

Program gives sophomore an edge

Fund helps talented students to grow

Amanda McElfresh

One Lafayette High School student is getting a head start on college preparations thanks to a selective national program.

Terricia Soyombo, a sophomore at LHS, is a scholar with the Next Generation Venture Fund, a program designed to help gifted middle and high school students receive additional education and tools to help them prepare for and succeed in college life.

Scott Greenwood, chief operating officer for Duke University's Talent Identification Program, one of the sponsors of the Venture Fund, said the program began three years ago and targets students who come from traditionally underrepresented neighborhoods and families who might not otherwise be able to prepare their children for college.

"It's designed to equalize the playing field," Greenwood said. "This can give them access to programs and services they might not otherwise receive."

Greenwood said the program allows about 125 high school students

to take summer courses at universities across the country, receive mentoring and tips on applying for scholarships and assistance in preparing for standardized tests, such as the PSAT, SAT and ACT.

In addition, the program has a component called BizCamp, in which students learn various entrepreneurial and leadership skills to help them succeed in business.

Greenwood said the program was created because there often is a misconception that smarter students do not need as much assistance in preparing for life after high school than other students.

"Oftentimes, the brighter students are left out," Greenwood said. "And these are the greatest assets to our future, and they do need the extra assistance sometimes to help them achieve their goals."

Soyombo said she has been involved with the venture fund since the summer after her eighth-grade year. Since then, she has taken online courses through Duke University, for which she earned college

credit, has participated in other programs at Duke and has received help in preparing for the PSAT and SAT tests. She also has participated in BizCamp, which she said has given her some excellent tips for the future.

"It's definitely helped me a lot," she said. "It's really nice knowing I have these opportunities and this advantage."

After she graduates, Soyombo said she is hoping to attend Duke, Stanford University, Rice University, the University of California at Los Angeles or the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and is considering majoring in either economics or psychology.

While she is one of only a few selected students who are part of the program, Soyombo said she enjoys spreading the tips she learns with others.

"The best part is that I can use what I learn about colleges and scholarships to help my friends and tell them what they should be doing," she said.

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