

CAREER & EDUCATION



Saquana Peterson, a 7th grader at Vernon Elementary in north-east Portland, earns a \$1,000 scholarship from the Oregon College Savings Plan.

College Dreams Start Early

The Oregon College Savings Plan recently awarded \$1,000 college savings accounts to 15 families in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Columbia Northwest program. The awards were designed to help families realize their children's full potential and start thinking about college.

Among the winners from Portland were Tasha Bilbrew, an 11th grader at Benson; Daniella Cabello-Martinez, a 6th grader at Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy; Isaiah Mortensen, an 8th grader at Trillium Charter School; and Saquana Peterson, a 7th grader at Vernon Elementary.

Working with their mentors to describe what they hope to achieve

after college, the students used a number of creative formats to tell their stories, including web links, video raps, essays, poems and books.

The Oregon College Savings Plan works to educate the public that with good planning, funding a college education can be easier to achieve by starting with small investments that can grow substantially when it comes time for children to consider college.

The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters is to provide children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better, forever.

Loan Debt

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Senate Democrats would cover the \$6 billion cost of the bill by closing some tax loopholes on high earners. Republicans continue to balk at any perceived tax hikes for the rich and have made a counter-proposal to cut funding for a preventive health initiative that is part of President Obama's 2010 Health Care plan.

Last week, on the same day that student loan debt reached the \$1 trillion mark, Senate Republicans blocked a vote to extend the 3.4 percent interest rate on student loans for another year.

I am reminded of an old African proverb: "When elephants fight, the grass suffers." Thousands of low-income students and their families are suffering while the two sides in Congress engage in ideological warfare.

College graduation is as important to our national security as a strong military. But when it comes to funding, education seems to always take a back seat to war. One wonders how much graduation rates for African Americans and Hispanics would rise if they did not have to overcome the added economic barrier of high student loan debt.

Marc Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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