

Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony's Destination Education helps kids navigate the road to college

By LISA ERMAK
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college I was already in the ninth grade and I didn't have the course work necessary to go to college. I was on the wrong track."

His counselors weren't pointing him in the right direction and he felt like the adults close to him had given up, so he decided to take 10 credits a year, not five, and enrolled in summer school.

"I made it through. I made it through all of my courses with As. I did because I had a plan and I had a sense of hope. I want to give students a sense of hope so when they're in seventh grade they don't give up."

Younger spoke this month about his story during an educational forum put on by the Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony and Destination Education.

His hope, as the president for the alliance, is to see students who never considered continuing their education after high school to do so and seek help.

That's exactly what Destination Education was created for.

Monique Powell is director of the local chapter of the Michigan College Access Network, which seeks to help every student in the Holland/Zeeland area achieve post secondary education, particularly among low-income and first-generation college students.

"In Michigan, 62 percent of all jobs will require some post-secondary education by the year 2018, she said. "Destination Education understands that education is a key driver of community economic vitality and individual success."

In 2011, the graduation rate at Holland High School was 69 percent, 81 percent at West Ottawa and 83 percent at Zeeland East and West.

Daniel and Maria Morales sat in the audience as they listened to a translator relay information to them in Spanish.

Their son Victor graduated this spring from West Ottawa and hopes to continue his education.

They attended the forum to gather information about the first steps in applying for college because they said they don't want their three kids to work the way they've had to.

"We want our kids to have opportunities in life," Daniel said.

But they said they've found the process to be both frustrating and difficult since they don't know English that well.

Along with a language barrier, Powell said money is another obstacle students and parents name in reaching educational goals.

Many families just aren't aware of financial options or knowing where to go for help, she said.

Powell stressed the importance of going on college visits, filling out the Free Application for Free Student Aid, or FAFSA, seeking out scholarships and working with mentors and school counselors.

In 2011, Destination Education partnered with the National College Advising Corps to place recent college graduates into the area high schools as advisers to help create a college-going culture and help juniors and seniors with the process of applying and getting into college.

Holland, West Ottawa and Zeeland all have advisers in place for the 2012-13 school year.

"Opportunity knocks and it knocks often, but preparation is the key that opens the door," Younger said to the group. "I'm talking to that person in the room who's thinking 'Oh, I can't do this.'"

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Holland — When Marvin Younger, a retired educator, was in high school, he realized he wanted to go to college, but couldn't find the right tools or help to get there, so he made it his personal mission.

"... Once I decided to go to college. I was on the wrong track."

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