2015

Taking Initiative

Brooke Warner

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/forum

Part of the Civic and Community Engagement Commons, Community-Based Learning Commons, Journalism Studies Commons, Nonfiction Commons, Other Arts and Humanities Commons, Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons, Photography Commons, and the Publishing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/forum/vol2015/iss2/3
Twice a week, Johnathan Bean, a senior at Huguenot High School, does not board the bus after school with the rest of his classmates. After the final bell rings, he strolls into another full classroom and plops his bag onto a table in the front row. Today his shirt reads “Babe Magnet.” He is all smiles as he jokes around with his friend, then settles down to flip through a booklet of math problems.

Bean has high hopes for college next year: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, University of Virginia, or James Madison University. He is confident, but the only thing standing in the way of his dream school is his score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

The SAT is a national test to gauge college readiness, used by many colleges as a factor for admissions. Bean has taken the SAT three times, but found that the last time his score improved significantly. What made the difference? He started attending the tutoring sessions provided by the SAT Initiative, a program designed “to provide ambitious students, who demonstrate commitment to improving their SAT scores, with free, quality preparation led by local college students,” according to the Initiative’s website.

The SAT Initiative was started this year by University of Richmond senior, Liam Mulcahy, after he noticed a 600-point discrepancy in scores private and public schools in the city of Richmond. To start, Mulcahy called all nearby public schools. “Liam’s enthusiasm is what really sold me. His hard work and dedication are an inspiration in itself,” (Zymora Scott, head guidance counselor at Huguenot High school, said).

The SAT Initiative has recently moved into Armstrong High School and John Marshall High School as well.

Most days, there are about five tutors from University of Richmond and 25 Huguenot students. The group meets Monday through Thursday after school for an hour. Scott spread the word about the program to the whole senior class at Huguenot, believing that “every time assistance is offered in the context of improving a child’s ability to continue on in their education is a great opportunity.”

Unfortunately, many students who would like to attend cannot because of scheduling and

“Liam’s enthusiasm is what really sold me. His hard work and dedication are an inspiration in itself.”

- Zymora Scott, Head Guidance Counselor at Huguenot High school.
transportation issues. The Initiative and Huguenot are moving toward solutions, though, with activities buses running after school and tutoring hours extending into the school day.

Both the tutors and students have seen improvement. Huguenot senior Kennedy Tatum, working quietly in the back corner, remarked that the tutors excel at explaining problems in different ways. This is something that she does not observe often in her classes. Although she usually struggles with math, she noticed that it has been getting easier. She hopes to attend University of Richmond next year.

One tutor, Richmond freshman Najwa Labban, has attended every session so far. She felt lucky enough to be prepared for the SAT, and wants to return the favor. “I’ve gotten to know the students well. They all know me by name, have my phone number, and text me if they have any questions,” she said. “It’s a great atmosphere, and the kids are really opening up to it.” When given the option, several kids will choose to be in her group every time. Bean’s favorite part of the program is his tutor, Labban. Right now, the group is focusing on the math section of the SAT. A typical session includes a snack, then breaking up into small groups to work through problems on a math practice test. Huguenot senior and Bean’s partner in crime, Monte Nedrick, said with a hint of incredulity, “I took a practice SAT, and I didn’t know anything. Then, I took the real SAT and it was the same type of questions.” This is why the Initiative aims to teach students the types of questions, making them less overwhelming and confusing. The key to the test is tricks to the math, how to approach the reading, and realizing that the writing is tricky.

Mulcahy is optimistic for the future of the program. “Some students are truly matching the program with what they need, and we’re doing a good job of adapting. I’m really seeing a new sense of hope, of belief in themselves, of enthusiasm. I think a lot of kids will surprise themselves with how well they do.” Students are eagerly waiting for the results from the Nov. 8 test.

“It’s a great atmosphere, and the kids are really opening up to it.”

– Najwa Labban, Tutor

“I’m really seeing a new sense of hope, of belief in themselves, of enthusiasm. I think a lot of kids will surprise themselves with how well they do.”

– Liam Mulcahy, Founder of the SAT Initiative