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Senior Success Stories:

A Look at Some Outstanding, Inspiring City Students and How They Got Where They Are Today (Ready to Graduate!)

Eduardo Gonzalez, Monroe High School

Eduardo came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico in 2000. He entered School No. 12 as an English Language Learner (ELL) student and in 6th grade entered the dual-language program at Monroe. His abilities soon became clear: as an 8th grader, he earned high school credit in Mathematics and Spanish.

As a senior, he takes AP courses and is a Teaching Assistant for a biotechnology course. He is also editor of the school newspaper, a member of the National Honor Society, and student rep for the school's United Way campaign. He has excellent attendance and holds a part-time job at Wegmans with which he helps support his family.

Eduardo has earned numerous awards including the Board of Education's Hispanic Heritage Award for the past 6 years and the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection's Highest GPA Award for the last 2 years

This fall he will be attending [MIT on a full scholarship](#). He will pursue a degree in biological engineering and plans to go on to graduate school for his PhD, with the goal of one day being able to clone organs for medical transplants.

Maurice Wims, Wilson Magnet High School Commencement Academy

Like many students, Maurice will be attending MCC in the fall. Unlike many, he wasn't always sure he would get there.

Until age 14, Maurice was raised by a single mother, who died suddenly. His father re-entered his life and became a more active parent. During his junior year, the two went through a difficult time and Maurice's perfect attendance record was briefly interrupted. To help stay on track, he moved in with his older brother who is paralyzed from a gunshot injury he sustained as a teenager.

Despite the struggles Maurice experienced, he has managed to become a successful student at Wilson. He earns Honor Roll status on a consistent basis, is a hard worker, and is considered a pleasure to have in class.

In addition to his academics, Maurice is also involved with the Hillside Work-Scholarship Program and the Liberty Partnership Program at MCC.

He will be attending [Monroe Community College](#) in the fall and intends to transfer to a four-year college upon graduating, possibly to pursue sports training. He is extremely proud to be the [first member of his family to attend college immediately after graduation](#).

Maurice attributes his success to his desire to make his mother proud, even if she is no longer physically with him. He is very thankful for the support of his father and brother and other extended family members who have made his success possible.

Enoch Henry, Global Media Arts High School at Franklin.

Referred by his peers as "The Gentle Giant", Enoch has overcome significant personal trials and tribulations and is a true example of resilience. He experienced a lack of support at home and was told repeatedly that he would not make it through school. At one point he contemplated dropping out. However, he continued his studies, worked hard each day with his teachers, and came to school even on days that were some of his lowest.

He maintains perfect attendance and throughout the school year has held an above average GPA, including a 3.1 during the marking period in which he faced being evicted by his guardian. Although Enoch suffered low self-esteem, he always sought out his teachers and counselor for assistance with maintaining his grades.

Enoch discovered that his true passion is the medical field and has undertaken a Youth Apprenticeship at the University of Rochester. He creates web-based projects and conducts research for the lead doctor. He has been offered the opportunity to work in the summer Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) for students interested in the biomedical and health fields. Enoch will attend seminars dealing with current topics in biomedical research. His goals include attending the [University of Rochester](#), majoring in Pre-Med, and ultimately becoming a Doctor of Sports Medicine.

Jensen Caraballo, Thomas Jefferson High School

Jensen is a very determined, bright and inspirational young man. Bound to a wheelchair most of his life, battling life threatening illnesses, being in and out of the hospital and not knowing who would care for him on a daily basis, Jensen and his school family refused to give up on his dream of graduating from high school. This year, he will be graduating 16th in a class of 110 with an overall GPA of 3.68. At graduation, he will receive the 2009 Richard J. Masters Scholarship for his academic success and personal determination.

At Jefferson, Jensen is the "cool dude" in the wheelchair who always manages to make other people feel better; he is an incredible role model for everyone who encounters him. He has taken a full academic load throughout high school and has been on the Highest or High Honor Roll every marking period. He loves computers and plans on attending [Monroe Community College](#) in the fall, majoring in Computer Science.

Living on his own in an assisted living situation, Jensen coordinates all of his social networks and services with his case manager by himself for himself. He is his own advocate and understands that, regardless of any hardship, one must continue to fight through the adversity and reach his best potential. According to Jefferson Principal Mary Andrecolich-Diaz, "Jensen possesses the values that we strive to instill in all students."

Elliott Powless, School of Imaging & Information Technology at Edison

A media/video major, Elliott has won first place in the Poetry Slam Competition at Edison and subsequently earned a spot on the Roc-City Poetry Slam team in 2007 and 2008. As a member of the team, he has traveled to San Diego, New York City and Washington DC to perform his poetry in front of thousands of teenagers from across the nation; his spoken word is a powerful tool that has encouraged many students to come forward to share their own words. He has also performed on Russell Simmons' HBO series "Brave New Voices."

Elliott recites his own work, often focusing on social injustice. According to one of his teachers, "His rhythmic beat is almost hypnotic, yet his words can stop a heartbeat and send shivers up one's spine."

Elliott has endured and overcome many obstacles in his 17 years (poverty, abandonment, and racism to name a few), yet is always resilient and works to help others achieve the same. He has played a large part in building a positive culture and climate in his school, his neighborhood, and his community. For example, as a volunteer with Teen Empowerment, he has helped organize community events and became a facilitator to promote peaceful dialogue between local youth and the Rochester Police Department.

He will be attending [Finger Lakes Community College](#) majoring in Theatre Arts.

Chrystal Vacchetto, Dr. Freddie Thomas High School

Chrystal has taken a leadership role at school and in the community. At school, Chrystal began the Freddie Thomas Book Club three years ago. She found sponsoring teachers and has remained as the club's leader. She is organizing a trip to the upcoming Teen Book Fair where the group will be the only RCSD teens participating in the countywide event.

Chrystal is a member of Explorers Post 570 and holds the office of secretary. She has finished her First Responder course and is leaving Freddie Thomas High School with certification and will start with [Monroe Ambulance](#) after graduation. She plans to pursue EMT training at [Monroe Community College](#) in the fall. She hopes to someday start her own business after graduating college with a major in entrepreneurial enterprise.

Chrystal is also committed to giving back to her community. She volunteers at the Grace United Methodist Church's Community Breakfasts each Saturday. She has also spent many hours volunteering at Habitat for Humanity's several locations.

Chrystal is an inspiration to her friends and family. Others know they can turn to her for both acceptance and support. She has become a leader within her family. She provides calm and steady support to both her parents and siblings during times of crisis. Despite many personal obstacles, Chrystal has persevered and has become a young woman with clear goals in mind. She is sure to succeed in all her endeavors.

Oscia Miles, School of the Arts

Oscia is a highly motivated, enthusiastic learner who has challenged herself with Honors and Advanced Placement courses. She has made the Honor/High Honor Roll several times and is a member of the National Honor Society.

A voice major at School of the Arts, she has performed in many productions including her most challenging role: Imoinda, the leading female character in a world premier opera for which SOTA was given funding to create and perform last school year. Oscia has received numerous awards and accolades for her beautiful voice, including Best Soloist at the annual Heritage High School Music Festival Competition, 1st Place in contemporary music and overall winner in the Omega Psi Phi arts competition, and an award and scholarship from the Rochester Philharmonic League's Annual Young Artist Competition.

Oscia studies at the Eastman School of Music through its Community Education Division for which she receives scholarship money. In the fall, she will start her Bachelor's degree program at the [Eastman School of Music](#), which has granted her a [full scholarship](#).

An office volunteer, teacher's assistant, and peer tutor at SOTA, Oscia last year received the Frederick Douglas/Susan B. Anthony award from the University of Rochester, which recognized her for her leadership skills, community awareness, and character.

Ellis and Elijah Snipes, School Without Walls

Ellis and Elijah are twin brothers who are graduating after five years at School Without Walls. Throughout their SWW experience, they have been responsible and enthusiastic leaders on the school robotics team and have been consistently good citizens in the school community. Both began their fourth year fully intending to graduate but did not put in enough consistent good faith effort to complete their senior projects and their course work. They often missed deadlines, and their academic performance declined significantly. At the end of their first senior year they were feeling defeated and unsuccessful.

They came in at the beginning of the 2008-09 school year with a more clear idea of what they wanted to do for their senior projects. Elijah, who is interested in psychology, wanted to do something in that area, while Ellis, who is interested in cooking, wanted to study culinary arts. Elijah enrolled in a Psychology course at MCC and met weekly with School Social Worker and Psychologist at SWW. Ellis enrolled in a 5-month culinary arts program at REOC. Both had successful outcomes and passed their senior projects with flying colors.

These two very quiet and understated brothers have grown and matured a great deal during their tenure at SWW. They now have clear goals and a sense of purpose. They will be walking across the stage in a few weeks with their heads held high. Elijah is continuing his studies in psychology next year at [Monroe Community College](#), while Ellis will be studying culinary arts at [Paul Smith's College](#) in the Adirondacks. We are very proud of these two young men and their ability to persevere.

An Dinh, East High School

Two years ago, An Dinh came to the United States from Vietnam. When she arrived, she spoke no English. She had also never taken a music class or played piano in her life.

Two years later, An is graduating from East High School as an accomplished pianist.

When An began attending East, she enrolled in Priscilla Brown's piano class. Within 8 months, she had learned to play the piano so well, she auditioned for and was accepted as a scholarship student into the RCSD/Pathways program with the Eastman School of Music.

An has never let her struggles get in her way, especially when it comes to her English language proficiency. "She will work on what she is saying until she is understood," Brown said. "She also has a wonderful sense of humor about any problems she may have with the language."

Despite these struggles, An will be attending [St. John Fisher College](#) in the fall to major in Pharmacy. "The fact that she is going to St. John Fisher says a lot about her understanding and academic abilities," Brown said. "She is a very determined young lady."

Liasor Dima, Thomas Jefferson High School

Liasor has been the victim of poverty, hunger, civil war and refugee camps. His family fled their home country of the Sudan due to the civil war and became members of refugee camps in Ethiopia. His strongest memories of that time are of people dying of hunger and the broken hearts of their families. After many years in the camps, his father was able to bring the family to the United States in pursuit of a better life for his children. In 2000, speaking very little English, Liasor came to the Rochester City School District and for the last 5 years has been a student at Thomas Jefferson High School.

Although as a child he was a victim of many horrible issues, as a young man he refuses to be a victim and is diligent in his quest to be a person of change. He considers education "more precious than many things in his life" and credits his parents for instilling the value of education in him.

Mastering the English language, Liasor is on his way of reaching his goals. He ranks fourth in his graduating class of 110 with an overall GPA of 4.512. He took Spanish IV Honors

and AP Biology as an 11th grade student and is currently taking AP English Literature. He is also a scholar athlete, playing soccer, and is senior class president.

Liasor will be attending [St. John Fisher College](#) on a [scholarship](#) and plans on majoring in Biology. He is determined to graduate from college with a Masters and then pursue a Doctorate degree in International Relations. He would like to work in the United Nations overseeing the distribution of food to nations in need.

Vonderick Knight, Charlotte High School

Vonderick has been a student at Charlotte since 2005. Over the past few years, he has worked hard to turn his mediocre grades into Honor Roll and High Honor Roll marks. He takes pride in his work and the positive recognition he receives for his academic achievements.

Upon graduating this month, he plans to enlist in the [U.S. Navy](#).

While at Charlotte, Vonderick grew into a responsible, focused young man who sees the value in reaching for the stars. With his personal motivation and sense of responsibility, there is no doubt that Vonderick will find success in his post-graduate endeavors.

Mayet Gebereyohannes, Wilson Magnet High School

Mayet came to the U.S. from Ethiopia and entered the International Baccalaureate Program at Wilson. Not only did she have to keep up with the rigors of the IB program but she also had to learn English as a new language. For her first two years at Wilson she was in the ESOL program; by 11th grade, she had exited the program, unusual after only two years. She has dealt with the culture shock of transitioning from a Third World country to the U.S. and watching her college-educated parents take on menial jobs to support their family.

She has juggled the new American values with traditional African ones, often causing challenges at home, but she has come out of this period of growth intact and motivated. She has also been incredibly helpful to other immigrant students, making them feel welcome and helping them with schoolwork and English. She is also involved in numerous extracurricular activities including Outdoor Activity Club, Bowling, Culture Club, Track, and Soccer.

Mayet will be attending [SUNY New Paltz](#), majoring in International Relations.

Richard Santos, Bioscience & Health Careers High School at Franklin

Ricky attended school in Utica for his first three years of high school and came to the Bioscience & Health Careers High School at Franklin in June of 2008—a difficult time to enter a new district. Like many incoming high school students, he was deficient in credits earned and Regents exams passed. In addition, he was also dealing with personal and family issues that led to his move to Rochester.

Once here, Ricky made a decision: he was going to graduate on time and at all costs. His first step was enrolling in summer school to make up exams needed for graduation. Then he did everything possible his senior year to reach his goal. His schedule included independent courses, extended-day programs, lunch study sessions, doubling up classes in two subject areas, and reducing his out-of-school work hours. To date, Ricky has been on Honor Roll and is described by his teachers as a hard worker with a pleasant attitude. True to his plan, he has met the requirements for graduation and plans to attend [Monroe Community College](#).