

Helping Dreams Come True

Prince William County Public Schools News
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Drema Khraibani, a freshman at the University of Mary Washington (UMW) with a passion to teach children, graduated with honors in June 2009 from Freedom High School in Woodbridge. Because of a unique program, “Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Teachers (TSTT),” she is closer than ever to achieving her dream. Thanks to a partnership formalized recently between TSTT and UMW, Khraibani will receive assistance and support during her college years. TSTT establishes partnerships with colleges and universities that agree to pay at least half of a student’s tuition.

In a special ceremony on November 9 at the Edward L. Kelly Leadership Center, officials from UMW and the TSTT Program signed an agreement that will benefit Prince William County Public School (PWCS) students like Khraibani. Under the agreement, UMW will admit three full-time in-state TSTT students for four years of undergraduate study and up to two years of graduate study if graduate study is required for a student’s initial teacher licensure program.

The TSTT involvement with students begins in the ninth grade, continues throughout college, and then graduates are placed back into their communities as teachers. TSTT targets economically disadvantaged and minority students.

Dr. Rosemary Barra, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at UMW; Dr. Bettye Perkins, Executive Director and Founder of TSTT; and Dr. Marie Scheckles, Chair of the Education Department at the University of Mary Washington, were the officials who signed the partnership agreement as School Board member Betty D. Covington (Dumfries), Superintendent of Schools Dr. Steven L. Walts, and officials from TSTT and UMW observed.

Nearly 80 TSTT program graduates are now serving as teachers and role models in their communities. Tara Parker, a January 2009 graduate of St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, New York, has aspired to be a teacher for as long as she can remember. Because of the mentoring and guidance she received from TSTT



throughout high school and college, she is now a first-grade teacher at Leesylvania Elementary School in Woodbridge. Perkins calls TSTT a full-circle model. “There is no other model like it in the U.S.,” she says. Khraibani and Parker spoke of their experiences with TSTT during the signing ceremony.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Steven L. Walts brought the TSTT program into Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS), having worked with and seen the benefit of the program for over a decade. “TSTT is part of the ‘Growing Our Own’ initiative in the School Division,” said Walts. “We look forward to providing TSTT with some top-quality students that they will send back to us as top-quality teachers. It’s a win-win for all of us,” he said.



School Board member Betty D. Covington (Dumfries), said she had worked many years with UMW during her 27 years as a principal. “I was always delighted with the [UMW] student teachers in my schools. They were so well trained and so enthusiastic.”

PWCS is the first school division to bring TSTT into Virginia, Perkins said. TSTT, PWCS, and George Mason University began working with high school students interested in teaching in December 2006. UMW is the second university in Virginia to collaborate with TSTT, and the 23rd university in the country.

“TSTT tackles the critical [teacher] retention problem across the country,” said Perkins. One-third of new teachers leave the field after three years, and one-half of them leave in five years, she pointed out. “The coming and going of teachers is disruptive to schools. Ninety percent of TSTT teachers are staying beyond the five years because of the mentoring that is done by TSTT and the schools where the teachers are placed,” she said.

UMW, which was founded as a teacher’s college, “is proud to partner with TSTT,” said Dr. Martin Wilder, Dean of Enrollment and Student Services. “The UMW goal is to have a campus that is diverse and reflects the broader community, and the TSTT program makes this possible,” said Wilder, adding that he knows “how essential it is to build the pipeline...[this partnership] will guarantee these young people a position in the classroom.”



“The TSTT program ensures that economically challenged and culturally diverse students are given equal opportunity to become teachers and leaders in their own schools and communities,” shared Amy White, director of Human Resources. “Being a teacher is one of the best things to do in life,” said White, a former elementary school teacher and principal. “It is an opportunity to bring joy and beauty and new learning and delight into the hearts of young people in their years of greatest curiosity. The icing on the cake is that the TSTT students will come back and teach [PWCS] children,” she said.

In a few short years Drema Khraibani will likely walk into a PWCS classroom fulfilling her dream. She will come with high recommendations from her principal at Freedom High School, Inez Bryant. “I remember Drema as a student at Freedom. She was a very dedicated student in both her academic and athletic achievements. Her personality, passion, and genuine love for others will make her an excellent teaching candidate,” said Bryant.