and rolled: Intensity, identity keep Minnesota RollerGirls going strong." Lujain Al-Khawi, a freshman at The

George Washington University, took first place in Columnist with her essay, "Being Muslim doesn't have to mean less authenticity as an American teen."

Danielle Wong, a senior at Eastview High School, finished runner-up in Business Story with "Keystone Youth Services: A first job that's more than taking orders." Maya Shelton-Davies, a freshman at St. Thomas, took second place in Social Issues Story with "Al-Shabab's actions hit home in Minnesota: Locals speak out against Somalia-based Islamist militant group's attack in Kenya." Kayla Song, a freshman at the University of Minnesota, also earned second-place honors in Arts and Entertainment Story for "Penumbra Theatre: Making an artistic statement with style." Amira Warren-Yearby, a freshman at St. Thomas and the 2015 ThreeSixty Scholar, finished second in Columnist with "Crowning Achievement: Leading

by example means embracing your true identity."

Simone Cazares, a freshman at the University of St. Thomas, finished third in Social Issues Story with "Young people take a stand with Black Lives Matter."

Youth SMS a success

By Johanna Holub
ThreeSixty Journalism's first-ever Youth Social Media Summit, supported by Youthprise and in partnership with College Possible at Harding High School, took place on Saturday, Feb. 27, 2016.

About 30 students from Harding joined 20 ThreeSixty students at the University of St. Thomas to learn more from their peers about social media and how to use it wisely and effectively for personal and professional purposes in our digital-focused world.

The day kicked off with a lunch, in which Ryan Blake of University

Continued on next page

From previous page

of St. Thomas Office of Admissions spoke to students about St. Thomas and social media, and was followed by a talk with Puke Rainbows Creative owner Erica Hanna. Hanna shared how her background shaped who she is and what she does, overcoming the odds as she grew up in poverty to winning Emmy awards during her successful career in video. Today, she owns her own business, creating successful social media campaigns that make a difference in others' lives.

Hanna also wowed the crowd by bringing out her Emmy award—inspiring oohs and ahhs from the crowd—and taking a group “selfie” at the end of her speech.

Then, students broke into three groups to learn more about several aspects of social media, both for personal and professional use.

A breakout session called “Social Media Activism vs. ‘Slacktivism’” was presented by ThreeSixty Social Media Leaders Daniela Garcia and Melisa Robles-Olivar, assisted by Social Media Pros Emma Strub of Belmont Partners and Jim Hammerand from the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal.

Another breakout session was presented by Social Media Leaders Alejandro Hernandez-Tadeo and Kristy Ornelas on “Building a Brand and Connecting.” Social Media Pros Chad Caruthers, executive director of ThreeSixty Journalism, and Erin Lillienrantz of Belmont Partners assisted with the session.

ThreeSixty Social Media Leaders Nesani Sabal, Louisa Akoto, Bayan Algazi and Jennifer Delgado led a third breakout session called “Social Media Responsibility: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at a Social Media Campaign.” Social Media Pros David Jungers of Sprinklr and Erica Dao of Weber Shandwick lent a hand during the session.

To read student coverage and see photos of the Youth Social Media Summit, go to page 6.

Thanks to all who attended and participated, with special thanks to featured speaker Erica Hanna of Puke Rainbows Creative, and to Youthprise and College Possible. ThreeSixty is also grateful for our social media professionals from Belmont Partners, Sprinklr, Minneapolis/St Paul Business Journal, and Weber Shandwick, all of whom volunteered their expertise and time over many months to help make this day happen.

Johanna Holub is a public relations professional with Belmont Partners.

NOTEWORTHY

ThreeSixty Alumni Spotlight: Sara Pelissero

From budding journalist to multimedia producer at KARE 11



By Zekriah Chaudhry
Minneapolis South
High School

ONE DAY HER TOPIC could be politics. The next it could be National Donut Day.

For journalist Sara Pelissero, you just never know. Pelissero juggles all sorts of stories as a multimedia producer for KARE 11, writing for the station's broadcasts and website and posting the latest news on social media.

It's a busy lifestyle Pelissero could have only imagined during her junior year of high school at Mounds View when she started her journalism career with the Urban Journalism Workshop, the precursor to ThreeSixty Journalism before it was rebranded in the early 2000s.

Already successful with her high school newspaper, Pelissero had considered but not settled on journalism in her future. However, in what she called her “journalism awakening” with ThreeSixty, Pelissero began to see a future career and her potential.

“I remember going to different newsroom tours back then and just thinking, ‘Wow this is really cool,’” Pelissero said. “It seemed like a dream job.”

Pelissero majored in journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, interning at newspapers along the way. After she graduated in 2007, she worked as a reporter for the Green Bay Press-Gazette, but eventually



Sara Pelissero, a multimedia producer at KARE 11, was once a budding journalist in the Urban Journalism Workshop, the former name for ThreeSixty Journalism. Now, she's writing for the station's broadcasts and website, and posting the latest news on social media. She also serves on the ThreeSixty Board of Advisors.

began to wonder about other kinds of storytelling. When a friend told her about a website producer position at WCCO, she was initially unsure if it would suit her. But she took a chance and started in 2009.

“It was the first time that I ever thought about TV,” Pelissero said. “But it also was kind of this state and this time in journalism where writing for a newspaper and writing for a TV website is very similar and there aren't a ton of differences.”

With a penchant for the innovative side of the field, Pelissero later left her job with WCCO to take on her current multimedia position with KARE. She also serves on ThreeSixty Journalism's Board of Advisors and recently has been involved with ThreeSixty's

new alumni initiative, AlumniConnect.

In a world where crazy hours are called another day's work, the hard-working attitude Pelissero developed from striving to get a job is the same attitude she brings to her job today.

“Being in this news grind,” Pelissero said, “it is that feeling of never ending. There's always news, and there's never holidays. There's no such thing as weekends really. It doesn't stop. Sometimes when you're trying to balance a family life with that, it can be challenging.”

Her husband, Tom, also is a journalist. He covers the NFL for USA Today.

With such constraining aspects of the job, it might be difficult at first to understand why Pelissero is so in love with her job. But she loves **ALUMNI** continued on page 13



Sign up for ThreeSixty AlumniConnect!

ThreeSixty is happy to introduce ThreeSixty AlumniConnect, an alumni-led digital and face-to-face networking group that supports former ThreeSixty students in college and beyond, and facilitates and encourages direct alumni participation in ThreeSixty programming, events and activities.

More details will be rolled out soon. To stay up to date, please take a moment to sign up online at <http://threesixtyjournalism.org/AlumniConnect> and submit your current information, so we can keep in touch and share your successes to help ensure that other high school students can benefit from ThreeSixty's programming for years to come.

It's social, but about business, too

Students share social media wisdom at first-ever Youth Social Media Summit

IT WAS TIME for students to be the teachers for one day when more than 30 high school students listened to their peers share wisdom about social media at a day-long summit in February at the University of St. Thomas.

High school students, about 30 from St. Paul Harding, traveled to the university that morning for the inaugural ThreeSixty Journalism Youth Social Media Summit, a pilot program aimed to empower local teenagers to use social media “wisely, responsibly and effectively to accelerate their future success in a digital world,” according to the summit’s mission statement.

The program, several months in the planning, featured breakout sessions with titles such as “Activism vs. Slacktivism,” and was led by the 11-member ThreeSixty Journalism student social media team and volunteer professionals from the Twin Cities. The summit was supported by Youthprise and was in partnership with College Possible at Harding.

Professionals outside the summit said they appreciated the insight the students had to offer.

“I value the way young people are mindful of new media and value the ways they use it,” said Jamie Millard, 29, co-executive director of Pollen, a community-building website that aims to connect people through storytelling and opportunities. “I don’t think that there’s anything for them



By Skyler Kuczaboski
St. Paul Harding High School

Youth SMS Breakout sessions

Students and volunteer professionals led three breakout sessions during the Youth Social Media Summit:

- Activism vs. “Slacktivism”
- Social media responsibility: A behind-the-scenes look at a social media campaign
- Building a brand and connecting

to learn from older people. They’re digital natives. It’s in your blood. You can teach us how to be creative with new digital media.”

Social Media Leader Nesani Sabal, a 17-year-old senior at DeLaSalle High School, helped lead a breakout session informing students on how to build a brand and connect on social media.

“I’m on social media and I think that it’s a really good platform for a lot of people, especially teenagers,” Sabal said. “I think that putting (social media) to a good use, talking about how to build a campaign, how to build your own brand ... I think that that is stuff that we as teens really need to start looking at.”

As the summit’s featured speaker,



Erica Hanna, owner of Puke Rainbows Creative, takes a selfie with students and others from the stage after speaking to students at ThreeSixty Journalism’s Youth Social Media Summit in February at the University of St. Thomas. Hanna was the featured speaker.



Louisa Akoto (second from left), a senior at Coon Rapids and one of ThreeSixty’s Social Media Leaders, speaks to students during a breakout session about social media campaigns. With the help of volunteer professionals, students taught their peers about social media during the summit.

Erica Hanna, owner of Puke Rainbows, a creative content strategy and video production company—she’s also the reigning two-time Minneapolis Twitter personality of the year—spoke to students about how she used social media to build her career and find her voice.

“Social media is just a great tool to amplify what you love,” said Hanna, who at one point used Twitter to raise \$30,000 for Charity: Water, a nonprofit that provides drinking water to people in developing nations. “If you know how to use it correctly, it can really help you. You’ll

“Talking about how to build a campaign, how to build your own brand ... I think that that is stuff that we as teens really need to start looking at.”

—Nesani Sabal, senior at DeLaSalle High School

get out of social media what you put into it. If you put in a lot of time, you’ll get a lot of benefits.”

At the summit, teens had a chance to interact with social media professionals, to engage their digital voice on social media, to connect for future success and to explore college life at the University of St. Thomas, among other things. The idea stemmed from a program called Protect My Rep, which originated with ThreeSixty several years ago. Leaders of the program went from school to school, *Continued on next page*



A student laughs during a breakout session at the Youth Social Media Summit in February at St. Thomas.

From previous page spreading awareness of the impact, both positive and negative, of information posted on the web.

“Protect My Rep was a traveling thing. We would go to different schools, which takes a lot of time and resources, so our question was, ‘How can we do it in a more efficient way?’” said Chad Caruthers, ThreeSixty’s executive director. “What if we had a social media day where the kids came to us?” The idea here was to just give it a shot with digital professionals and give our students a youth-led social media program, led by other high school students.”

Many professions use social media in some way, which is why social media can help teens make progress in the professional world.

“(Social media) has gotten me every single job I have ever had,” Millard said.

“It makes the difference between getting an OK job and a great job,” Hanna said.

The social media leaders and ThreeSixty staff said they were satisfied with the results of the summit, and hope to host it again in the future.

“It is a great platform to build upon,” Caruthers said.

‘A crash course in solitude’

IN SEPTEMBER 2015, I witnessed a terrible two-vehicle car crash right in front of my high school.

My classmates and I were scattered near the front door, waiting for our rides, when our mostly typical day was suddenly interrupted by police and ambulance sirens and flashing red and blue lights. I turned my head to the scene and noticed the brutal damage to a small gray Hyundai. The metal doors had caved in.

I watched the scene unfold for seven minutes, and after several unsuccessful attempts to reach my father on the phone, I realized that the small gray Hyundai was his.

The chaos I was witnessing that day would spill over into my life. While my father—my single



By Louisa Akoto
Coon Rapids High School

parent—survived the accident, his road to recovery was long, and I was unexpectedly enrolled into a crash course in solitude.

“That woman almost killed me,” my dad said over and over again as I stayed by his bedside over several months. The police report said a female driver ran a red light while my dad was making a left turn. He was left with a broken pelvis and a broken hand, which needed casts. He couldn’t walk. He couldn’t sit. He even had a hard time eating. He stayed in

the hospital for four months.

No one expected our life would turn out this way after leaving Ghana in 2006. My father went to America before I was born. When I was 8, my parents made the decision that my brother and I would move to Minnesota. My mom would stay behind, and she eventually passed away when I was 12. At the time of the car accident, my brother attended college in Mankato, so it was just my dad and I.

Adjusting to this new solitary life was difficult. I began to realize how lonesome it was when I came from school and nobody was in our apartment. All the responsibility fell on my shoulders. Who was going to ask me about whether I was done with my homework? Who was going to tell me to take out the trash? And get up for school?

I had a lot of questions. I wondered how we were going to pay for rent. I wasn’t completely sure how much my father’s insurance would cover his

hospital bills. Will my dad ever walk again? All of it was overwhelming for a 17-year-old student.

I stopped doing homework and put less effort into one of my favorite after-school activities: theater. Some days, I didn’t even get up to go to school. When friends and teachers asked how I was dealing with the situation, I would often fake a smile and reply, “This is preparing me for college next year. I’m going to be living alone some day, anyways.”

“It’s normal for students to feel this way after such an unexpected tragic event,” my counselor told me, trying to provide comfort.

Over time, I figured out life on my own with the help of my social worker, school counselor and teachers. Every week at school, I got pulled into the counselor’s office, where Patton, the social worker, would offer me a \$25 gift card for Cub Foods. My social worker made sure that I would have enough food or have transportation when needed. I felt safe knowing she cared.

Because I didn’t have many resources, I learned to cut out unnecessary luxuries. I also relied heavily on my best friend. After school, we would go out to eat or he would invite me over to his house to eat dinner. When it came to transportation, I often relied on my friends to get me to and from extracurricular activities.

My father is back home now, but still recovering from the injuries. Although he endures plenty of pain, his demeanor remains the same. He is a warrior who continues to fight through his obstacles. He inspires me to look at the future with a big smile and lots of love in my heart.

Many unexpected events have happened in my life, regardless of whether I was prepared for them. These events have led me to live a life filled with gratitude and to spend time with the people I love.

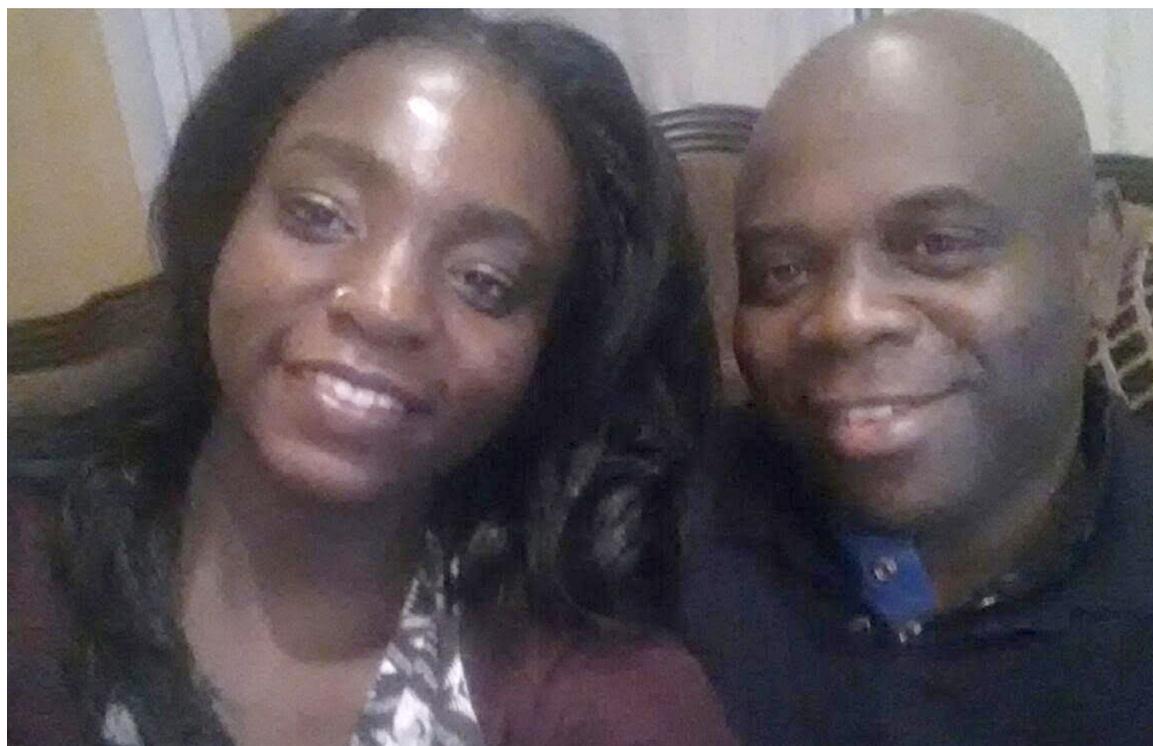


PHOTO SUBMITTED

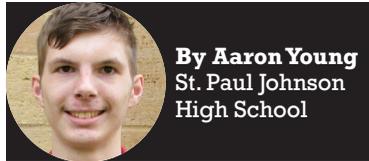
Louisa Akoto, a senior at Coon Rapids, and her father pose for a photo. Akoto had to adjust to living on her own this school year after her father was seriously injured in a car accident.

Going backward to swim forward

IN THE POOL, my shoulders were squealing and screaming in agony. The pain was too much to bear. It felt as though my shoulder blades were being torn apart like a wishbone. Every muscle in my body shouted for me to stop swimming.

I didn't want to surrender to the pain, but I knew I had no other choice. I dragged myself out of the pool during swim practice in the winter of 2014, took the walk of shame toward the bench and sat in sorrow. I held my head in my hands, hiding my ruby red cheeks while my ears steamed with anger.

Sitting on the bench reminded me of my past struggles. During my



By Aaron Young
St. Paul Johnson
High School

freshman year, I was diagnosed with Raynaud's disease—a circulatory issue that causes a cold, uncomfortable sensation in my hands—and due to shock and frustration, I dropped out of swimming. The following year I suffered a sinus infection and appeared sluggish and slow upon return. As the season began junior year, I was sidelined while recovering from a cyst, and I didn't make my debut until midway through the season.

Instead of giving up, I decided to confront my misbehaving shoulders and sought assistance on the matter, as I had done before. I hung up my goggles for the year in swimming, but I knew this wasn't the end. It was only the beginning of the biggest hurdle I had to face in my swimming career.

I took my bent-out shoulders to the doctor for an examination. The doctor asked me to extend and stretch my arms out. I played the role of a puppet, moving at the commands of the doctor's voice. My face grimaced from the pain as I maneuvered my shoulders in the proper directions.

I was diagnosed with swimmer's shoulder, a condition in which inflammation occurs in the rotator cuff. Upon discovering this news, I was devastated that I had to overcome yet another obstacle in my swimming career. I didn't want

to surrender, but at the same time I was frustrated that I wasn't able to competitively swim for the rest of my junior year. Both my rotator cuffs had "In need of repair" signs on them, and the doctors told me I needed to undergo physical therapy to fix them.

Each week at OSI Therapy, I performed a variety of drills, ranging from basic stretches to weightlifting to complex band stretches. I also got to feel the pain of needles being poked into my shoulder muscles during acupuncture. I had no other choice but to confront the pain head on.

When I first started therapy, I would be forced to lift my shoulders up in agony, sometimes with a two-pound weight in hand. As I stretched my arm outward, the anguishing pain would immediately come back, and I was forced to face the fact that the recovery process would be more difficult than I thought. It was

exhausting and frustrating, but I was determined more than ever to get these shoulders back in action.

After months of rehab, my shoulders were finally getting back on track. The next challenge would be relearning how to swim. Although my shoulders were getting significantly better, the core of the issue was yet to be solved. To relearn proper swim techniques, I went to Viverant, a physical therapy clinic, where I worked with a swimming specialist. Unlike at OSI, where I went through the basic exercises, this time I targeted specific muscle groups to improve my freestyle stroke and speed. I also worked with a swim coach at Foss Swim School to master the fundamentals of each stroke.

As I returned to the pool in my senior year, I was ready to put all the knowledge and strength I had gathered on display. I jumped into the pool on the first day of practice and started swimming. This time, though, it was different. I was outperforming many of my teammates and darting through the water like a bullet. My freestyle was at a top-notch level. My coach recognized how far I had come and told me my stroke looked better than ever.

When the first meet came around, I was ready to showcase my talents to my teammates, my coach and my parents. I wanted to show them the progress that had been made. Not only did I swim well, I ended up finishing first in all my races that night.

Through this experience, I learned that sometimes in life, you need to take a few steps backward before you can progress forward. I had to go through physical therapy and relearn how to swim in order to get launched in the right direction. As a result, I have become a more resilient human being and have grown in character, knowing I can accomplish and overcome anything that comes my way in life.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Aaron Young (middle row, fifth from left) and the St. Paul Johnson boys swim team. Young, a senior, had to relearn how to swim after suffering an injury to both shoulders during his junior season.

Closing the gap

Generation Next seeks to erase educational achievement gap

36 percent. 53 percent. 60 percent.

These are the 2014-15 graduation rates for American Indians, blacks and Hispanics, respectively, in Minneapolis and St. Paul, according to recent data.

77 percent. 70 percent.

These are the graduation rates for the Twin Cities' Asian and white students, respectively, in the same time period.

Those sobering statistics attest to one of the many harsh realities of the achievement gap, a major concern among educators and leaders across the state.

But Generation Next, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit that aims to close the education achievement gap, is tackling this problem daily, focusing its efforts from "cradle to career," or from pre-kindergarten through college.

"One of the reasons why I think Generation Next is necessary is because a lot of people are working on these issues every single day," said Victor Cedeño, director of networks and education policy at Generation Next. "...The challenge with that is, you ... lose the bigger picture.

"We're the only people paid full-time to think about the bigger picture. ... We bring people together and look at the issues, and also look at the systems at hand to understand better the challenges that they're facing."

Announced in 2012, Generation Next is composed of a 5-member staff, including Cedeño and R.T. Rybak, the former Minneapolis mayor who now serves as executive director. (The Minneapolis



By Annrose
Jerry
Blaine High
School

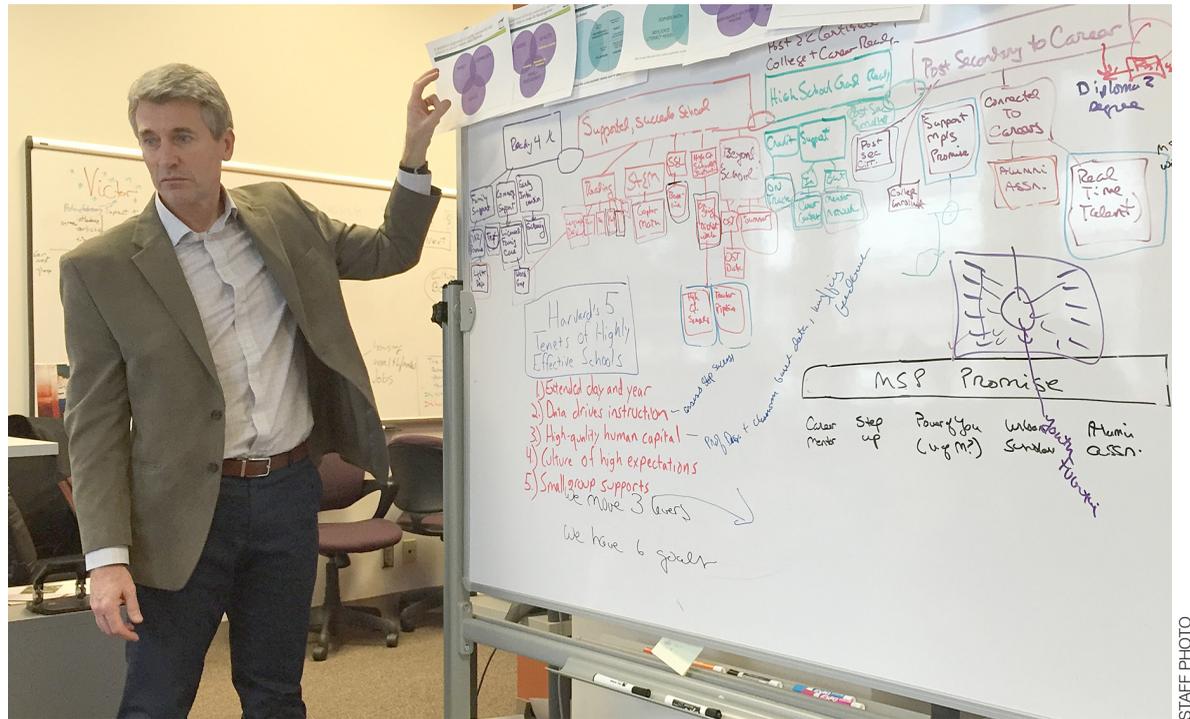
Foundation recently announced Rybak will be its new CEO and president. He will remain with Generation Next through July 1.) It also consists of a host of civic, business and education leaders. Generation Next brings local organizations, businesses and nonprofits together and analyzes data in an effort to solve the achievement gap in the Twin Cities.

The coalition has identified six areas, most of which were borrowed from the national StriveTogether model, to improve: kindergarten readiness, third-grade reading, eighth-grade math, social-emotional learning by eighth grade, high school graduation and post-secondary attainment.

Generation Next's 6 goals

- **Kindergarten readiness:** Each child enters kindergarten with the literacy, social and emotional strengths needed for successful learning.
- **Third-grade reading benchmarks:** By the end of third grade, each student meets key benchmarks for success in reading and reading comprehension.
- **Eighth-grade math benchmarks:** By the end of eighth grade, each student is on track to meet benchmarks for success in math.
- **Social-emotional learning:** Every child is socially and emotionally equipped to learn by eighth grade.
- **High school graduation:** Each student graduates from high school ready for college and career.
- **Post-secondary attainment:** Every high school graduate earns a post-secondary degree or certification.

SOURCE: GENERATION NEXT



Generation Next Executive Director R.T. Rybak stands near a whiteboard at the Generation Next offices in downtown Minneapolis during an interview in March. The organization aims to close the educational achievement gap.

These goals, Cedeño said, "are critical components, or critical moments in a child's development."

"It doesn't mean that they're the only (critical components)," he said. "But in terms of keeping attention on the achievement gap, it helps to have a defined list."

The work

Within the last year, Generation Next has been working on a graduation tracking system that identifies where a student is falling behind, starting in the student's freshman year, in an effort to raise graduation rates. It

is working to institute better credit recovery options and ways to increase FAFSA completion. It has created a tutoring network in the Twin Cities and has helped provide 20,000 books to a local literacy organization.

The organization has met with teachers, counselors and principals to discuss how strategies can be implemented in schools and has worked on implementing data-sharing policies. It is working to improve early childhood education, focusing on reducing suspension and expulsion, and also increasing cultural competency of early childhood programming.

StriveTogether, the national network that Generation Next is modeled after, has had programs that have shown positive results in more than 20 metropolitan school districts, according to Generation Next's website. Generation Next is still in the early stages of seeing results from its work, according to Rybak.

According to Generation Next's

2015 annual report, the organization's work has resulted in a 16-percent increase in preventive screening for 3-year-olds. Other efforts include an initiative aimed at improving the quality of licensed family child care in the next three years, an initiative that uses data to align literacy organizations and tutors' efforts with schools, and more, according to the report.

Much of what the organization does, Rybak said, is break down the achievement gap into "targeted, understandable, digestible actions." The white boards in Generation Next's downtown Minneapolis office show evidence for its motto of "Map, gap, role," using graphs and visual representations to draw up plans of action.

Crunching the numbers

Generation Next uses demographic data from schools and programs to **GEN NEXT** continued on page 28

"Sadly, in this community, we can say that we can predict the likelihood of a child's success by looking at the color of their skin."

—R.T. Rybak, executive director of Generation Next

ThreeSixty Focus on...

Tyus Jones

The Minnesota Timberwolves rookie talks life in the NBA as a teenager, Flip Saunders and improvement

AS RISING STARS Zach LaVine and Karl Anthony-Towns competed in an oddly matched but entertaining one-on-one game on one court, as veterans Ricky Rubio and Tayshaun Prince rained down uncontested 3-pointers on another, and as too many shoes to count squeaked across the Minnesota Timberwolves practice facility, one player stayed off to the side, shooting free throw after free throw.

Rookie Tyus Jones kept shooting until he was the last player in the gym, always the same routine: Dribble dribble dribble, eyes on rim, rise up, follow through.

Success is something Jones, a Minnesota native, is accustomed to. A point guard, Jones first started for Apple Valley High School's varsity team as an eighth-grader. He received his first Division I scholarship offer as a freshman.

In 2011, he started playing for Team USA's U16 National Team and went on to win three gold medals for U.S. national teams (U16, U17 and U18). He won a state championship with Apple Valley in 2013 and finished his career as a three-time AP Minnesota Player of the Year and a three-time Gatorade Minnesota Boys Basketball Player of the Year. He finished as one of Minnesota's all-time great high school players.

As one of the top high school basketball players in the nation, Jones went on to win a national championship at Duke, as well as earn the Final Four's Most Outstanding Player award, in 2015.

In June, Jones was drafted 24th overall by the Cleveland Cavaliers and then traded to his hometown team: the Timberwolves. This season, the 6-foot-2, 195-pound point guard averaged just more than 4 points per game and almost 3 assists. After a December run in the NBA Developmental League in which Jones averaged almost 25 points and five assists per game, he made his return to the Wolves (29-53) and finished the season with the team.

In March, during the first weekend of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, ThreeSixty Journalism had the chance to talk with the Minnesota phenom about life as a teenager in the NBA, his family of basketball players, March Madness and more.

Aidan: What is it like to be a 19-year-old in the NBA playing for your hometown team?

Tyus Jones: It's great. It's a true blessing. I mean, it's just a dream come true, to be from Minnesota and to



By Aidan Berg
Minneapolis
Southwest
High School



Zekriah Chaudhry
Minneapolis
South
High School

the NBA?

TJ: It's a big adjustment, just the speed of the play, the tempo. Obviously there are bigger, stronger athletes. Just the pace of the play—the windows are smaller, you've got to make decisions a little bit quicker and get your shot off quicker. Just different stuff like that where it's just an adjustment. You've got to get used to it if you're going to be playing.

A: You had a stint in the D-League in December and really tore it up. What did you learn from that experience and did it help you get in a groove with the Timberwolves once you returned?

TJ: I learned to just keep working hard on the stuff I've been working on in my workouts and in practice. Carry it over to a game, that was good to see for my confidence. It definitely got me into a little bit of a groove when I came back.

A: You've been playing more minutes lately, shooting above 42 percent from the 3-point line, which leads the team, and you have a solid assist-to-turnover ratio. How do you want to build on your game moving forward?

TJ: Just continue to try to improve in all areas of my game. Continue to shoot open shots with confidence when my teammates give me a good pass. That's them believing in you to knock it down, so just believe in yourself, have confidence and just continue to try to get better. Each day I'm trying to be better than yesterday, so I think just continuing to try to work on all areas of my game.

A: What is it like to play on the same team as Kevin Garnett, a future Hall of Famer and a Timberwolves legend?

TJ: It's unbelievable. It's kind of surreal, especially for me growing up in Minnesota and being a

DAVID SHERMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Timberwolves fan and a “KG” fan. I just always remember coming to the games and, you know, KG was and is the biggest deal in Minnesota, so to now be a teammate of his is kind of crazy and doesn’t feel real sometimes when I take a step back and look at it. He’s been great to me, a great teammate and a great big brother to me, and someone who’s helped me adjust my rookie year.

A: Your coach Sam Mitchell was recently quoted as saying you’re doing well but that you still have a long way to go. Do you take that as a personal challenge, or how do you react to that?

TJ: That’s just him being truthful and honest, and that’s what you want. I obviously have things to work on and I’m going to continue to do so. He’s been letting me know every day, he’s been on me, what I need to work on, what I need to get better at, and that’s what you want because you want to continue to get better, you want to know what you can work on and know that the coaches care enough to tell you what to work on. It’s good and it’s definitely something that I take as a challenge.

Zekiah: You’ve talked a lot about how your older brother, Jadee, has influenced your career as a basketball player. Now your younger brother, Tre, is tearing it up at Apple Valley. How are you trying to influence him in a way similar to how Jadee influenced you?

TJ: First by example. I knew for a number of years now he’s looked up to me. So just lead by example and know that he’s always watching me and what I do, and trying to emulate what I do, whether it’s on the court, off the court, no matter what it is. Secondly, now that he’s starting to get recruited and he is kind of coming into his own and kind of



DAVID SHERMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Jones, who graduated from Apple Valley High School, averaged about four points and three assists per game during his rookie season this year with the Minnesota Timberwolves.

carving his own path, just be there for him to support him. Make sure he always has someone in me, as an older brother, that he can go to just like I always had. So I’ll just be there for him, support him and continue to be his biggest fan.

Z: Having been through the recruiting process, what kinds of things are you telling him right now?

TJ: To just enjoy it right now and take it slow, just because it’s the beginning for him. He’s still got a long ways to go before he has to go to college, so just enjoy it and take it slow right now. He’ll be fine.

Z: Dating back to your high school career, you had a close relationship with Flip Saunders. Now that he has passed away, how are you dealing with that? Are you still playing for him?

TJ: I am, I definitely am. It’s tough. It was a tough stretch for us all, everyone in this organization and on this team at the beginning of the year

The Tyus Jones file

Profession: NBA point guard

Height: 6-foot-2

Weight: 195 pounds

Career highlights: One of Minnesota’s all-time great high school basketball players. Starting point guard for Duke University as a freshman. 2015 National Champion and Final Four Most Outstanding Player. 24th overall selection in 2015 NBA Draft. Backup point guard for Minnesota Timberwolves.

Find ‘em: On Twitter at @TyusJones06 and on Instagram at @1Tyus

with him passing. And for myself, like you said, knowing him in high school and having a relationship with him. It’s tough for me just because I had that previous relationship with him and didn’t get a chance to officially play under him, but the fact that he had faith in me and trusted me to be a point guard on this team, to go make me a part of this organization, I’m definitely playing for him still because without him I wouldn’t be here. I just want to prove that he was right about me.

Z: It’s March Madness now. What kind of memories does that bring up for you? And a lot of brackets are busted now, so how’s your bracket doing?

TJ: It brings back a lot of great memories for me. It doesn’t feel like it was a year ago already, but I remember it like it was yesterday. Just a lot of great memories, something that I’ll never forget, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I wish everyone could experience and go through. A lot of great memories.

JONES continued on page 28

Weighing a gap year

A break before college can be beneficial, experts say—but it's not for everyone

AFTER GRADUATION, some high school students will attend college locally while others are bound for out-of-state schools.

Other students will work or enroll in technical programs.

But there is another growing option for graduating seniors: the gap year. It's a period—typically an academic year—in which a student takes a break between high school and higher education. Students might work, travel, volunteer or study.

For some students, taking a gap year can provide benefits that students who pursue a more traditional path after high school may not receive, students and experts say. But it's not for everyone.

Quentin Smith, 22, a University of Minnesota student, completed a gap year during the 2012-2013 school year. His desire to see something outside of his hometown of Owatonna was part of what motivated him to study abroad.

"I want to see the world," Smith said. "I want to actually get out and do things."

And he did.

Through the Rotary Youth Exchange program, Smith traveled to Indonesia after high school. His eyes lit up as he talked about his experiences overseas: excursions to surrounding islands, meals with his host family, a cooking class, bartering and opportunities to travel to neighboring villages.



By Selam Berhea
Blaine High School

Smith said that, through his gap year, he learned to see different perspectives, keep an open mind and minimize bias.

"Those are three big things driving my life right now," he said.

Gap years are common in Europe and are becoming increasingly common in the U.S., experts say. These days, more gap year opportunities are popping up for students in the form of study abroad and volunteering programs. Even Ivy League schools such as Harvard and Princeton encourage a gap year for students who are accepted to their schools.

Other times, students may take a gap year to work and to save for college, or to simply figure things out.

Pros

Taking a gap year can have great payoffs, according to students and experts. The three highest-rated outcomes of gap years, according to "The Gap Year Advantage: Helping your child benefit from time off before college," are that students gain a better understanding of their identity and values, gain a better understanding of



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Quentin Smith, right, during his gap year trip to Indonesia during the 2012-13 school year. Smith said the trip had multiple benefits for him, including giving him time to plan his future and helping him see different perspectives.

Language or cultural exchange programs

NSLI for Youth:

<http://www.nsliforyouth.org>

Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Abroad:

<http://www.yes-abroad.org/>

Youth for Understanding:

<https://www.yfu.org/>

Rotary Youth Exchange:

<https://www.rotary.org/en>

Volunteer/service programs

World Wide Opportunities on

Organic Farms:

<http://www.woof.net/>

America's Unofficial Ambassadors:

<http://unofficialambassadors.com>

Americorps:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amerikorps>

"There are other options than just going straight to college."

—Quentin Smith, University of Minnesota student who took a gap year

other countries, people and cultures, and gain more skills and knowledge for college or a career.

On top of these payoffs, many students find that a gap year helps them narrow their academic and career track, according to the American Gap Association. An independent, multi-year study from Rae Nelson and Karl Haigler, authors of "The Gap Year Advantage," states that 60 percent of students said the experience either "set me on my current career path/academic major" or

"confirmed my choice of career/academic major."

For Smith, a gap year abroad allowed him more time to plan for his future.

"First of all, I was kind of a mess in high school and I didn't know what I wanted to do," he said, "so this allowed for one more year to think about it."

Cons

However, a gap year is not for everyone. For those going abroad,

a year-long exchange program like those in AFS-USA, which offers intercultural exchange programs, can cost \$12,000 to \$15,000, and others can cost more (although many programs have scholarships). The experience also can mean 6 to 12 months away from family and friends, culture shock and unfamiliar surroundings.

"If you're not at least willing at least a little bit to go out of your comfort zone, you're not going to have a good time," Smith said.

While he was abroad, Smith stood out a lot, he said. He also experienced illness and homesickness, as well as missing out on the college experience during his trip, he said.

"It's going to be harder to meet people once you come back," he said.

Effect on college admission

At the University of Minnesota, admission isn't based on one factor, but rather an overall assessment of a student's application, said Admissions Counselor Steve Baker. A gap year on a student's resume would be "more of a secondary factor" in the decision, he said.

Continued on next page

From previous page

“It wouldn’t necessarily change or alter a student’s admission decision,” Baker said.

Baker attributed a gap year to one of the many experiences that “enhances our student body, our culture, our discussion in the classroom,” but also recommends students “be thoughtful about what they are thinking about gaining in going into this gap year/deferral process as far as experiences.”

Students who want to take a gap year but also have been accepted to a college like the University of Minnesota can choose to defer, or postpone, their enrollment. At the University of Minnesota, all deferrals are dealt on a case-by-case basis, Baker said.

Katia Kozachok, a senior at Perpich Arts High School in Golden Valley, is gearing up for a gap year in the fall. Kozachok will be going on a year-long exchange to India through the Rotary Youth Exchange program.

“I’m going to become an even better person than what I am today,” she said, “and I’m so excited for that.”

Kozachok, who had been staying in a dorm throughout high school, is excited to have a homestay experience in India. She is spending her last couple of months preparing for the trip and trying to learn as much Hindi as possible.

While Kozachok is in India next year, Smith will continue his studies at the University of Minnesota, while keeping his eye out for more study abroad opportunities.

At the end of the interview about his gap-year experience, Smith offered some advice: “... There are other options than just going straight to college.”

BOARD *from page 3*

communities. I’m honored to be part of that initiative.”

Theisen, a University of St. Thomas graduate, is a former regional director for the Society of Professional Journalists and a former president of the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists (MNSPJ). She served on the MNSPJ board from 2006-2014. Her roles included planning outreach and training programs for Minnesota journalists, and planning the chapter’s Page One Awards contest, banquet and silent auction benefiting the chapter’s student scholarship program. As a regional director, Theisen oversaw student and professional SPJ chapters in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota.

ALUMNI *from page 5*

the excitement and the atmosphere of being in the field. A desk job just wouldn’t cut it.

“Sometimes there are just crazy breaking news stories that happen,” she said. “I would say that’s where my adrenaline kicks in, and those are just huge highs for me as a journalist.

“Being able to craft those stories, finding out what’s important to people on a given day, and then finding the best ways to bring them that information while being relevant, while being reliable and consistent and credible, those are daily challenges. That’s part of the fun.”

A surprise welcome to college

WHEN IOWA STATE University sent me a breaking news alert in an email, I thought it was another college rejecting my application.

I clicked on the link anyway.

What filled the screen was video of a professional news anchor announcing that a new student was accepted at Iowa State. Then, through video magic, I saw my name displayed: “Congratulations, Daniela Garcia. You are a Cyclone.”

I got in! And that personal touch of welcoming me into the community made me feel an instant connection to the campus.

I was surprised because, of the 19 colleges and universities I applied to my senior year, I hadn’t even considered ISU until my mom made me fill out the application. Through this experience, I have learned that being open to trying new things can provide some of the biggest surprises and, in the end, can be the most rewarding.

When I began my college search, Iowa



By Daniela Garcia
Edina High School

State University was last on my list. I was too focused on the name of a college—I thought what mattered was the campuses’ prestige.

Another one of my reasons was the university’s seemingly undesirable location. Going into my senior year at Edina High School, my top college prospects were the ones closest to home. My mind was set.

I thought ISU was too far away from my sweet hometown of the Twin Cities. I am a city girl, and Iowa is a farm state with what I imagined was not much to do, and that scared me. I was also misguided by frivolous details such as campus food, parking availability and size.

Then, I realized what really mattered. The most important factor to me was

the financial and academic support my family and I would be provided, which was substantially more at ISU than what other universities offered. I also appreciated the time some colleges spent on crafting personal messages, like the breaking news alert I received.

The big “aha” moment for me was when I realized many of the schools I applied to did not even follow up with me. There were no thank-yous, which seemed like the minimum. Other schools thanked me for applying and then I never heard back from them again. Iowa State went above and beyond to make me feel welcomed and showed me they cared.

When I experienced their warm greeting and saw all the opportunities they were giving me, I knew where I belonged. Name recognition among my friends and family didn’t matter anymore.

I now have some breaking news of my own: I will soon be an Iowa State Cyclone.

NOTEWORTHY

ThreeSixty student earns coveted award

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM student Mina Yuan, a junior at Wayzata High School, has been named a national Gold Medal winner in the journalism category of the 2016 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Yuan, who won the award for a ThreeSixty story she wrote on Internet censorship in high school, is the only Minnesota student to receive a journalism honor and is one of nine Minnesota students who received a Gold Medal in various art and writing categories. As a result, she is invited to National Events in New York City June 1-3, including the award program’s National Ceremony on June 2 at Carnegie Hall.

“I am so honored and surprised to receive this award—I never expected this when I entered my article,” Yuan said. “This article was really complex yet

rewarding to write, so it means even more to me that I received the Gold Medal for it. I am so excited to visit Carnegie Hall for the award ceremony, and I am looking forward to writing more articles with ThreeSixty.”

Yuan’s story, “Online safety or over-protection?: Exploring schools’ rights to filter Internet access vs. students’ rights to information,” which appeared in the June 2015 issue of ThreeSixty Magazine, was entered into the national contest after she became one of five high school students in the Midwest Region to receive a regional Gold Key in the journalism category earlier this year.

Notable alumni of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, which bills itself as “the nation’s longest-running, largest, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens,” include Sylvia Plath, Andy



STAFF PHOTO

Mina Yuan, a junior at Wayzata High School and a ThreeSixty Journalism student, has earned a national Gold Medal in the 2016 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Warhol, Truman Capote, Stephen King, Lena Dunham, Zac Posen and Richard Linklater, according to the program’s website.

Tackling concussions

Safety measures in football have been taken in recent years, but some call for sport's removal

WITH THE HEIGHTENED public awareness of head injuries in football serving as a backdrop, Dr. Bennet Omalu spoke candidly about concussions in youth football in late February at Beth El Synagogue in St. Louis Park.

Omalu is the doctor who discovered the connection between football concussions and the degenerative disease Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) while studying the brains of deceased National Football League players in the 2000s. Omalu, whose story was the focus of the 2015 film “Concussion,” starring Will Smith, pulled no punches.

“If you were out at a restaurant and a child at another table misbehaved, and his father repeatedly slammed the child’s head into the wall as a punishment, you would most likely call the police,” Dr. Omalu said to a packed house, drawing a connection to the dangers of youth football, when children slam their helmeted heads against one another.

Increased attention to the dangers of concussions in football has led to improved recognition and education for coaches and medical staff, according to a medical expert.

One local coach said the game is “probably the safest it has ever been.” However, some local medical professionals have called for the removal of football from schools, due to concussions.

Football concussions have been



By Aidan Berg
Minneapolis
Southwest High School

in the national spotlight recently. In April 2015, a judge approved the NFL’s \$900 million settlement in a concussion lawsuit with thousands of former players. A top NFL official this year acknowledged a link between football and CTE, which the New York Times wrote for many “was an echo of big tobacco’s confession in 1997 that smoking causes cancer and heart disease.” And at the box office, “Concussion” documented Omalu’s struggle to bring to light the connection between football concussions and CTE, as well as the pushback he received from the NFL.

The concussion issue has carried over to youth and high school football as well. In high school, one in five athletes will sustain a sports concussion during the season, according to Head Case, a concussion awareness website. Forty-seven percent of all reported sports concussions occur during high school football. And 33 percent of high school athletes who have a sports concussion report two or more in the same year.

Dr. Nicholas Holmes, who specializes in sports medicine and concussion management at Twin



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRISTETA BOARINI

Dr. Bennet Omalu, who discovered the link between football concussions and the disease CTE, speaks about concussions in youth football, among other things, in late February at Beth El Synagogue in St. Louis Park.

Cities Orthopedics, said concussion recognition at the high school level has improved.

“Right now concussions get a lot of attention in the media and a lot of attention from coaches, so most people are better at recognizing it,” said Dr. Holmes, who also is the team physician for Park High School in Cottage Grove.

“Most places these days, the coaches have some kind of training and recognition,” Dr. Holmes also said. “I think that it’s certainly a lot better than it used to be. ...”

Safety measures

New rules have been adopted in recent years for diagnosing concussions and protecting players who sustain them. In 2010, the Minnesota State High School League implemented a rule change from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), stating that athletes who show symptoms or behaviors of a concussion must be immediately removed from play and cannot return until cleared by a medical professional. In addition, the league’s protocol has a general rule: “When in doubt, sit them out.”

Baseline testing — which requires athletes to take an exam that measures their baseline brain functions — in high school sports also has become a more common concussion management technique. The MSHSL

also recommends coaches, officials, students and parents take the NFHS 20-minute concussion course online.

But what happens once a player is diagnosed with a concussion?

According to the MSHSL policy, only a medical professional can diagnose a player with a concussion. If the player is diagnosed with a concussion, the player is removed from all competition for the remainder of the day.

The MSHSL policy also states that only a medical professional can clear the athlete to return to play. The policy includes guidelines for a step-by-step process for returning, in which the player must be symptom-free at each level to reach the next step. Each step requires a minimum of 24 hours.

Holmes said the average person takes one week to clear symptoms and get cleared to return.

Josh Zoucha, the head football coach at Minneapolis Southwest, said his team’s return-to-play protocol — which mirrors the MSHSL guidelines — includes a series of physical conditioning exercises “from very light to intense to see if they show any concussion symptoms over a series of four days.”

“If the athlete misses one day of the return-to-play protocol, it starts over,” Zoucha said. “If they show any symptoms during the testing, it stops until they show no signs and then starts over.”

Ian Baures, a senior at Minneapolis

Southwest High School, is a former football player who quit the sport after suffering multiple concussions, he said. Baures said he felt pressure to return to play after his first concussion.

“There (were) a lot of ‘Are you ready yet?’ kinds of questions,” Baures said, “which pressured me into playing before I was ready.”

Zoucha said he could not speak about a specific situation involving a player, but said, “I trust our trainers to make good decisions about our players.”

Baures said he returned to play about three weeks after his concussion. When he suffered a second concussion, he decided to stop playing football, he said.

“Now that I look back on it, I’m very happy that I stopped playing,” he said.

Future of football?

Last fall, two University of Minnesota doctors recommended football be eliminated from schools across the nation, which would reduce pressure on students to play a sport in which many suffer from concussions, according to a Star Tribune article.

Not everyone agrees.

“I don’t think there is a need to get rid of high school football or sports at any particular level,” Holmes said, “as long as people understand the risks, and we have good education about what can happen and how you return to activity.”

Zoucha said the sport is “probably the safest it has ever been, especially compared to when I played, or even 10 years ago.”

“Safety has moved to the forefront of most sports,” he said.

Baures thinks differently about football.

“I think that it is a dying sport and should die soon,” he said. “Because no matter how much padding or new technology you put in a helmet, there is still a good chance that you can get hurt.”

ThreeSixty| COLLEGE ESSAY BOOT CAMP

Kicking students' college essays into shape!

THE WEEK'S LESSONS were in place, the more than 30 students at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis and Harding Senior High School in St. Paul were enrolled, and the volunteer writing coaches were eager to share their expertise. There was just one big question: Would our ambitious idea of intensive one-week College Essay Boot Camps work?

What we learned is, to work one-on-one with boot campers on transforming their remarkable stories into clear, concise essays, and to see the joy and accomplishment on their faces when, after just one intensive week, each has a polished college essay—well, those feelings will be hard to top.

We're delighted to share this collection of these students' essays with you and think you'll agree that our grand experiment was a great success.



STAFF PHOTO

St. Paul Harding students on the first day of ThreeSixty Journalism's College Essay Boot Camp in April at Harding.

A story of 'survival and opportunity'

By Najma Dahir
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

I HAD FIVE DAYS to quickly pack up 12 years of my life in a dirty, hot and cramped refugee camp in Ethiopia and fit it into a suitcase I shared with my mom for our long journey to America. It felt impossible to pack up all our memories—some of them too painful to relive, like my father leaving us. I knew I would never see my dad again and my childhood friends once we left. I couldn't stop sobbing.

Soon, though, that sadness transformed into excitement for a new life. We waited our whole lives to escape to a country we had only heard about in stories. As the old school bus drove away from the camp for the final time, my mom said to us that in the United States, "We

are going to have a better life." And that's all I needed to know.

My mom's patience and resilience throughout our journey has empowered me to act strong for her and my siblings and overcome our obstacles. I admire my mother's strength today like I did when my father left us when I was 7 years old. When he left, my whole world turned dark.

Early one morning, I was sleeping on the ground inside of a hut. My mom grabbed me and I was scared. "Najma kac kac wan baxaynaye naa tos dhakhso," my mother screamed out in Somali, telling me to get up! I saw tears coming from my mom's eyes. I didn't know what was going on. Then I heard my grandmother say, "Your father left so the door is open for you ... leave now!" My grandmother was kicking us out. She yelled, then she hit my mom in



Najma Dahir

the head with a brown-heeled shoe.

I decided to stand up for my mom and help her. I didn't want her to feel alone. With my father gone, I had to step up and become a second parent to my two younger brothers. At age 7, I took a job to support my family. Every day I woke up at dawn to sell sugar, oil, vegetables and gasoline, and walk to school in the afternoon.

But soon we were faced with a difficult choice: Stay in the refugee camp in Ethiopia that my family had lived in for 25 years, with no additional aid, or travel to the U.S. My family chose to move to the U.S., though without my father, in 2011.

Our first year in America was challenging. I could not understand my teacher or my classmates. I spoke no English. I felt so lonely and scared. After 22 days of living in Tennessee, we uprooted our lives again to move to Minnesota.

Life is much better now. The many Somalis in Minnesota have welcomed us with open arms. My Somali classmates make sure I understand my coursework and

show me their support at Roosevelt High School. I strive to work hard because of what my family and I went through in the past. I want to create a better future for us. I hand in my schoolwork on time. I retake any tests or quizzes I receive low scores on. I have joined Key Club, the math team, student government, College Possible, AVID, Emergency Medical Responder, National Honor Society and badminton. These achievements make me feel empowered and determined to succeed.

My life is a story of survival and opportunity. Our difficult journey to the U.S. in many ways still continues today. I must move forward and focus on my future for my family. I'm excited for college. In Ethiopia, college seemed like an unattainable dream. Now, I can make that dream come true by studying to become a doctor to support my family. I owe it all to my mother. One day, I will be able to show her how much her strength has meant to me.

'I am in control of my future'

By Randy Cuate Galarza
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

IT WAS 8 A.M. on a supposedly lazy Sunday and I had just woken up and rolled out of bed. I placed my long, brown skinny feet into my slippers and walked slowly downstairs to eat breakfast. My mom was already at the table, sitting down. I saw her staring blankly ahead. I grabbed a bowl for my cereal and glanced over to my parents' bedroom. My dad wasn't there. I was confused.

"Hi ma," I said to her.

"Hi," my mom responded in her
Continued on next page



Randy Cuate Galarza

From previous page
native Spanish.

“Where’s dad?”

“He’s gone.”

“Where did he go?”

“They took him.”

The look on my mother’s face said it all.

My dad was deported. I was in shock. Immigration officials didn’t allow him to say goodbye to me or any of my three siblings. The night before was the last time I have seen my father.

That moment was a turning point for us. My life changed. My family’s life changed. I watched my mom, now a single parent of four kids, with no college education, struggle to provide for my family. She now had to work three jobs to barely keep up with rent, which meant we rarely saw her.

A few months later, on a Sunday night, I knocked on my mother’s bedroom door, then walked right in. I needed her to sign my permission slip for a field trip. I found her sitting on her queen-sized bed, looking back at me with tears running down her cheeks. I froze. I stood at the door, unable to speak. I asked her what’s wrong and sat down beside her. She told me she didn’t know if she could do it anymore: work three jobs, raise four kids by herself, put two of them through college, and still be there for her kids. It was that moment when I realized I never wanted to be in her position.

At age 16, I started to work at Burger King and Chipotle to help pay the bills. I realized that, in the future, I didn’t want to work multiple jobs to barely make ends meet. I wanted a career that would give me financial stability. I knew that college was the way to get there.

That is why I’m putting in the work and the effort right now, taking multiple IB classes, enrolling in the AVID program and receiving ACT practice help so that I can get into a good school and pursue a degree in engineering.

Math and science were subjects that always interested me. But earlier in high school, I wasn’t sure what career would be a good fit with my interests. Through my own research,



STAFF PHOTO

St. Paul Harding High School students who completed College Essay Boot Camp pose for a photo with ThreeSixty Journalism staff and volunteers in April at St. Thomas.

I landed on engineering. During my senior year, I will be taking an engineering class to see if it’s a good fit for me.

I am still working 20 hours a week and taking challenging classes. It’s not easy to help support your family while pursuing your own dreams. At times, I have lost complete motivation and fell into a state of depression, but then I constantly refer back to that time I saw my mother break down and the promises I made to myself that day: I am in control of my future.

Returning to Guatemala, with a college degree

By Amner Sosa
St. Paul Harding High School

THE ENGINES ROARED as we landed at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala. It was the

summer of my 13th year. Outside the airport, the heat smacked me. Then I noticed the smell. It was a mixture of smoke, sweat, feces and onions. Hundreds of people were pushing me and each other. Some wanted a taxi, others, a handout. Many had something to sell.

Through the commotion, one thing caught my attention the most: A man without arms or legs was being frantically dragged around on a skateboard. He wore a torn shirt and pants cut off at the legs and tucked into the back part of the shirt so they wouldn’t come off. I didn’t want to stare, but I couldn’t stop.

I will never forget the image. It has come to represent the poverty and hardship of Guatemala. I had longed to go back to Guatemala, and there I was.



Amner Sosa

I knew about Guatemala from my parents. My parents were born and raised there and both lived difficult lives in poverty. My dad worked in banana factories and in the fields detasseling corn. My mother gathered firewood from the mountains, cooked for her family of seven and did strenuous housework. My dad often tells the story of what he bought with his first job. He had saved two months to buy a small stove.

“Did your old stove break?” I blurted out, puzzled.

“No, all my childhood we couldn’t afford a stove, so I bought one for my dad,” he replied with a melancholic laugh.

My mother doesn’t talk about her personal life because she’s a private person. She says she never got to seventh grade because she was forced to stay at home and help with housework. Like many immigrants, they came to America looking for a better, more peaceful life.

When we went back that summer I was 13, I felt like both a boy and a man, but also like I was stuck

between two worlds. I felt guilty and sad knowing I was a person with opportunities unlike kids in Guatemala. It was the first time I saw and felt true poverty. Seeing the kids going to work in the corn fields, and seeing how a lot of young women were prostitutes, was a reality check.

That visit and my parents’ stories made my heart burn. Now I’m on fire to better my education. I want to pay back the hard work that my parents put in to raise a family. I am competitive by nature, and now I want to compete for scholarships. I no longer see education as something I’m obligated to do. How could I not feel fortunate to go to school?

A college degree can get me to a point where I not only will live a stable life, but also will give me the right tools to one day go back to my beloved country and help people. Maybe I’ll meet the man on the skateboard again, and this time help him get prosthetic legs.

Continued on next page

A bully, a hijab and a lesson about communication

By Asmaa Mohamed
St. Paul Harding High School

MY FOURTH-GRADE classmate reached out swiftly for my hijab. In the hallway at school, she closed her hand around my hijab and yanked it off my head, showing the front of my hair. She then pulled the rest of it off, revealing the rest of my hair. She kept pulling, choking me with the slightly thick fabric as it caught around my neck. I froze with shock as I fell to the cold, tile hallway floor with tears running down my face. My friends eventually rescued me and pulled her away.

I had learned doing nothing doesn't help. I felt angry and violated, but being the non-confrontational person I am, I moved on.

That awful moment in fourth grade was not how I imagined the conversation to go. I felt frustrated, constantly being asked the same questions by my classmate.

"Why don't you take your hijab off?"

"Why don't you show your hair?"

"Are you bald?"

This time, I tried to explain to her without getting annoyed. I told her that as a Muslim, girls wear the hijab to hide our beauty and the gaze of men, as well as to be modest. We believe our God has commanded us to wear the hijab. That's when she pulled my hijab off my head.

One comment that stuck with me for years was, "If you took off your hijab, you would be so much prettier." I would lock myself in the bathroom, sit on the sink and stare at myself in the mirror. I imagined what my classmates' reactions would be if



Asmaa Mohamed

I showed up to school without wearing my hijab. "Would I be prettier?" I started to wonder.

A couple of weeks before my classmate challenged me, my mom pulled me aside. She said, "I noticed a change in you, and I want you to tell me what's going on." I explained to her my frustrations and she developed my understanding of how I could see the situation in a more positive way and how I could help my peers understand my religion and my reasons for wearing a hijab.

When I look back at that moment, I notice that no matter how many times you explain the same thing to some people, they may not fully understand. Still, I must be patient and try telling them in different ways.

I still get asked, "Why do you wear your hijab?" And, "Why don't you show your hair like so and so?"

Now I just look at them and say, "I want to wear a hijab for myself, not for you or anyone else." Today I am very proud to wear a hijab.

This experience changed me as a person because I learned to stay calm and to be level-headed with others. When I disagree with someone, I tell myself to see where they are coming from, to develop understanding. I am smart and think about my decisions. I learned to be calm and communicate my feelings and thoughts when facing adversity.

Many challenges lie ahead of me, especially as I prepare for college and study to become a pediatric nurse. I stand proud of who I am as a Muslim woman and am ready to use my communication skills to educate others about myself.

Making my parents' dreams come true

By Kongmeng Lor
St. Paul Harding High School

IT'S FEBRUARY 2011. I am 11. I departed Laos 36 hours ago.

Our journey took us to Thailand, then Japan, and our final destination was Minneapolis. I look out

the window, and notice this white stuff called "snow" for the first time. At that moment, I knew we were in America. My 7-year-old brother, and our chaperone, seated next to me, are still sleeping.

In 2005, my parents left Laos and went to America for work, but me and my brother didn't travel with them. I was upset and sad, but I knew that they went for a better life—better jobs for my parents and a better education for me and my brother one day. I know my parents' sacrifice wasn't for nothing, and I hope to show them that the dream they offered us will come true.

The five years that me and my brother were left behind in Laos were hard because I didn't gain the love that my parents could've given to us. I grappled with loneliness. I stayed with my uncle, but my brother lived with my grandparents. While I missed my parents, my uncle taught me things he liked, for example, math and information technology. And I started to share the same passion.

Then it was time to join my parents in America.

Right after the plane landed, I turned and said to my brother, "Wake up, we're here." Then I put my backpack on and held my brother's hand as we started to walk toward the terminal. It was cold, but I was shaking with excitement and nervousness.

I was happy to move to America and to see my parents again. It had been a long time. I asked my brother, "Are you excited?" And he said "Yes!" We made eye contact, my parents hugged us, and that's when I realized that our family was coming back together again.

When I first went to school, it wasn't that hard for me to learn English because back in Laos, I already spoke English. However, the biggest difference was the food and the transportation. Back in Laos,



Kongmeng Lor

every morning, I had to wake up and cook breakfast, then I walked to school. Here in America, cold cereal was normal to eat in the morning, and buses for students to take to school were available. This showed me that I was in a better place with good education, and made me want to work hard.

Now, as the oldest son in the family, I have to help my parents. I have to babysit my brothers and sister when I get home from school because my parents work. I also have to clean the house when the baby makes a mess, and cook for them.

I notice that even today my parents are still working so hard for me and my siblings. My father's hard work has inspired me to work hard in school because I learned that if I have a higher education, I won't have to go through my father's struggle, having to decide to leave his children in another part of the world for five years and working constantly in the U.S. He works two jobs, one for a vending machine company and another as a driver.

While my dad wants me to be a doctor, my time with my uncle got me thinking about a future in information technology. I want to help out my parents right now so they won't have to work so hard. They have sacrificed so much already. So now that I have this opportunity to go to college, I won't let this opportunity go away because now I'm here in America and will do my best to achieve my dream of getting my master's degree, and the dream that my parents had offered for us. One day I'll show my parents that the dream that they have offered has come true.

Hoop dreams

By Tommy Xiong
St. Paul Harding High School

"RIIIINNNNGG!" I started running. My first day in Accelerated Life Science, and I was tardy.

I quietly entered the classroom, stopped, and looked around. All

I saw were unknown faces staring at me. I wanted to run away from the students.

"Oh, you must be Tommy Xiong, our new student

from the other science class?" Mr. Winesch said. I responded anxiously, "Uhhh, yeah." I felt like an outcast. Before I knew it, I had Niagra Falls rushing down my face and a flood of negative feelings inside me that would not go away.

For two weeks, I played sick in the nurse's office during Accelerated Life Science. Finally, the nurse suggested I visit the seventh-grade counselor to talk about my anxiety and stress. I thought, "I don't want to talk with anybody," but I reluctantly followed the nurse. Soon, I realized time spent with the counselor was time I would not have to spend in Accelerated Life Science. That plan worked for a trimester, before I actually started to open up to my counselor, telling her about being anxious and intimidated around others.

I told her I felt like an outcast in Accelerated Life Science. I told her I felt anxious and uneasy during passing time between classes. She had some good ideas, such as reworking my course schedule and talking my parents into taking me to the doctor. This began a buildup of trust between me and my counselor. I started to go and actually talk with her every day.

Then came her boldest suggestion: Try playing sports to relieve my stress and anxiety, she suggested. I said no. "I'm too short and too fat."

I was at my grandma's house that spring, and my uncle asked me to play basketball. "No," I thought. "I don't want to suck." I had nothing else to do though, and my counselor's advice went through my head. I tagged along.

Moments later, I played my first game of basketball. I missed my first shot, then my second, third, and more. My family and friends, however, *Continued on next page*



Tommy Xiong

From previous page

encouraged me to keep shooting and keep trying. On that day, I learned that I didn't have to be perfect.

During the course of the summer, I started to play basketball every day. Every time I played, joy rushed through my body and mind. The more I played, the better I was and the more confident I became, both on and off the court.

This confidence transitioned into the next school year. I became more social, saw things differently and became more comfortable.

Now that I'm in high school, I see basketball as my savior. It has helped me overcome my anxiety and become confident. I am funny, involved with College Possible and have a girlfriend. My grades are improved, and I am more interested in everything school has to offer. I am more engaged in my education than ever and am particularly interested in psychology—how the mind works.

As for my mind, it is looking forward to college, my future and lifelong happiness. I call these my "hoop dreams."

Unearthing culture through travel

By **Nadiyah Miller-Celestine**
St. Paul Harding High School

ON A SUMMER DAY in New Orleans, sweat beaded on my forehead during my first visit to a city that dazzled with metallics and was friendlier than my Midwestern hometown. My family and I strolled through the French Quarter, peering into corner stores stocked with T-shirts, sunglasses and jewelry. I saw a city flecked with dazzling purple, green and yellow,



Nadiyah Miller-Celestine

warmer than the frigid state where I grew up. The city's pride for the New Orleans Saints football team remained evident in streaks of gold, white or black and was signified by the Fleur-de-lis. Jazz music echoed in all the city's corners, and golden brown beignet tasted more flavorful than the doughnuts I've eaten in my neighborhood. I was enchanted by the southern town, and in college, I want to continue to learn about people, places and ideas that are different from me.

The contrasts I noticed between my family's hometown in New Orleans and my own spurred a curiosity about foreign ways of life. I spoke differently than my southern family, and I occasionally became confused by their language, because we chatted with different slang. We assigned different meanings to the same words. The phrase "good minute" didn't really translate to sixty seconds, and the word "ice box" labeled the refrigerator. They even used "beaucoup," the French word for "a lot," which I learned in my French class during high school. The experience of traveling to New Orleans exposed me to the culture in ways I couldn't have studied in a textbook.

During my trip to New Orleans, I learned to accept regional differences within my own family that I didn't expect, equipping me with the gumption to seek out commonalities with other people. I want to travel and notice more about the differences in how others talk and how they build a community around them. In Minnesota, if you walk by a stranger, you could just ignore their existence. In the south, however, it would seem natural to talk to complete strangers, and a minimal greeting might offer, "Good morning," or "Good evening," or "Have a nice day." The southern United States glowed with a more welcoming vibe than Minnesota.

I loved going to New Orleans because I found out that after visiting, I developed an excitement about all the new information I learned. I learned more about my family's past and the connection that New

Orleans shared with French culture. I also found out more about where my family grew up and how they lived. I learned that my relatives celebrated different holidays, such as Mardi Gras, and ate different types of foods, such as Gumbo and crawfish.

After visiting New Orleans, I considered other places and other cultures that enrich the world, and I realized that I wanted to see those cultures unfold live while comparing them to my own. I want to better understand my own points of view by hearing, tasting and smelling other cultures while traveling to other foreign places. I want to visit cities such as Paris and unearth more differences between their culture and mine, and observe and maybe participate in other people's traditions. Better yet, I want to contemplate those cultural differences that I'll find among others around the world and bring them back to Minnesota.

When I go to college, I will continue to learn about the histories, rituals and quirks that define other cultures while also traveling to new places. In New Orleans, I stepped outside of my comfort zone and learned the value in witnessing and interacting with people in their own neighborhoods. It helped me meet new people and taste new types of foods, and listen to new genres of music. This experience helped me learn to adapt and become open to new environments I am exposed to, and accept people and learn about them. I feel traveling abroad while in college will broaden my perspectives on myself and others, and when I travel back home, I'll have more stories to tell.

Learning from a mother's persistence

By **Nugumsa Mohammed**
Minneapolis Roosevelt High School

JULY 4, 2010. I was playing soccer with my friends in Kenya. When I

got home, my mom was happy to the point where she couldn't talk.

She ran up to me and gave me a kiss on my forehead. I asked her, "Mom, what is going on?"

"We're going to America," my mom said. She had a phone call from the United Nations telling her that our flight would be on July 7, 2010. I was overwhelmed and did not know what to do.

Now I could go to America to get my education and have a good future.

I was born in Ethiopia. I am the youngest of five siblings. When I was 2, my mother took me and my oldest brother to Kenya in order to come to America. She did not know what Kenya would hold, so she didn't want to bring the whole family.

We were supposed to come to America on Sept. 15, 2001. On our way to the airport, my mother got a phone call from the U.S. Embassy, telling her our flight was cancelled due to the Sept. 11 terrorist attack. My family was disappointed.

It took nearly 10 years to finally come out of Kenya.

It was great spending the decade in Kenya, but we had to leave for a better future.

I was looking forward to coming to the U.S. But when I got here it was not what I expected. I expected tall buildings everywhere in the city. I expected life to be easy. I expected people to have fun, not to be focused on work.

I spoke Swahili and Oromo in Kenya, which gave me an advantage to learn English in America quickly. But it was still difficult at times. One of those times was on the plane on our way to America.

I had to use the plane bathroom. When I finished, I wanted to get out but the door wouldn't open. It had instructions, but I couldn't read English. My only way out was



Nugumsa Mohammed

to calmly knock on the door until someone heard. I panicked about not knowing who was going to come and help me. Thankfully, the guy who came knew how to speak Swahili and gave me instructions on how to open the door.

The first couple weeks in Seattle, I was nervous not knowing how my life would change. I stayed in the house because I did not want to go outside not knowing English at all.

I moved to Minnesota my seventh-grade year. I started to feel comfortable speaking English because I practiced with my cousins who were here before me. I got removed from ESL classes my eighth-grade year. Growing up loving sports, I started football and wrestling my sophomore year. It helped me be confident in myself and be mentally strong.

In 2014, my brothers and dad came to Minnesota. At the airport, it was the first time my whole family had been together in 10 years. I was excited to know now I have brothers who will have my back.

Watching my mother always trying to bring us into America, her not giving up, has inspired me to adapt to the culture in America. For nine years, my mom would go to the U.N., calmly asking them, "Where is the process going? How long are we going to be here?"

It showed me to not give up on things easily.

It made me want to not stop learning English when people didn't understand what I was saying. When I tried to fit in and change who I am so I could look American, my mother told me, "Be yourself and the right people will come along." Despite all the difficulty, I managed to get through it with my mother and brothers beside me.

My experience with my mother has made me look at my future in a different way. I feel like I have a life to live in the future. I want to go to college and get my degree and be the first to graduate from college. And always appreciate what my mother has done for my family.

Walkouts. **Race.**

Transgender rights.

Marijuana.

Academic pressure.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Fights—in school and online.

THESE ARE AMONG the stories ThreeSixty high school students wanted to tell, in an effort to shed light on the complex subject of school climate—the quality and character of school life—across the Twin Cities. ¶ These stories say a lot about the state of our schools, as well as about the students who spend countless

hours inside them. Some are fed up with school violence and racial division. Others are willing to take a stand against perceived injustice. Others want their voices to be heard more clearly. ¶ And it's not all negative. Some students are finding community through the arts. Others are focused on going to college. ¶ As you'll see, school climate is a multifaceted topic. But these stories begin to unpack some of its complexities.

The state of transgender rights

Social and political battle hits home in Minnesota

FROM NORTH CAROLINA to South Dakota, the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming people, including students, are front and center in a social and political battle.

The fight is playing out in Minnesota classrooms as well.

In recent years, schools such as Mounds Park Academy and districts such as St. Paul Public Schools have enacted policies against discrimination based on gender identity. The Minnesota State High School League also voted to allow transgender students to play on teams that fit their gender identity.

In March, Republicans in the Minnesota Legislature proposed



By Shay Radhakrishnan
Math and Science Academy

a bill that would limit transgender and gender-nonconforming people's use of bathrooms and locker rooms to their biological sex. A similar bill was recently enacted in North Carolina.

Supporters say that having laws banning transgender and gender-fluid people from using facilities that do not correspond to their biological gender would protect privacy. Opponents say these bills and laws

are discriminatory.

"What people don't understand is that we are just as human as the rest of them," said Andy, a transgender student in Minnesota. (Only his first name is being used in this story.) He says that progress has been made in transgender rights, but challenges still remain.

'Bring down barriers'

The St. Paul Public Schools district took action on the issue in February 2014, when work on a gender inclusion policy began after students reported harassment and discrimination, according to the SPPS website.

The policy, which passed in March 2015, includes rules to respect all students' rights to be addressed by their preferred name and pronouns, to prohibit separating students by gender without a valid educational reason during academic programming, to allow all students to join co-curricular and extracurricular activities that correspond to their gender identity, and to provide students access to facilities that suit a student's gender identity.

"I think as educational institutions, our work has to be to bring down barriers that prevent students

from focusing on their growth and learning," said Mary Hoelscher, a program specialist at Out For Equity, which aims to create a safe and welcoming school environment in the St. Paul Public Schools district. "And policies such as this create that space that's needed."

Hoelscher also said extending more protection and rights to transgender and gender-nonconforming students in schools can help educate communities and create a safer environment.

"(The policies) also provide an opportunity for community members to understand how to support students better and create the learning opportunity," Hoelscher said. "It establishes a clear expectation across the institution, it provides accountability for if something doesn't go as well as it ought to. I think it also is very affirming for students to see that they count, they have clear protection and support."

'We need to have a policy'

Public schools are not the only institutions who are tackling the issue of gender inclusion. Private and charter schools are working on it as well. Mounds Park Academy, an

independent private school, recently put into place a policy that was met with positive responses, according to a Pioneer Press report.

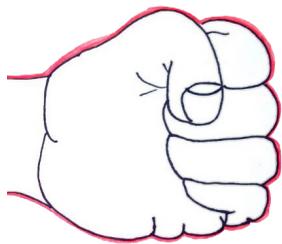
However, controversy has circled Nova Classical Academy.

The public charter school initially planned to take steps in educating students in an effort to provide support for a gender-nonconforming child, but delayed after meeting challenges from parents and the public. Nearly 400 parents at the school signed a petition earlier this year opposing mixed-sex bathrooms, according to the Minnesota Family Council, a local Christian organization (although the executive director of the school has said those numbers are "exaggerated," according to a Star Tribune report). Some pulled their children out of the school, according to reports.

The school has spent months working on a policy for supporting transgender and gender-nonconforming students, and the board of directors expects to adopt a policy this spring.

"We need to have a policy," board chair Paul Mason said. "We can't deal with these issues on a case-by-case

RIGHTS *continued on page 30*

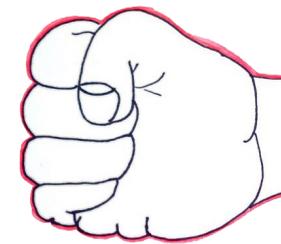


Tangled roots



ILLUSTRATION BY MINA YUAN

Grappling with safety



Students, teachers and officials weigh in on school violence causes, solutions

WHILE HEADLINES WARN about school fights and teacher assaults, Ian Marquez doesn't feel threatened as he walks down the hallways of Central High School in St. Paul.

"Things are going to happen, but overall, I still feel safe," said Marquez, a senior. "I know no one's going to sit out there and have an urge to hurt me."

Violence, however, has become an increasingly public reality in Minneapolis and St. Paul schools. But students, teachers and officials have differing ideas on the root causes of school violence.

Minnesota Department of Education data shows that in 2014-15, 3,869 reported cases of assault occurred in schools throughout the state, including 592 in Minneapolis and 257 in St. Paul.

This year, multiple incidents have been highlighted in the news, especially those involving violence against teachers and officials: In March, a St. Paul Como Park teacher was seriously injured by two students who tried to disrupt his classroom, police say. In January, a 14-year-old boy was arrested in connection with the assault of a teacher at the alternative high school Minneapolis Harrison Education Center, which came a month after a 17-year-old student



By Danielle Wong
Eastview High School

was arrested in connection with the assault of the school principal, who suffered a concussion, according to reports. And in December, a St. Paul Central teacher was slammed, choked and punched, according to police, by a 16-year-old student while trying to break up a fight. (The teacher is suing the school district for negligence, according to reports.)

The list goes on.

Jason Matlock is the director of operational and security services for the Minneapolis Public Schools district and is responsible for emergency and security planning and critical incident response. Matlock believes the root causes of fights are the same as when he went to school—two students like the same person, differences in opinion, issues at home—but that technology is making it harder to get away from these situations.

"Social media—Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter—you're talking about the ability to continue that stressor across time," Matlock said. "Bullying no longer just happens when you go to school."

Koua Yang, a teacher and coach at St. Paul Harding for 16 years, said he believes discussions around diversity are causing some teachers and officials to become too "soft" on students.

"We want to make sure that we understand where they're coming from. We can't just say everybody should be treated the same," Yang said. "But at the same time, students shouldn't be allowed to do whatever they want—come to school, come to class whenever they want ... I would say about 5 percent of the population's doing that."

"... We've been so loose now, the kids have kind of taken advantage of it."

However, North St. Paul High School junior Coralie Maldonado feels her school environment has become anything but "loose."

"I feel like it's more suffocating, it's become more of a prison," she said. "... It's just become a really stressful environment that no student wants to learn in, or can learn in."

But from Yang's perspective, **ROOTS** continued on page 29

Debate has emerged over how to prevent school violence

JAMIL LOTT HAS a lot to deal with every day.

He might be assuring a substitute teacher that a student is frustrated, not dangerous, or soothing a sobbing middle school girl who was raped and cannot focus on her classwork. Lott, a behavioral specialist at Washington Technology Magnet School in St. Paul, understands the needs of students and teachers through a lens that few others see through, especially after recent outbreaks of violence in Twin Cities schools.

"Sometimes (students) are with me in my office or whatever, (and) we're building this rapport that goes a long way," he said. "Students would tell me who's going to fight. Or who just broke up. Or what girls are upset with each other, and 'So-and-so's picking on me and calling me names.' So I'm able to intervene before another issue brews."

Since the beginning of this school year, students have attacked high school teachers and officials at schools throughout St. Paul and Minneapolis. Fights, student suicides and other deaths have occurred.

In the aftermath of the violence, a debate over how to improve school safety has emerged among administrators, teachers union members, staff and students, with some proposing easier access to mental health resources. While many staff members



By Mina Yuan
Wayzata High School

insist safety should be prioritized over money, administrators point out the high costs of these reforms.

And some students assert that implementing only top-down reforms criminalizes students and neglects the root cause of student-staff violence, which some attribute to cultural and communication-related gaps.

Looking for solutions

The St. Paul Federation of Teachers, the teachers' union representing workers in the schools, has pushed for "increased support in schools to help meet the needs of our students," said union president Denise Rodriguez. In December, union leaders threatened a teachers strike over safety concerns, following the alleged student assault of John Ekblad, a St. Paul Central High School teacher, according to reports.

While Rodriguez could not speak specifically about the assault of Ekblad due to pending litigation, she said school districts need to implement improved safety resources, such as more counselors, **PREVENTION** continued on page 29

"We are in control as adults of what we do. We have to address (the challenges students face) and make those connections and unpack those things to find that kid inside who wants to learn.

Everyone's inspired by something."

—Jason Matlock, director of operational and security services at Minneapolis Public Schools



"(News outlets) were like, 'These schools are violent and out of control.' That's not what it's like at all here. We've had a lot of tragedies happen this year, and I don't like seeing our pain exploited that way."

—Angela Vang, senior at St. Paul Central High School

SOUND OFF ON

SCHOOL VIOLENCE



Story by Danielle Wong and Mina Yuan
Photos by Danielle Wong

"Every school is going to come with (its) set of fights and (its) set of troubles, but that's just a part of being a kid. It's just part of this high school journey. Things are going to happen, but overall, I still feel safe. I know no one's going to sit out there and have an urge to hurt me."

—Ian Marquez, senior at St. Paul Central High School

"I ask my kids all the time, 'Do you feel unsafe?' And they're all like, 'No. Are you kidding? No.' So again, it's that perception piece. I think it's based on people's experiences. If you've had an unfortunate experience ... you see more of it, and you might feel more unsafe."

—Laurie Olson, head of security at SPPS and parent

"I don't think I've ever felt threatened. I've never felt scared or like anybody's life was at harm. There are situations where kids get in fights and they may be play-fighting or they may push someone. Someone might get hurt or get a bruise or something maybe, but I mean, that's rare."

—Jamil Lott, behavioral specialist at Washington Technology Magnet School

School fights going viral

What used to be small-scale incidents are now public events online

SMARTPHONES CLENCHED in hands and voices raised, the excited chatter and jeers only get louder when somebody's head hits the floor.

If you haven't seen this happen, be sure to check Snapchat for the uploads.

Want more? You can pick from thousands of online videos.

At schools around the country, what once were small-scale disagreements are now becoming public events that are recorded, posted,



By Zekriah Chaudhry
Minneapolis South High School

watched and commented on. The popularity of online fights has left school officials and others trying to figure out how to shift the trend.

"We live in an age where everyone wants to be Facebook famous," said Jason Matlock, the director of

operational and security services for Minneapolis Public Schools. "... And unfortunately with fights, that seems to be an easy, quick way to get a lot of clicks and likes and attention."

The ability to record fights and share them over social media has given fighting a broader reach and a longer lifespan in the minds of students. This is what Matlock refers to as "positive reinforcement."

Chandra Morris, a freshman at Minneapolis South High School, said she has seen videos surface on a consistent basis.

Sasha Cotton, a youth violence prevention coordinator with the city of Minneapolis, also has noticed this new-age platform for violence.

"Social media has been an issue

since I started my career, and that's been fifteen years, going as far back as chat rooms and Myspace," Cotton said. "As long as social media has been around, social media has been a tool that has made bigger problems for violence."

Matlock and Cotton have tried to prevent fights involving school-age students (on and off of campuses) by trying to divert students from situations where fights normally happen.

Cotton gave one example, citing St. Patrick's Day 2015, when a large group of teenagers and young people arrived in downtown Minneapolis and ran through the streets, blocked traffic and got into fights—what Cotton called an "eruption of violence." This led to extra precautions taken this year to ensure the same thing did not happen.

"Being strategic, we have youth outreach workers both in

Minneapolis and in St. Paul and (we are) engaging those youth outreach workers who work in our schools ..." Cotton said. "(We are) deploying them to really be engaging with young people and be talking with them and trying to de-escalate issues before they become a police matter."

A relatively small amount of students engage in fights on school property (approximately 8 percent, according to a 2015 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report). But Matlock and Cotton would like to build relationships with students before they reach that point.

"First, (teachers) have to talk to their students and listen to their students," Matlock said. "That's a huge thing. Adults have to make sure they are including the students in what they are doing."

This intervention is especially **VIRAL** *continued on page 30*

Student Profile: Alessandro Denti

An Italian exchange student who asks, 'Why Crocs?'

THEY ARE HATED with a passion. They are loved unconditionally.

They are too ugly for some and accessorized to perfection by others.

They are Crocs.

And Alessandro Denti, a 17-year-old foreign exchange student from Italy, just doesn't understand why Minnesotans would wear them.

"The way you dress is so different than the Italian way, like Crocs," Denti said with a laugh.

This was one of many instances in which Denti, who's from Sardinia, Italy, would grow accustomed to Minnesotan—and American—culture as a student at Coon Rapids High School this year.



By Kristy Ornelas
Coon Rapids High School

Going to the U.S.

Denti was intrigued to study abroad after a friend of his in Italy studied in Wisconsin. He told his parents, his friends and his Greek and Latin teacher, who fully encouraged him to follow through with his plans.

Once he'd made up his mind, Denti signed up in October 2014 with AFS Intercultural **STUDENT PROFILE** *continued on page 30*



Alessandro Denti, a 17-year-old from Italy, became accustomed to Minnesotan culture during his stay this year as a foreign exchange student in Coon Rapids.

KRISTY ORNELAS/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Justifying the high

Despite health warnings, some students smoke marijuana for sleep, stress, they say

Editor's note: ThreeSixty has changed the names of students in this story.

SARAH WAS IN eighth grade the first time she smoked marijuana.

She was getting food with friends from a youth council when someone asked her if she wanted to smoke “weed.” Sarah was with people she trusted, she said, so she figured, “Why not?”

Now a 16-year-old high school student in the Twin Cities, Sarah has continued to smoke marijuana. The primary reason she smokes now, she says, is to help with insomnia.

“I was taking melatonin before,” Sarah said, “but melatonin would give me the weirdest dreams and I didn’t like it, so I started smoking weed before I went to bed and that helps me.”

In many schools, illegal marijuana use is present in student life. While experts say marijuana use can be bad for students’ developing brains, some local teens justify smoking marijuana, saying they use it to deal with stress and sleep.

Sarah isn’t alone. A 2015 survey from the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that, for the first time, high school seniors are smoking more marijuana each day than cigarettes. The study says 6 percent of high school seniors are smoking marijuana daily.

Sarah also isn’t alone in using marijuana to self-medicate. Jacob, a 17-year-old high school student in the Twin Cities, also smokes



By Sebastian Alfonzo
St. Paul Central High School

marijuana to help with sleep, he said. He said smoking is “especially nice” when dealing with the late-night, early-morning sleep schedule of a high school student.

Michael, another 17-year-old Twin Cities student, says he smokes marijuana to deal with the stress that comes with being a high school student.

“On a positive end, I think I’m more relaxed overall,” Michael said. “I feel like I come back from the weekends more refreshed.”

While their reasons vary, all three students also spoke about the social aspects of smoking marijuana. All three began smoking through friends—not for self-medicating purposes. All three said they still smoke with friends for fun. One of them even said smoking “has made me more social.”

Effects of marijuana

Marijuana plays a part in St. Paul Central Social Worker Steve Collins’ work every day, he says. Smoking marijuana is a significant issue that negatively affects high schoolers’ emotional, social and academic growth and family connectedness, he said.

Collins believes smoking marijuana also can arrest emotional development, he said.

MARIJUANA *continued on page 31*

Success over stress

Top high school students face academic pressure head-on

VARSITY VOLLEYBALL PLAYER.

Vice President of National Honor Society and Senior Class Board.

Assistant at St. Paul’s Arlington Hills Library.

On top of all of those titles, 17-year-old Salena Yang maintains a 4.48 weighted grade point average and is ranked number two in St. Paul Johnson High School’s senior class.

Many high school students face tremendous academic pressure, however, students who are successful find that balancing their schedules, managing their time and facing that pressure head-on are key ingredients to performing well in school.

Experts also believe it’s up to the student to use the pressure on them to either feel defeated by a growing to-do list or feel extra motivated to accomplish these tasks.

Academic pressure can be created by worries over grades, tests and homework, as well as from parents and friends. Yang said expectations for her always have been high.

“... Everyone expects me to do well in school, so I have that mindset that, ‘You have to do well. You have to do well,’” Yang said. “So that stresses me out.”

Yang knows that although schoolwork can be stressful, working hard and getting good grades will help her in the future.

“I just want to work hard now



By Va Yang
St. Paul Johnson High School

in life so I don’t have to work hard later,” Yang said. “Sooner or later, you’ll find out that you have to work hard to get what you want, so that’s why I’m working hard right now.”

Only one other Johnson senior has a higher GPA than Yang. Her classmate, Aaron Young, is ranked number one, and says he’s earned the valedictorian post through “hard work and motivation and dedication.”

Young also wonders how many students are actually learning in the process of trying to get good grades.

“You get students who are just willing to just pass their class,” he said, “and they just want to get to the next level.”

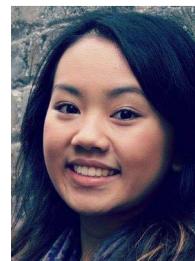
Michael Thompson, principal at Johnson High School, said he sees this happen.

“I think there are some students who get all As and don’t learn very much, and there are some students who get Cs and Ds who learn more,” Thompson said.

Yang and Young both agreed



Young



Yang

that academic pressure pushes them to work harder in school.

“(Academic pressure) will always exist because no matter where you are ... you’re always going to have that pressure to be more progressive toward getting your education,” Young said, “but at the same time you are always going to have that pressure to get that A or that B+, (to) strive for the high grade. It can ... give a student a reason to try.”

Chris Rozek, who holds a Ph.D. in social and personality psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and who is a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Chicago, says Young’s view is an example of a student interpreting academic pressure in a positive way.

Rozek also said both students and their teachers must learn to balance academic pressure.

“If all the students and teachers are focused on is trying to reach a certain performance level, then they are less likely to enjoy what they are learning and find it to be irrelevant to their lives,” Rozek said, “which then in the end undermines their motivation.”

When Yang feels unmotivated, she steps away from things that are causing her stress. And she says it

works for her.

“I usually just take a break and remind myself that all this hard work will pay off later,” she said. “Just be

positive and don’t just always study every day. Go out and have some fun. Do something that you like.”

Why I joined a high school walkout

AS I WALKED slowly into the hall after the second-hour bell at Minneapolis Southwest High School in January, I thought to myself, “I’ve never done anything like this.”

“What if something goes wrong? What if the authorities come? What if something happens to us?”

I walked down the stairs, and I thought to myself, “I can’t let fear overtake me.” I went toward the front desk, stunned to see other students gathering for the walkout.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” one of my closest friends asked me.



By Melisa Robles-Olivar
Minneapolis
Southwest High School

COMMENTARY

“Are you sure you want to do this?” I repeated her question.

But when I looked around, I realized at this moment, we had to do this.

I knew Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportation raids, which were then recently

initiated by the Obama administration to deport undocumented Central American immigrants, including families and minors, needed to be stopped.

The Obama-led government has deported more illegal immigrants—more than 2 million, one report says—than any other president, data and reports show. According to a Star Tribune article in January, immigration authorities in St. Paul, who oversee this state and four others, deported more than 1,730 people in the past fiscal

year, about 80 percent of whom had a criminal conviction.

“People need to realize that the women and children fleeing their home countries are doing so because of violence,” Samantha Morales, a senior at Minneapolis Washburn who helped organize the event, later told me. “... People need to try to fully understand the effect that the deportations are causing, because they are mental, emotional and physical damage to the people affected directly and indirectly.”

I wanted to stop the raids, the

deportations, the families that were going to be broken and the children that were going to be left behind. I knew I needed to join the walkout.

So, on Jan. 20, I walked out.

As I left school with the other 40 students, who were linked together arm by arm and chanting “Not one more,” an overflowing sense of empowerment overcame me. I couldn’t believe that I had walked out of school and that this was actually happening. We were creating history.

We walked to Washburn High
Continued on next page

My untraditional route to college



McNally Smith College of Music in St. Paul.



Minneapolis Roosevelt High School.

PHOTOS BY ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ-TADEO/THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

NEXT FALL, I will be a freshman at Augsburg College in Minneapolis and the first college student in my family.

But my path to Augsburg is not typical.

During my junior year in 2015, I decided to leave Roosevelt High School in south Minneapolis. Too often students would argue with teachers. In some instances, fights would break out in the hallways. This chaos would make it difficult for me to communicate with teachers and get to my classes in peace.

I had heard about the Post-secondary Enrollment Option, which allows high school students to take



By Alejandro Hernandez-Tadeo
Minneapolis
Roosevelt High School

COMMENTARY

college courses and gain dual credit for high school and college. I started taking PSEO classes full-time during the spring semester of my junior year. I now travel about an hour-and-a-half during the week to attend McNally Smith College of Music in downtown St. Paul, and I will finish high school with college credits.

I have some good memories from Roosevelt, but I needed to be in a

place that let me focus.

Roosevelt Principal Michael Bradley agrees that things are not perfect at Roosevelt, but he says it’s a work in progress. His goal is to create an “inclusive environment,” he said. He points to renovations, such as a new auditorium, and that a more visible encouragement in the arts has become important in the school.

High schools can start creating better environments for students with simple things. For example, heat strikes in Minnesota can be bad for students because older school buildings do not have air conditioning. Adding air conditioning to buildings may come off as being a silly proposal,

but how can someone concentrate while sweating their life away?

In fact, Peter Demerath, an associate professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, said there may be some truth in students’ efforts being a reflection of the physical state of the school.

Also, one of the main things every single school should focus on is building a connection between students and staff. These relationships are significant because they connect students to their teachers and show students that teachers care about their educational lives.

“These strong relationships with teachers showcases their belief in their students,” Demerath said.

Aaron Young, a senior at St. Paul Johnson, said his school “has its pros

and cons.” However, he is thankful to attend Johnson because of the friendly staff, but most importantly the opportunities such as the open Advanced Placement classes. The school has opportunities for students to take great steps toward their educational goals.

Young found his opportunity in AP courses and is taking advantage of it, just like I found my opportunity in PSEO and took advantage of it.

While I still take math and English classes at McNally Smith College of Music, my favorite courses are teaching me about music technology. I now understand what I want to study when I go to Augsburg College next fall. I now know there are jobs I’m interested in related to music.

At the end of the day, every student is different. Not everyone has the same interests or the same strengths. We all need different opportunities.

That also means that the paths some of us take to get to college may be different.

More info on PSEO

To find out more information about PSEO in Minnesota, go to <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/CollReadi/PSEO/>

Through that tough decision that I had to make that day, I came to realize that as young people, change isn't always going to come quickly. But sometimes, we need to put ourselves in those situations and try.

From previous page

School, where we met with dozens of other students. It was a cold mid-January day and I couldn't feel my feet, but I was willing to stand by and endure the temperature to oppose the acts ICE was taking against the Latinx (a gender-neutral modifier for "Latino," which is masculine) community. My community.

When I saw the crowd of a couple hundred students, I was stunned. A mix of high school students from all over the Twin Cities area came by bus, and some walked with their bare feet to participate in the walkout.

"We decided to take action because we realized that what was and is happening affects the Latinx community as a whole," Morales later said. "... We decided to have other high schools walk out because we realized that it also affects students, both undocumented as well as documented."

All my worries disappeared the closer we got to Martin Luther King Jr. Park in Minneapolis. I was surrounded by Latinx youth who wanted to voice their opinion against the raids. I felt a sense of pride that for once, the Latinx youth were taking a stand, and others were there to support us.

But not everyone supported what we did, what I did. My teacher was one of them.

"Where were you yesterday, Melisa?" my teacher asked during class the next day.

"I walked out," I replied, knowing my teacher knew where I was.

"Why did you walkout?"

"I felt the need to walk out, I—"

But before I had the chance to express myself, I was cut off.

"You should have stayed in school, getting your education instead of walking out. Do you really think anything is going to change with what was done yesterday?" my teacher asked.

The words coming out of my teacher's mouth stumped me. I was in disbelief. I did not want to hear what my teacher had to say. Words of discouragement were all I heard. I wanted to get up and leave the classroom.

I knew that the walkout was more than walking out of school. It was more than education within the classroom—it was going beyond what is being taught within the classroom by educating others and bringing awareness to an issue that is impacting children, families and an entire community.

An issue that everyone should know and be fully aware of.

I understood that walking out may not have created quick change, but I knew that we brought attention to the media, and the folks around us, who saw us walking out of school, likely wondered what exactly these young Latinx and other students were protesting about.

Through that tough decision that I had to make that day, I came to realize that as young people, change isn't always going to come quickly. But sometimes, we need to put ourselves in those situations and try.

Trying is better than nothing. Trying is taking one step toward creating change.

Race and political correctness

WHEN A GIRL in one of my classes said, "Black Lives Matter is a hate group against policemen," the entire class, including the teacher, turned to me for reaction.

It was the worst moment of my high school experience. As the only black student in class, I felt belittled and publicly insulted, unable to fight for myself and for my face. This experience underlined that even in our relatively progressive society, clear distinctions based on the color of your skin still exist.

The moment my class picked the topic of police brutality for an issue discussion this year, I knew I was in deep trouble. I knew no matter how much research I did, no matter how well thought-out my arguments were, there wasn't much I could do. There was no way I could stand up for an entire population.

Later, when we were discussing campaign finance, I said we should get rid of money in politics and go back to the "good old days when it was just the candidate at a podium, like Lincoln's time." Of course, the second I said that, another student said, "You wouldn't have been able to vote," making a clear distinction



By Marissa Abara
Wayzata High School

COMMENTARY

that yes, I am black, and yes, I am a woman. The teacher also said, "He has a point," disregarding the point I was trying to make.

In school, I stand out. I am one of only three black students in a 66-member Senate in Student Council, and I've always been the only black student in my AP classes. I see few other black competitive swimmers and people have told me "black people don't know how to swim."

I have never had a black teacher.

Friends have told me I'm lucky because I have a better chance of getting a job due to my race and sex. Almost every day, at least one white person asks to touch my hair. I'm often told that I'm "the whitest black person they've ever met." That is like saying, "You're pretty close to being white, but you'll never be white." I'm told that I look like I'm from "the islands" and that I'm "exotic looking." I don't like being asked which

of my parents is white, because it doesn't matter and it never has. I'm asked on a regular basis which country I'm from. Is it really too crazy to believe that I'm American?

When I express how I feel about this issue, I've had people tell me, "That's not true," or, "You're being too dramatic." When I told my friends how writing this piece was hard for me emotionally, one of them said, "Oh my god," as though I was overreacting.

I've had guys tell me they couldn't date me because they were scared of what their parents would think. I couldn't even make this up.

Four years of this cycle of harassment has taken its toll on me. I've tried to keep my head high, but I'd much rather lay low, sticking within my small group of friends.

People say that we are the "politically correct generation." But I don't believe it.

We still have a long way to go.

I believe we need to have more open conversations inside and outside classrooms. It's time we stop judging people and learn from our differences.

Making our voices heard

ON A FEBRUARY morning this year, I was rushing to find a seat for our daily assembly at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. My mind was elsewhere, studying for an Economics test I would take later that morning.

Then, two adults on the auditorium stage were introduced. They were from Black Lives Matter and were describing their cause.

I listened attentively.

One day in December, we had a



By Jennifer Delgado
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

COMMENTARY

discussion in class about Black Lives Matter. At the time, the movement was active in many causes in our community. I personally never paid much attention to the movement, but that day in class I realized how

uninformed I was. I felt embarrassed because, as a senior and student of that particular class, I should have been aware of those issues.

So, senior students in the social justice religion class decided to create a program on Black Lives Matter to inform our school community about these issues happening around us. As high school seniors, we should be encouraged to learn about issues that affect the **INVOLVED** *continued on page 31*

Returning to the stage

Theater back in the spotlight at Minneapolis Roosevelt

AFTER MORE THAN 15 years without a theater production at Minneapolis Roosevelt High School, the overhead lights dimmed in the school's newly renovated auditorium in January as the actors and actresses took the stage.

The thick, maroon curtains were pulled back, revealing a multi-colored set where the worlds of Dr. Seuss and Romeo and Juliet merged together, creating the play titled, "The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet."

The Roosevelt theater program had died after a long-time theater teacher retired. But this school year, after a push from students and families, Roosevelt added more programs



By Talia Bradley
Minneapolis
Roosevelt High
School

focused on the arts and hired Kristi Johnson, an enthusiastic young theater teacher.

Johnson said she is ready to share her ideas and talents with the young performers who have since been eagerly marketing their next production by posting flyers and putting video clips of rehearsals in the school's weekly announcements.

"The students make it all worth it for me," Johnson said as she sat on the edge of the Roosevelt stage, looking



MINNEAPOLIS ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

Kate Anderson (Juliet, right) hugging Sam Albright (Romeo) after the Roosevelt High School Theater's final performance of "The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet" in January.



MINNEAPOLIS ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL THEATER

The cast of "The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet" takes its final bow after a performance in January at Minneapolis Roosevelt High School. The Roosevelt High School Theater's production was its first in more than 15 years.

up at the cast, which was sitting on the set and laughing. "These kids are so energetic and excited about acting and being able to be themselves in a safe and comfortable space."

Overcoming challenges

Adding the theater program was a challenge.

A group of Roosevelt families rallied together and drew the attention of high school administrators last year. After much protest and deliberation at school board meetings and a student walkout over district funding that was filmed on the news, the district eventually provided money for a theater teacher position—and other school efforts—and Roosevelt officials hired Johnson.

Fast forward to Jan. 28, 2016, when the school's first production opened.

Kate Anderson, a Roosevelt sophomore who has performed on stages around Minneapolis and in Mexico, said performing at Roosevelt was a different experience because she felt honored to perform in front of and alongside her classmates.

"Roosevelt staff have been very supportive of the program and they couldn't have hired a better teacher," Anderson said.

Roosevelt Principal Michael Bradley agrees, saying that Johnson's hard work is evident "through the happiness of the kids and the program."

A 'focus on the arts'

Schools such as Roosevelt with a higher percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch are less likely to offer in-school theater classes, according to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics. However, after previously focusing on math and reading resources, the school has begun emphasizing the arts in an effort to engage students and boost achievement, according to an October 2015 Star Tribune report.

"Our focus on the arts is an effort to afford equity to our students," Bradley said. "Historically, schools serving populations of poverty appear impoverished of quality resources. There are generally few opportunities for students to explore the arts."

Roosevelt is focused on holistic education—tailoring the education to each individual, Bradley said. The principal wants students to grow as

Next production:

"Urinetown, the Musical"

The Roosevelt High School Theater's next production was "Urinetown, the Musical," which satirizes the legal system, capitalism, bureaucracy and more, according to the group's Facebook page. The production was slated for four public performances in April.

individuals, and believes the arts are essential to the growth of students, he said.

"Through dance, theatre, music and visual arts, students explore new ways of expression, they create, they grow confident," Bradley said.

Sense of community

As the theater program has developed and created a new opportunity for students, it also has opened the door for many students to feel part of the larger school community.

"I never felt part of the Roosevelt community until I joined the cast of 'Seussification of Romeo and Juliet,'" Anderson said. She never felt she fit in, she said, in any of the other clubs or opportunities offered at Roosevelt, other than soccer. The school's creation of a program that centered on an activity she loves was a dream come true, she said.

As the cast of "The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet" flooded into the auditorium for rehearsal in January, students entered with a warm welcome and a stampede of hugs.

"These guys are my family," senior Marcus Riley said as a smile spread across his face and as another actor startled him by jumping on his back.

Disclosure: Talia Bradley is the daughter of Roosevelt Principal Michael Bradley.

Unlimited possibilities

College Possible makes student's college dreams become reality

FOR HIGH SCHOOL sophomores, the college application process can seem foreign and daunting, but a growing program aims to help students navigate the process. This program has what every high school student needs to understand and gain knowledge about college applications, environments and resources.

College Possible, a national non-profit launched in St. Paul in 2000, helps lower-income high school juniors and seniors make their college dreams a reality. The program



By **Bayan Algazi**
St. Paul Harding High school

strives to encourage and motivate students to achieve their goals and aspirations, starting with college admission.

And it works.

At my school, St. Paul Harding Senior High School, College Possible coaches promoted the program



PHOTO COURTESY OF COURTNEY PERRY

Coach Caitlin Gibson with a small group of juniors last year at Robbinsdale Cooper High School. Bayan Algazi, a senior at St. Paul Harding, says College Possible has made a significant impact on her future.

enthusiastically. The school staff and other College Possible students encouraged sophomores such as myself to apply for the program and experience the college process with support. I wanted to join College Possible so I would be more organized and balanced with extensive support and resources.

I applied in March 2014 and had to interview with a College Possible senior coach. I was excited, not nervous. I had to answer questions such as, "Why do you want to join College

Possible? Why is it important to go to college?"

I also asked my own questions, the biggest being, "Will I be able to afford to go to my top college?" As the interview wound down, I became more and more sure that College Possible could help me discover my academic niche and the right college to support that.

In May 2014, my high school advisory teacher handed me a letter with the return address of "College Possible." My classmate next to me

had the same envelope, and we excitedly ripped them open.

"CONGRATULATIONS!" was the first thing I saw. I was accepted to College Possible. When I got home, I shared the news with my family. My father, who brought us to America for my and my sister's education, looked over the acceptance letter.

He looked at me, surprised and impressed, and said, "This is such a good opportunity. You are going to have a good two years with them. America has enough opportunities and resources for everyone." We all thought coming to America had been worth it.

I started as a College Possible student in Fall 2014, and I was curious and excited to have my first session with my coach. I walked into my class at 2 p.m., after school, happy and enthusiastic. There were 39 other students in the room, all hopeful that College Possible would help make our dreams of going to college a reality.

POSSIBLE continued on page 30

Signs of progress

Mpls. office focused on black males is making an impact

AS A GROUP, black male students in Minneapolis Public Schools have struggled with multiple things: Graduation rates, test scores, attendance and suspensions among them.

To address those issues, the school district created the Office of Black Male Student Achievement, which is among the first of its kind



By **Erianna Jiles**
St. Paul Como Park High School

in the nation. Almost two years into its efforts to increase achievement of one of the lowest performing groups of students, officials say

they're starting to see progress.

Students' GPAs are rising, they are engaged in class and they see the importance of education and their future, according to Michael Walker, the director of the office.

But Walker said there's still more work to be done.

"This walk is going to take some time," Walker said. "We didn't get into this situation overnight so we're not going to get out of it overnight."

The Office of Black Male Student Achievement is located in the district office in Minneapolis, however, Walker says he is rarely there. He prefers to work in classrooms with teachers and students.

A longtime district employee and a former assistant principal at Minneapolis Roosevelt High School, Walker currently works

in eight classrooms, helping teachers strategize better ways to engage their African-American male students. He says he meets with students one-on-one when they come to him with problems. Walker also attends community events and talks to other organizations that also support black male achievement.

Bernadeia Johnson was superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools when the Office of Black Male Student Achievement was created in 2014. She hired Walker to lead the office.

"Michael Walker understands as a black male who graduated from Minneapolis Public Schools," Johnson said. "He understood what I was trying to do."

The office was modeled after a similar office at a school in

Oakland, Calif., according to Johnson. In the Oakland office's first four years, suspensions for black male students dropped by half and graduation rates increased 10 percent, according to a Star Tribune report.

The Office of Black Male Student Achievement started with a budget of \$200,000 for the 2014-15 school year. This year, its budget increased to about \$1.2 million.

According to the school district website, the Minneapolis office's goals for black males are to reduce suspension rates by 25 percent, increase graduation rates by 10 percent and improve attendance. It also sets goals for black males to participate in taking Advanced Placement or post-secondary courses, and to get students to

ACHIEVEMENT continued on page 31

GEN NEXT from page 9

decide how to use its resources to help students. The organization's data philosophy is to pay attention to nuances and also look for trends in relation to diversity.

"We have spent too much time trying to only understand why a diverse classroom creates challenges," Rybak said, "and we need to pivot to also understand why every student learns more in a place where they have people from different perspectives."

It's also important to break down the data by race and get beyond the term "communities of color," Rybak said. This attention to detail allows bigger and sometimes surprising trends to be discovered, he said.

"In many measurements, especially commitment to learning, many communities of color have a higher level than their white counterparts," he said. "And that doesn't show up when you just look at a math or reading score."

Two of Generation Next's partners agree that the organization has filled an important void in the community. At a Generation Next meeting focused on high school

graduation and college and career readiness in March, Magdalena Wells, director of college access at College Possible, said Generation Next has helped College Possible grow and maintain its presence in the Twin Cities, as well as given the organization funding for partnerships in the community.

Noam Wiggs, director of education and training at Minnesota Alliance with Youth, said Generation Next was "convening people that wouldn't normally be in the same room," and that its biggest impact is "data transparency (that) starts conversation."

The vision of Generation Next, according to Rybak, is that every child thrives.

"Sadly, in this community, we can say that we can predict the likelihood of a child's success by looking at the color of their skin," he said. "... (It's) the one thing that can stand between this community and greatness."

Disclosure: ThreeSixty Journalism participates in Generation Next's High School Graduation and College and Career Readiness networks.



STAFF PHOTO

Victor Cedeño, director of networks and education policy at Generation Next.



DAVID SHERMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Jones handles the ball during a game against the San Antonio Spurs this season.

JONES from page 11

My bracket is doing okay—not great, but not completely busted, so there's still some faith. (He picked Duke to win it all.)

Z: Take me back to draft night. What was that like?

TJ: Unbelievable. Once again, that is another moment in my life where I was extremely blessed and another time I will never forget and I will always remember very vividly. It's just something that I have worked so hard for and to get to, and my family just was able to really enjoy that night. One of the best nights of my life, that Tuesday.

Z: What are you looking for in the future of this organization? Where do you see the Timberwolves going?

TJ: We are all working toward getting better and improving individually and as a whole. We see winning in our future. We want to win a championship one day, and you have to take steps to doing that. So right now we are just trying to build up a team and continually get better.

'Tyus Stones'

As a freshman at Duke University two seasons ago, Tyus Jones hit several big shots, including a clutch 3-pointer toward the end of the 2015 national championship game against Wisconsin that helped seal the Blue Devils' fifth national title in school history. Jones, who finished with 23 points in the game and earned Final Four Most Outstanding Player honors, was given the nickname "Tyus Stones"—Pres. Barack Obama reportedly called him "Tyus Stones" during Duke's ensuing trip to the White House—for his clutch late-game performances. Here's what Jones had to say about how he approaches those situations.

"Confidently, confidently. Being poised is something that I've always prided myself on. As a point guard, you have to keep your teammates poised and they look toward you, you're the leader on the court. So when it comes down to those, my teammates and coaches had always believed in me to take those shots and just make those plays, whether it be getting an assist, setting up a teammate, calling a play or taking a shot, they always trusted in me, and that's big. I never wanted to let my teammates and coaches down so when it came down to taking those shots, that's how I did it, is not wanting to let them down and taking them with confidence."

Z: What role do you play on that future team?

TJ: Just a point guard on this team. Someone who is in control at all times, being able to just set up guys—I've got a lot of talented guys around me. And also scoring when

needed to, knock down shots, being able to space the floor and then put pressure on other teams' point guards. So just someone who is a complete point guard for this team and fits in with the other talented guys that we have.

PREVENTION from page 20

psychologists and behavioral specialists for students and staff.

Lott agreed that more mental health professionals are needed to prevent violence and deal with its aftermath.

“The teachers can only do so much,” Lott said of behavioral discipline in the classroom. “Many of them are trying to do the best they can do. I think the same goes for the administration. They can only do so much.”

Learning about alienated individuals early on could protect schools not only from fights, but also from more violent measures such as large-scale shootings, said Rick Kaufman, leader of the crisis response team at Columbine High School in Colorado, where two students killed 13 people in 1999.

“What kind of changes are needed? Increased attention to detecting warning signs of violence, and mentoring or counseling programs that enable schools to identify and provide support to alienated or at-risk youth,” said Kaufman, who is now executive director of community relations, family engagement



DANIELLE WONG/THIRTEESIXTY JOURNALISM

Angela Vang, a senior at Central High School in St. Paul, speaks about school violence. Vang says she hopes to see more open, inclusive dialogue, among other things, to help stop school violence.

and emergency management for Bloomington Public Schools.

Central High School senior Angela Vang agreed, citing Central having only one social worker for its 2,000 students, despite a student committing suicide earlier this year.

“We had a lot more counselors and dogs in the office for like two days,” Vang said. “And anybody who needed them could go see them, and everyone was like, ‘Oh, that was so great, that was so amazing to have those resources.’ Why don’t we always have those kinds of resources? Why do we have to wait until

something so tragic happens?”

In response, administrators acknowledge that while staffing more mental health professionals would be ideal, it could cost millions of dollars.

Rodriguez said the St. Paul district and the union recently negotiated a new contract that is “a strong step in the right direction” but falls short of a complete solution. The new contract includes \$4.5 million in spending on school climate programs that implement restorative practices; 30 new counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists and language teachers; and 2-percent raises for teachers.

Engaging students

Others point to less costly alternatives to improving safety, such as engaging students.

“If we had our students engaged and allowed for some more leadership from students, we would find some different avenues that wouldn’t necessarily cost more for staffing,” said Jason Matlock, director of operational and security services at Minneapolis Public Schools.

In St. Paul, a student group called the Student Engagement and Advancement Board aims to help students and administrators communicate. The board, which began meeting this school year, conducted a student survey on school resource officers and presented its findings to the school board in February to show administrators students’ opinions.

Lott, a former Como High School student who said he’d gotten into a few fights himself, said student feedback is especially important because of differences in cultural perspective. Cultural gaps, he said, can cause staff members to feel uneasy or threatened when students are truly only “blowing smoke.” The answer is

hiring more culturally diverse staff or training teachers, he said.

Interpreting that smoke as a full-blown fire can lead some people to view students as aggressive criminals and call for harsher punishments, such as suspensions and expulsions, which only exacerbate the situation, according to Vang, the senior at Central.

“I don’t think sending a student home is really addressing their behavior, and I don’t think that disengaging them from a class any further is going to teach them anything,” she said. “But I don’t think we have strong enough alternatives, either.”

Vang said she hopes to see alternatives that allow teachers to discipline students without criminalizing them, as well as more open, inclusive dialogue.

Relating to one another, Rodriguez said, is a crucial step in this process.

“It’s not possible to heal from conflict if we all can’t relate to each other,” Rodriguez said. “We need to stop finger-pointing and blaming, and work together with parents, students, educators and the community to come up with real solutions.”



DANIELLE WONG/THIRTEESIXTY JOURNALISM

Ian Marquez, a senior at Central High School in St. Paul, said he feels safe in school despite incidents of school violence in St. Paul Public Schools.

ROOTS from page 20

stricter policies are exactly what students need.

“Contrary to many people’s beliefs, kids who are in poverty, kids who don’t have support at home, they want structure,” Yang said. “They need accountability. They need those skills. So as a building, as a school district, we need to tighten up a little bit, we need to make them a little more accountable.”

Mending through relationships

What administration, teachers and students agree on is the importance of building relationships that help avoid school violence.

“(Teachers) need to learn all those social skills that come with (being a

teacher), emotional as well, so you can build this relationship with students to the point that they come out as the best students ever, and they’re ready for the world,” Marquez said.

While Matlock agrees that relationship-building is at the center of alleviating situations, he said that not all teachers are able to connect with every one of their students.

“Teachers have a very hard job,” Matlock said. “There’s no conceivable way that one human being can make 150 authentic connections in a 50-minute time frame each. It’s just not possible. What we’ve really been talking about wanting to do more is bringing the community in to make sure that they’re helping us fill that gap.”

For Yang, leveraging his relationship with students is an important aspect of maintaining structure in his classroom, he said.

He also emphasized that school violence isn’t as bad as people make it out to be.

“Our building in general and a lot of schools have been misrepresented,” Yang said. “We love our kids. We really do the best we (can). If you talk to any of the kids who are in our classes, they would say the same thing”

And that’s something Marquez can agree with.

“Every school is going to come with (its) set of fights and (its) set of troubles,” he said, “but that’s just a part of being a kid. It’s just part of this high school journey.”

RIGHTS from page 19
basis.”

The student has since transferred schools as the school continues to work on the policy.

The political fight

Several states have recently adopted or considered laws that would limit the usage of bathrooms, locker rooms and other facilities based on gender.

In March, the governor of North Carolina signed a controversial bill limiting transgender people to using a bathroom of their biological sex, instead of the sex with which they identify. The governor of South Dakota vetoed a similar bill in early March that would have limited public school students to using bathrooms and locker rooms that matched their biological sex.

Also in March, Minnesota House Republicans revealed plans for a similar bill to restrict transgender people’s access to bathrooms, locker rooms and changing facilities that match their biological gender.

“Children, and their parents, need to know that their safety and privacy rights will be protected, particularly when they are in intimate settings away from home,” said John Helmerger, the chief executive officer of Minnesota Family Council, in a March press release.

The Minnesota bill is not expected to go far. There was no vote during an April House committee hearing, and the Democratic-run Senate is unlikely to support it. Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton also said he would veto the bill if it ended up on his desk.

“Current proposals to enshrine such measures of discrimination in our state laws are appalling,” Dayton said in an April press release, “and they are wrong.”

VIRAL from page 22
important for reaching students raised in violence-prone environments and in a culture where fighting essentially becomes social media entertainment, according to experts.

“If my parents physically fight or my dad hits my mom in order to get her to do what he wants, then I, in turn, learn a dynamic of power and control: ‘I hit people to get them to do what I want,’” Cotton said. “And

STUDENT PROFILE from page 22
Programs, a nonprofit organization devoted to providing students with international experiences. Denti wanted to study in an English-speaking country. But because the United States was a popular request, he thought he would most likely end up in Canada, his second preference.

“I wanted to go to the USA, but literally everyone wanted to go there,” he said. “So I was like, ‘I’m never going to do that.’”
But in July 2015, Denti was asleep when his housekeeper woke him and told him that an email had been sent to his mother with good news: he was going to America. A Coon Rapids family had chosen Denti to be their year-long guest, and he would attend Coon Rapids High School for his junior year.

“I was jumping around,” he said. “I found out and I was like ‘Oh, perfect!’”

Studying abroad at Coon Rapids
Denti is one of a small handful of international students accepted at Coon Rapids through exchange programs each year. Sue Melander, a counselor and the foreign exchange program coordinator at Coon Rapids High School, said that in her 29 years, she’s seen students come from all over, including Asia, Russia, western Europe and South America.

“We’re tending to see more variety in the locations that our students come from,” she said.

Only a number of foreign exchange programs are approved by the school, according to Melander. Students must go through a program to obtain a student visa to study up to a year at Coon Rapids, Melander

hitting in the classroom becomes bullying in the bathroom, and bullying in the bathroom can often lead to robbery and these gang fights that we’re seeing, gang involvement, and it just exacerbates from there.”

Morris, the freshman, said suspending students who fight isn’t the answer. She also urged groups involved in fighting to go to counseling to work through their issues—instead of fighting.

said. Program administrators pair the students up with a host family and the school district.

Students and their families pay out of pocket for the students’ stay. Denti’s trip cost \$50,000, he said.

Students who can afford the experience can benefit greatly from it, according to Melander.

“For the kids who come here, they realize that having English will be an advantage for them in life,” Melander said. “Some of them are looking at going to college in the U.S., so they’re checking things out here to see how they’re going to make that happen.”

Warming up to Minnesota

The school day, among other things, was new to Denti. Students in Italy end school at 1 p.m., he said, where they then eat what American high schoolers know as “lunch.”

When it came to fashion, Denti also was surprised at how Americans’ style choices differed. “Shoes you wear at the beach, sandals, that doesn’t happen in Italy,” he said. “Or shorts. We dress up more. We always wear jeans and long pants, and never Crocs.”

But he also has adapted to the local culture. As soon as he arrived, Denti joined the Coon Rapids football team in order to meet new people. He did not know how to play or know any of the rules of the game, but Denti quickly became an Italian celebrity at school.

“Since I was the only exchange (student who played football), they gave me a lot of attention,” Denti said of the other players. “And they were all very nice to me. I was hanging out with all the seniors, so it was very cool.”

“I don’t like fighting, I don’t think it is a sufficient way to get through your problems, but people find it entertaining,” she said. “That’s why they record it. ...

“And I think that is kind of negative, but that is something that people do nowadays. And it’s sad, but it’s what people do.”

Denti also is in track this spring. He took a date to prom in April. He went skiing with his host family in Lutsen. He’s enjoyed both Minneapolis and St. Paul.

And he’s also traveled outside of the state.

“I went to South Dakota and saw Mount Rushmore and that was very cool,” he said. “I went to Washington D.C. and that was very cool, too.”

Although Denti had these “very cool” opportunities, he got homesick when the winter days hit Minnesota.

“At first everything is really exciting because everything is new, it’s your dream,” he said. “But then once you get used to that, you kind of have trouble, you feel lonely. Then you say, ‘Oh, what have I done? Why am I here?’”

So, does he regret studying abroad?

No, he says. In fact, Denti has bittersweet feelings about his return to Italy, which is scheduled for two weeks after the school year ends.

‘I don’t put limits on myself’

However, the strong bond that Denti has built with his host family over the past nine months has given way to a future reunion.

“My host family is going to come visit me this August in Italy,” he said, “and I’ll return and visit them too, so that makes me feel better.”

The months that Denti has spent in Minnesota have taught him quite a bit, he says.

“Now I’m more independent, more open-minded,” he said. “I know what my values are. I’m way more friendly and sociable than I was a year ago, and I don’t put limits on myself.”

POSSIBLE from page 27

We peppered our coach, Emily Johnson, with questions. What will we do here this year? How do we get a high score on the ACTs? Our excitement overwhelmed Emily, so she took a deep breath and said, “Let’s begin.” She was excited, too.

I was looking forward to preparing for the ACTs, researching colleges and finding resources for my area of interest over the next two years. During those junior and senior year sessions, I was curious and enthusiastic about college. Emily was supportive and caring toward the students. She helped us find resources and used her experience of going to the College of St. Benedict to show us how going to college is a journey.

I was always asking questions, and Emily always had the best possible answers. “Students want their questions to be answered,” Emily said in a recent conversation we had. “I want to help students achieve their goal and motivate them to go to college.”

I prepared for the ACT exam, taking four ACT practice tests on Saturdays and three real ACT tests. I learned about college requirements, majors and minors, and scholarships to support students financially through four hours of weekly sessions. I attended weekend campus visits, college fairs and other events. We celebrated our hard work and achievements. We planned potlucks and organized fun activities between sessions as a break to motivate us. Also, I gave back to Harding’s community by collaborating with peers in fall and spring service days.

Now, I have been accepted to several colleges. College Possible definitely played an important role in helping me reach this point and finding out how to embark on a great and happy journey.

MARIJUANA from page 23

“If part of the way you teach yourself to deal with the world emotionally is by getting high or using,” Collins said, “then that becomes one of your chief coping strategies and you are no longer able to deal with the world without it.”

Marijuana’s effect on the still developing brain of young people has been a point of study. While marijuana, which is legal in some form in 23 states (including Minnesota) and the District of Columbia, has been used legally for medical treatment, some studies suggest smoking marijuana at a young age can have adverse effects on memory, learning and impulse control, as well as on cognitive functions (although some studies also have shown conflicting results).

Tom Arneson, research manager at the Office of Medical Cannabis in Minnesota, said there are many risks to the developing brain, which develops into a person’s 20s. Arneson said some of the chemicals found in

cannabis may have a negative impact on cognitive function.

Marijuana also can bring out psychotic diseases such as schizophrenia earlier, especially in patients with higher risk of developing these diseases due to early child mistreatment or family history, according to Arneson.

“Things that are long-term, they’re developing in the medium-term, but you don’t see them until the long,” Arneson said.

Marijuana also can decrease family connectivity and cause family conflict, according to Collins.

He also said, in his observations, marijuana typically has a negative effect on students’ academic performances.

“What’s hard about the marijuana thing is that it is like water over a rock,” Collins said. “You don’t notice it right away, but slowly over time, you can watch the scope of that stuff go down. So you can see the trajectory of the kids’ grades start to dip slowly over time.”

ACHIEVEMENT from page 27

believe in themselves more.

But these ideas were controversial.

“Some people were happy about what we are doing, other people were concerned,” Johnson said. “Could we pull it off?” And other people thought, ‘Why pay attention to black boys?’”

She added: “My thought was that paying attention to black boys and creating strategies will help apply those elsewhere for all students.”

Black male students consistently perform at or near the bottom on nearly all performance indicators in the district, according to the office’s website.

The district’s black male graduation rate in 2014 was only 39 percent, according to Office of Black Male Student Achievement data. That’s 26 percent lower than white male students in the same year.

Progress is gradual, Walker said, noting that it could take the office 15 to 20 years to change students’ and community members’ beliefs

and mindsets. Walker said black male students’ GPAs and graduation rates are showing signs of improvement (the office was unable to provide specific data before this article was published).

According to a May 2015 KARE 11 report, signs of progress showed in the district during the 2014-15 school year: days missed due to suspensions dropped 47 percent for African-American males, the percentage of African-American male students suspended was down 3 percent, and the African-American male graduation rate increased 4 percent, among other things.

“We are starting to see students understanding and acknowledging being a part of the educational system,” Walker said. “They’re engaged in the learning process. We’re hearing from them that they’re getting moral support, that they’re a part of this movement.”

He added: “Attendance and GPA will take a little bit longer to tame, but in the short term we have seen GPA changes.”

Students see marijuana as ‘unharmful’

Yet more and more students are seeing marijuana as an unharmed drug. The National Institute on Drug Abuse study found that only 31.9 percent of high school seniors believe regular use of marijuana could be harmful, the lowest percentage to date.

Some students are aware of the risks and still choose to smoke. Jacob said he was aware of the risks, but that he preferred to live his life how he chose. He also said he wasn’t planning to stop smoking marijuana until it was absolutely in his best interest.

Sarah said she would likely take breaks in the future because marijuana triggers her anxiety. And Michael said he would likely continue to smoke until he learned to deal with stress better.

“I feel like at some point I’ll reach an emotional maturity where I won’t really need it anymore,” he said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Michael Waker, the director of the Office of Black Male Student Achievement in Minneapolis Public Schools. Walker says progress is being made, but there is still work to be done.

For the future, Walker insisted the voices of young black male students stay at the forefront.

“We want to make sure we have their voice at the table whenever we make decisions,” he said.

This project was not a class assignment. There was not a lot of teacher involvement. We all worked really hard to lay out the information objectively, based on only the facts of the issue, and show how, as a community, we can make a change by simply being informed.

INVOLVED from page 25

community around us. We should also be encouraged to share that information in our school. We all agreed that there are many social justice issues today, but we decided to focus on Black Lives Matter. Our goal was to present what we learned to our classmates.

“It was an opportunity to talk about black lives mattering in a predominantly Latino school,” said Sarah McCann, dean of student achievement for grade 12 and a religion teacher at Cristo Rey.

This project was not a class assignment. There was not a lot of teacher involvement. We all worked really hard to lay out the information objectively, based on only the facts of the issue, and show how, as a community, we can make a change by simply being informed. Our school president, however, did not allow us to present our project to our classmates.

The president, Jeb Myers, recently told me in an email interview that the issue was around timing. The last school week of December and the first week of January are “the most delicate” of the school year, Myers said, citing two fights during these weeks in recent years. He did not want our presentation to cause any added disruption during the last academic weeks of December, he said.

“I made a decision based on the information that I had that the presentation had the potential to disrupt our mission,” Myers said.

He also said he loved that students are passionate about others in the community and want to create change. He said that when the presentation was brought to him, he believed a plan for next steps — including adjusting the presentation for different age groups, bringing in police officers to discuss the issues, hosting an event that brought people together, and more — needed to be taken, but now understood that his “request for next steps to be added was a communication of rejection to the students.”

When my teacher told us the president’s concerns about disruption, we did not entirely agree at the time, but we ended up accepting the decision with no harsh remarks.

Weeks passed, and not being able to present was almost forgotten.

Then February and the presentation by Black Lives Matter came around. I thought this was hypocritical and unfair. (Myers said the adult presentations had already been scheduled.)

The information my classmates and I had gathered was similar to the speakers’ presentation. We worked hard to keep it unbiased. It was hypocritical to stop us but allow others to present. And, in my opinion, those speakers were far from objective.

Students should be allowed to have the liberty to — safely, of course — make their voices heard.



Join Us!

REAL STUDENTS. REAL STORIES.
ThreeSixty
JOURNALISM



Brandi Powell

The 2016 Great MN Media Get-Together

A Fundraiser for ThreeSixty Journalism
Hosted by **BRANDI POWELL, KSTP-TV**
Friday, Oct. 28 • 6–8:30 p.m.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m.

James B. Woulfe Alumni Hall
University of St. Thomas

Anderson Student Center, St. Paul Campus

For more information, go online to <http://threesixtyjournalism.org/fundraiser>.



College of Arts
and Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF
St. Thomas