



YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK

A photo gallery of **Success**



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you **not** to be?"*

Marianne Williamson

Inside each young person is a story of promise and potential. Our Young, Gifted & Black tribute celebrates Black students whose sense of accomplishment and belief in themselves shines in their eyes and in their actions. Congratulations to our honorees and to their parents and family members, and to the teachers with whom they built their success.

Carole Smith

Superintendent
Portland Public Schools



Asma Mohamed Aba

Grade 12
Renaissance Arts
Academy

**"Tomorrow belongs
to those who
prepare for it
today."**

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Asma Mohamed Aba took pre-calculus at Marshall Campus' Renaissance Arts Academy two years in a row because she wanted to learn more in-depth before moving on to calculus. Both years she earned an A.

"I always get my work done and am nice to my teachers," says Asma, who has had near perfect attendance for four years and is ranked fifth in her class. "I feel like I have to pass so I can reach my goals and go to college."

Her devout Muslim parents moved from Somalia to the United States 10 years ago. Although her parents encourage her and her six siblings to achieve, Asma says she pushes herself through her own initiative. She has excelled in the school's most rigorous coursework, such as chemistry and Senior Inquiry, but has also taken a history class at Portland Community College and a civic leadership class at Portland State University.

"My parents don't have to tell me to do my work," says Asma, who speaks English and Somali and is learning Spanish. "I don't feel pressured to do it, so I just do it."

Her father notes that Asma studies too much because he sees her doing homework after 11:30 p.m. and then she's up early in the morning for more. She also has three free periods in her class schedule, two of which she uses to study and one to pray.

"This year, the teachers are more strict because they're trying to prepare us for college," Asma explains. "I kind of understand that, so it makes me want to try harder."

In the fall, Asma plans to attend Portland State University, where she will major in naturopathic medicine. "I enjoy helping people," she says.

Hibaq Adan has received only one C grade — in biology — in four years of taking advanced and honors-level classes at Wilson High School.

“I will be the best I can as a student by asking questions,” says Hibaq, whose family is from Somalia. She is the oldest of four siblings. “I try to achieve the most I can. I try to do my parents proud. I want to flip the role and support them. That’s why I work hard.”

One of her defining moments came two summers ago when she applied to be an OMSI volunteer and make public presentations. She stretched herself to become more comfortable interacting with strangers.

“I learned a lot about myself,” Hibaq says. “I was shy. I wasn’t good at public speaking. But you need to be able to portray yourself in a way that people understand you.”

In class, Hibaq is often the only student who identifies herself as a Muslim by wearing a hijab. But she attracts a variety of friends. For three years, she has volunteered as a peer tutor in math, her favorite subject.

“She embraces an empathetic kindness toward all and volunteers to help whenever she can,” notes school counselor Kathy Garrett. “Her friends find her fun to be around because she makes them laugh and she forgives their mistakes.”

This fall, Hibaq will be attending Lewis & Clark College because it’s close to home. She is considering pursuing medicine, but hasn’t fully decided.

“I don’t necessarily know what I want to do,” she says, “but I know I want to help people.”



Hibaq Adan

Grade 12
Wilson High School

“If you love it and it helps you navigate the rivers of the world, it can’t be wrong.”

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Arielle Akanbi

Grade 12
Lincoln High School

**“Even if you
question yourself,
go for it.”**

Arielle Akanbi wasn't sure she wanted to join Lincoln High School's Constitution Team. A junior at the time, she was already committed to pursuing an International Baccalaureate diploma, and playing as a point guard. One more obligation had the potential to wreak havoc on her honor roll grades.

“I work hard,” says Arielle, who loves to cook, dance and shop at Nordstrom. “I want to take advantage of all the opportunities available to me.”

That year, though, she helped lead the Constitution Team to the state championship and win fourth place in the national competition in Washington, D.C. All the while, she kept up her grades and juggled the competing egos of the senior captains on her basketball team — sometimes on only a few hours of sleep. It was a time-management nightmare, but she says it made her more focused, resilient and confident. She is considering becoming a patent lawyer or a geneticist.

Arielle says she developed her overachieving habit from her Nigerian father. Since she was a child, she has played almost every sport, taken piano lessons and trained in ballet from age 3 until the seventh grade. When she left Corvallis, where she was born and raised, and moved to Portland in 2005, she gave up dancing to pursue basketball. When she got tired of babysitting to make money, she opened a cupcake catering business, called Dainty Cakes.

“It's about being a hard worker that can maybe be an inspiration to others,” she says. “That's what my dad has always told me.”

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Shawntrell Carson may be young, but he's one of the brightest students at Martin Luther King PK-8 School, having recently qualified as a talented and gifted student.

He is a teacher's dream, always following directions, using his time wisely and turning in his homework completed and on time. Since the beginning of the school year, he has made huge gains in reading and math and does an "exceptional" job expressing his thoughts through his writing.

"He makes sure he has a solid understanding of each assignment and is not afraid to ask questions," says teacher Melodie Adams-Hill. "Shawntrell has a genuine love for school and learning."

Shawntrell stays focused on the task at hand and rarely allows himself to be distracted by other students. He seems always willing to try new things and has an extraordinary sense of comprehension. He also participates in class discussions, usually with a knowledgeable point of view about the topic of study.

"He never gets discouraged about things he needs to learn," Adams-Hill adds.

Shawntrell's social skills also stand out, his teacher says. He tries to set an example for other students by doing the right thing and respecting his teachers and his peers. And he is a team player who extends a genuine kindness to everyone around him.

"Shawntrell always comes to school with a positive attitude," Adams-Hill notes. "I have never seen him display any negativity. Not only is he a model student, he is a model human being."

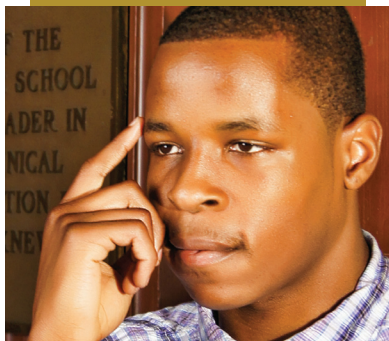


Shawntrell Carson

Grade 2
King PK-8 School

**"A model student.
A model human
being."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Nathaniel Carter

Grade 12
Benson Polytechnic
High School

**“My fate is not
based on what you
see.”**

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

One should not judge Nathaniel Carter’s potential solely by his cumulative grade point average, but also by how much he has overcome to get where he is.

“Nate made his mistakes, but also put in the time and effort ... to set them right and put himself on the path to college,” notes Benson Polytechnic High School counselor Stephanie Schares. “I think this is a story more students need to hear.”

Like many freshmen who arrive unfocused and unprepared, Nate’s high school journey started off poorly. A charismatic young man, Nate cared more about fitting in than finishing his schoolwork. His attention was focused on sports and making friends than studying and paying attention in class. His grades suffered the consequences of that poor decision-making.

As he matured, though, Nate attended summer and night classes to make up for what he should have done earlier. Even though he is considered at risk of becoming homeless, Nate finished his most recent semester with a 3.57 GPA, while also managing participation in football, basketball and night school classes.

His school counselor says, “Nate made the Honor Roll because of a determined work ethic that he possessed all along, but that needed a little polishing. He also is an intelligent, determined student who doesn’t complain or make excuses.”

“Nate has shown that he can manage school, sports and his friends in the midst of life’s unexpected obstacles,” Schares says. “I cannot wait to see what he will accomplish when he is free of these distractions.”

On Shaylah Crenshaw's first day of kindergarten at Roseway Heights, the multi-generational entourage of supporters who escorted her to her classroom let it be known: The Crenshaw family values education.

"We had been teaching her long before kindergarten," says her father, Mark Crenshaw. "She picks up stuff very quickly."

Shaylah, who loves dinosaurs, singing and chicken tacos, was an early reader and was assigned additional homework to keep her from getting bored. Eventually, her teacher nominated her for the talented and gifted program. Shaylah is considering a career as a chef, veterinarian or skin doctor.

"She is very inquisitive," says mom Regina Steimer. "She can entertain herself for hours."

Her teacher, Cynthia Wojack, says Shaylah is loyal and hardworking. "She is willing to stop what she is doing to help a friend in need," Wojack says.

At the same time, though, Shaylah gets impatient when learning new things. She's too much of a perfectionist, her family says. She prefers to get it right the first time and move on.

She generously shares her opinions as much as she does her toys, but only when she's comfortable. Both parents say they're naturally shy, as well. But those who gain Shaylah's trust are rewarded with a thoughtful wit.



Shaylah Crenshaw

Kindergarten
Roseway Heights
K-8 School

**"Goodbye, Easter.
Hello, Halloween."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Dupree Elliott-Wright

Grade 11
Franklin High
School

**"I don't judge
people."**

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

When Dupree Elliott -Wright received word of his Young, Gifted and Black award, he thought it was a mistake. His life journey, after all, has been one of instability, struggle and rejection.

"I was shocked I won anything," Dupree says. "I was like: Why me?"

But Dupree, a charismatic, handsome young man, has had the fortune of encountering adults who were willing to look past his behavioral issues, rooted in sadness and anger, and see his kind and generous heart. When Dupree was in middle school, his mother, struggling with a drug habit, surrendered Dupree, her youngest son, to the state foster care system. Two years ago, one of Dupree's three older brothers committed suicide.

"After his death, I used to get in trouble in school," admitted Dupree, now an 11th grader at Franklin High School. "I had attitude problems."

After a brief stay with a relative, Dupree ended up living with the family of his former eighth grade teacher. He got more focused and decided to take algebra twice, against the advice of his teachers.

"Some teachers thought it wasn't a good idea because they didn't think I could do it," he says.

The first semester, his grade was a C. The second semester he had an A. He now mentors freshmen and participates in track and field. Next year he plans to join the cheerleading squad.

"Dupree has made night and day changes in his behavior and relationships with peers and teachers," says school counselor Alice Headley. "He is a smiling face in the halls now, always friendly and respectful."

Dupree says he plans to attend college and become a social worker or a school counselor. "I love working with people," he says.

The third of seven children, Rashawn Fair started hanging out in middle school with the wrong friends, who encouraged him to skip school and ignore his education.

"You get caught up," Rashawn explains, "and homework was the worst thing. Then I thought about high school coming. That's the start of your manhood, so to speak."

Rashawn says his uncle and older brother made similar wrong choices — and worse. "That's what kind of helped me," Rashawn says. "I didn't want to make the same mistakes."

So Rashawn, with support from his mother, 18-year-old sister, Davisha, and grandmother, pushed himself to make better choices. During the summer, he attended Roosevelt High School's tutoring program, called Step Up, and went on a school-organized college tour during spring break. At home, he is kind and helpful to his younger siblings and makes everyone laugh.

"He is so willing to do whatever it takes to succeed," says his English teacher, Kate Brandy. "He is easygoing and well liked, but never betrays his goals to be 'cool.'"

Rashawn's mother, Tanya Atzbaugh, says his immediate family members have become a supportive anchor for each other, after years of struggle that resulted in her children living with their grandmother.

"It was hard for all of us," she says. "I came down, and I got it back together. I made him a believer that miracles do come true."

After watching cops in movies, Rashawn has decided he wants to pursue law enforcement. "I want to be a good policeman," he says, "who helps people."

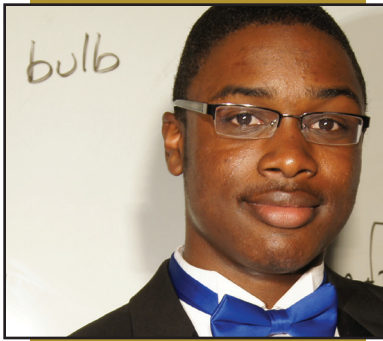


Rashawn Fair

Grade 9
Franklin High
School

"Do as I say, not as I do."

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Jaylin Freeman- Broadous

Grade 12
Grant High School

**"If you don't stand
for something,
you will fall for
anything."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

It took a seven week summer trip to Nicaragua last summer for Jaylin Freeman-Broadous to realize his full potential as a leader.

He and another American teenager organized community work parties to build a cement sports field. Pretty quickly, Jaylin had to define himself, make his own decisions and communicate only in Spanish, which he has been studying since he was 4 years old.

"It was really hard," says Jaylin, "That taught me to be a better leader and also see how little it takes to survive."

The gentle, understated teenager started showing more self-confidence, embracing his unique sense of humor and getting even more active in school. On top of a rigorous course load, Jaylin plays football and baseball, sings in the choir and participates in Grant High School's Black Student Union. He also volunteers as a peer mentor to those attending Nicaragua this summer.

"I feel like I'm a simple person, but at the same time, I think deeper about what my peers think about," he says. "I try to enjoy life as much as I can."

Jaylin leaves Portland in late June to attend a pre-freshman orientation at Penn State, where he will study industrial engineering. His favorite subjects are math and physics. He loves to read about outer space and travel. He also tap dances and plays the drums.

Jaylin says he gains inspiration from Malcolm X. "He makes me feel like I have to do whatever I want to do in the world, and no one can stop me."

His mother, Angela, a school principal, has also been a guiding rock.

"She's been through a whole lot in her life," Jaylin says. "She showed me it doesn't matter what happened, you can always succeed if you put your mind to it."

Shanice Gay's father died when she was age 8. Her mother, saddled with grief, sought refuge in whatever drug dulled the ache. She was conscious enough to pay rent, but she never stayed in one place too long. During high school, Shanice attended five schools in four school districts. This year, Shanice switched to Alliance at Portland Night High School, where she is excelling and was named Student of the Month in January.

"I've always been jumping from place to place to place," Shanice says. "My mother has always been there like a best friend, but not *been* there."

Since her mother is now in prison, 18-year-old Shanice won custody of her 6-year-old sister. They live with Shanice's grandmother. The routine is numbing for someone who never truly experienced her own childhood: Breakfast. Drop off sister at school. Go to school. Pick up sister. Drop off at babysitter. Go to part-time job. Pick up sister. Dinner. Homework. Hugs. Sleep. Repeat.

"My days are really frustrating," Shanice admits. "By the time I get off work, I am so tired."

Still, she finds time to attend her sister's school functions and visit their mother at the women's prison in Wilsonville every other Saturday. "I really don't want my sister to feel like she doesn't get enough attention, like I did with my mom."

Shanice says she wants to be a nurse because "I'm a real mother-nurturing type person." She practices positive thinking and has become skilled at accessing resources.

Explains Shanice: 'My mom always said, 'Stay independent. Don't depend on people or you will always be filled with disappointment.' Sometimes, I guess I'm over-independent."



Shanice Gay

Grade 12

Alliance

Portland Night
High School

**"Don't give up.
You've got to go
through hell to get
to heaven."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Robel Haile

Grade 11
Jefferson High
School

**“The future
depends on what
we do in the
present.”**

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

In Ethiopia, Robel Haile was accustomed to three students sitting at one elongated desk. His school did not have computer access or enough supplies. And if students couldn't pass a certain test, they did not move on to the next grade.

“Growing up in Africa, everybody wants to go to school because if you don't have a degree, the ability to get a good job is very difficult,” says Robel, who didn't speak English when he moved to Portland a few years ago.

He brings that same focus to Jefferson High School by coming to school early, staying late and spending his lunchtime trying to master his new language and earn good grades. An 11th-grader, he is a varsity soccer player and takes a college-level medical class at OHSU.

What Robel finds most difficult about his transition is missing his old friends and the effort to make new ones. “It's hard to be a teenager and an immigrant,” he says.

Polite, punctual and persistent, Robel is a favorite of his teachers, who are impressed that he completes every assignment, researches his subject areas outside of class, and regularly participates in classroom discussions. His sensitivity and drive puts him at odds with some of his classmates, though.

“Sometimes when I get a good grade, some students say bad stuff about where I come from,” says Robel, who wants to become a cardiologist. “It makes me feel bad.”

He says his grounding and inspiration come from his mother and his ESL teacher, who both repeatedly tell him to stay strong and to not to give up.

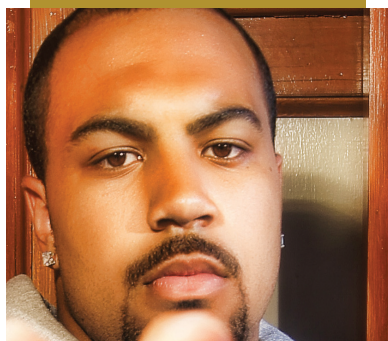
“In America, you get a second chance,” Robel says. “So I don't want to miss my second chance and get distracted by little stuff people say.”

Daniel Halverson has played on Grant High School's varsity football team since the ninth grade. During the 2010 season, he was the team captain and was actively recruited by several colleges and universities.

He is just as impressive as a competitor in academics. He consistently holds himself, and those around him, to high standards, both in the way he behaves as well as how he performs in school. His teachers are impressed by his participation in class discussions and that he regularly completes his homework.

Raised by a single mother, Daniel is also a good role model for his younger brother, who also attends Grant.

According to his English teacher, Mary Rodeback, Daniel "does an exceptional job of asking clarifying questions, keeping the group on task and organized, and always providing high quality work."



Daniel Halverson

Grade 11
Grant High School

**"I'm not afraid to
speak my mind."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Hamda Jama

Grade 12
Roosevelt High
School

**“Three things
never come back:
Opportunity. Time.
Words.”**

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Five years ago, Hamda Jama arrived in Portland from Somalia with no English skills. She enjoyed learning but was so frustrated with the language barriers that she considered dropping out of school in the eighth grade. She couldn't even communicate when she needed to use the bathroom.

“It was really complicated for the first year,” Hamda says. “I watched the teachers’ lips move, but I didn’t understand a single word. I didn’t give up. I kept trying, and now I don’t struggle anymore.”

This fall, Hamda will attend Portland State University with more than \$27,000 in renewable academic scholarships — and counting. She wants to become a pediatrician because thousands of children in her country die because they lack access to basic health care.

“It inspires me to be someone who can make change in my community,” says Hamda, the oldest of six girls and two boys. “I’m really glad I am setting a good example for my siblings.”

Hamda even tried out for the Rose Festival Court at Roosevelt High School so she could get more experience in public speaking and make friends with girls from other schools.

“It gave me a powerful confidence,” she says. “Now, I can talk to a lot of different people. It was one of the highlights of my years here in America.”

Hamda says her parents have only a middle-school education, so she is proud to be the first in her family to graduate from high school. Her advice: “If you lose hope too quickly, you won’t accomplish your dreams. Everything takes time.”

Mason Hawk is exceptional, whether as an academic or an athlete. She sets high goals and brings her “A game” to every endeavor.

“I would describe myself as really hard-working,” she says. “And I do not like to be defeated. At all.”

A member of the National Honor Society, Mason has lettered in women’s varsity basketball for three years at Benson Polytechnic High School, and earned a letter in volleyball her freshman year, when she attended Madison High. Her only regret is she wishes she would have run for a student government position.

“Her energetic and hard work ethic and commitment to achieving her goals are second to none,” notes Vice Principal Barry Phillips.

Mason says her inspiration comes from her single mother, who pursued her college degree while caring for her five young daughters. The family moved to Portland when Mason, the second oldest of her siblings, was a freshman.

“She raised us to have a lot of pride in everything you do,” Mason explains. “I just feel like a lot of people have potential that they don’t reach. I think that’s a waste. So, I’m going to reach the highest of what I know I can do.”

Mason works part-time during the school year at Riverside Golf Course, and full-time during the summer. She plans to pursue a business marketing degree. But which college depends on who offers the most lucrative scholarship package.

Her advice for other students: “Nobody can live your life for you. You make your own decisions. And for positive results, you should make positive decisions.”



Mason Hawk

Grade 12

Benson Polytechnic High School

“No excuses. Only positive results.”

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Rachel Katz

Grade 10
Lincoln High School

"In a land in which there are no worthy people, strive to be worthy"

YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK

Rachel Katz went to the same exclusive preschool in Chicago as President Obama's daughters. She uttered her first sentence at 16 months and commuted on a bus for hours each week to attend a kindergarten for gifted students.

A dainty, biracial Jewish girl, she looked different than many of her peers. Her defining moment, she says, was in fifth grade when one of her teachers took notice of her intelligence — which had been overshadowed by her quiet, reserved nature.

"He continued to tell me I was really bright for my age," Rachel says. "It made me want to excel at math and science and anything I could try in school."

Since middle school, Rachel has maintained a 4.0 GPA, despite a rocky transition after she moved to Portland in 2008. She skipped a grade, she is younger than most 10th-graders at Lincoln High School. She loves to read and is fiercely loyal to her friends.

Rachel studies French and Hebrew and took a college Latin course her freshman year to help her prep for college admission tests. Next year, she plans to pursue the International Baccalaureate diploma. She has already scored so high on tests that she had to create a separate email address to field the hundreds of solicitations from colleges.

Despite her impressive achievements, Rachel still experiences typical teenage anxieties about her looks, popularity and racial identity. "Sometimes I do wish I was just black or just white," she says. "I know other people react to me differently."

Rachel also has angst over whether to become an architect, a lawyer or a doctor. "It causes me great worry," she says. "I am prone to panicking about my future."

During her elementary school years, Naomi Likayi was known as the shy child who liked to draw. But secretly, she was angry. Often the only black child in her class, she was ostracized by her classmates. And her mother, who escaped from war-torn Congo, moved a lot because of family issues.

"I had anxieties every time I moved to different neighborhoods because I didn't like to move," Naomi says.

Although she was always a good student, Naomi's frustrations translated into her being rude, mean and standoffish to students and teachers. She credits settling into a more diverse neighborhood in Southeast Portland with helping her find her focus and sensitizing her to other points of view. Her exposure to theater also helped give her more self-confidence.

"There are going to be people who are going to be punishing you for no reason," says Naomi, a straight-A student. "But you can break out of your shell and become a peacock."

Christy Wheeler, a counselor at Vestal School, says Naomi is admirably resilient and has definitely transitioned into a more mature leader. She speaks three languages and is studying Spanish as well. She also mentors younger students, and her art hangs on the school walls.

"Naomi is a very positive, bright influence to her peers as well as to many of the younger children in our school," Wheeler notes. "Naomi cannot walk down our halls without some younger child running to her for a comforting hug."

Naomi says she plans to complete a college degree and pursue a career as an artist.

"I'm just an individual trying to find her place in the world," she says, "without being judged and discriminated against."



Naomi Likayi

Grade 8
Vestal K-8
School

**"I want to win
this battle of right
against might."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Julius Miller

Grade 12
Renaissance Arts
Academy

**“Go hard or go
home.”**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Poverty and adversity have inspired Julius Miller’s calm and can-do attitude. He says his musician father chose drugs over parenthood and his mother couldn’t catch a break. Julius — the oldest of his five siblings — had to accept responsibility early for the good of the family.

“My mom has never really been the luckiest person to find somebody to be there for her,” Julius says. “My dad was never really there, so I had to grow up on my own and learn on my own.”

During his middle school years, he moved from Reno to Minnesota to New Orleans, and back to Reno. It wasn’t until his mother settled in Portland, when Julius was in 10th grade, that his GPA steadily climbed from a 2.1 to a 3.3.

Mature beyond his years, Julius swears off drugs, drinking and partying, and always completes his assignments, even though he had plenty of excuses not to: He didn’t have access to a computer at home. He had family obligations. He had basketball practice.

“It’s very common for Julius to be here doing homework when I leave at 5:30 or 6 p.m.,” notes Susan Pfohman, his advanced algebra teacher at Renaissance Arts Academy on the Marshall Campus. “Then, he’ll be back again before I arrive at 7:30 the next morning.”

Julius wants to earn a college degree and break into the music industry, like his father, but, without the negative side effects.

“He’s kind of like an example of what I shouldn’t do and don’t want to be,” Julius says of his dad. “He inspires me to be the best person I can be and not to follow what he did.”

Ashleigh Miller-Hayes was so bored in elementary school, she refused to turn in homework. She also had discipline issues with students, teachers and her mother. Because she was so bright, she was accused by her peers of “acting white.” She was angry a lot and easily frustrated.

“I used to cry when I didn’t know the answer to a question,” says Ashleigh, who says she reads textbooks for fun. “When I gave up trying to fight with everybody, it was more peaceful.”

She started to turn things around in sixth grade after her math and history classes became more challenging at the Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy for Young Women. She is now taking advanced math classes and also took a liking to her history teacher, Dorie MacCormack.

“Ashleigh is extremely insightful and mature for her age,” MacCormack says. “Although she has been faced with obstacles in her life, she chooses to look past them and takes full responsibility for her successes in life.”

A life-changing moment came when Ashleigh picked up a violin. Soon after, she joined the school’s symphonic orchestra and has been playing the instrument for more than three years. She has private violin lessons every other week, and rehearsals after school twice a week. She also volunteered to help with another class just so she could get more practice.

“It was like a blessing because it’s one of the things I cherish the most,” says Ashleigh, who also likes to bake desserts and hang out with friends. “If I don’t become a lawyer, I’ll be a musician.”



Ashleigh Miller-Hayes

Grade 9
Harriet Tubman
Leadership
Academy for
Young Women

**“I’m a scholar, not
a student.”**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Jaya Probasco-Mitchell

Grade 2
Beach PK-8
School

**"Whatever boys
can do, I can do
better."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Jaya Probasco-Mitchell has always defied her odds. When she was born two-and-a-half months early at 3 pounds, 7 ounces, doctors thought she was going to be sickly.

"She came out screaming at the top of her lungs," says her mother Janel Probasco. "She's been a fighter ever since.

However, Jaya began the 2nd grade with low self-confidence. She is the only black student in her Spanish immersion class at Beach PK-8 School and just assumed other students were smarter.

"In the beginning, she was saying something like she couldn't get what her teacher was saying because she's black and the other kids get it easier because they're white," says her mother, who is bi-racial. "I assured her that is not the case and I didn't want to hear that ever again."

With the support of her family and school staff — and the release of a Disney cartoon movie that featured a black princess — "Jaya has gained a flood of confidence that has not only helped her academic performance skyrocket, but helped her realize that she is capable and intelligent in every capacity life presents to her," notes her teacher, Gustavo Molina.

Now, she thinks school is fun. "I love it," says Jaya, an only child who enjoys creating art. "The teacher is really serious about what we do in the classroom. He encourages us to work."

Naturally empathetic, Jaya often asks about the well-being of staff, parents and her classmates. When she grows up, she wants to be a lawyer "because if somebody did something wrong and they're going to jail," Jaya says, "I want to defend that person."



Eric Tamarr Stigler-Flores

Grade 7
Humboldt PK-8
School

**"Do homework.
Achieve.
Succeed."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Until a year or so ago, Eric Tamarr Stigler-Flores had difficulty speaking in complete sentences. But his speech troubles were both a blessing and a curse.

He never got into the habit of talking out of turn at Humboldt PK-8 School and he stays focused on his work. On his own, he sometimes takes notes in class to reinforce his learning. And, he tries to lead by example by paying attention, even when his classmates are ignoring their teacher's directives, cracking sunflower seeds or engaging in loud side conversations.

"I think I understand how to focus much better than in elementary school," says Eric, an only child who prefers to be called Tamarr, a derivative of his mother's name.

When Tamarr heard he could take high-school level algebra this year, he persuaded his 16-year-old cousin to tutor him so he'd be ready. He also enjoys his Spanish and science classes. After school, he likes video games and playing basketball, but only for fun. His long-term goals are to go to college, find a job he likes and move out of Oregon.

"We're really proud that he managed to keep up with the other students over the years in meeting and exceeding state tests," says his mother Tamara Stigler. "He just kept pushing himself. That's something that he does a lot on his own. Every year, he got more confidence as his speech started to develop."

Still, Tamarr remains a relatively quiet kid who doesn't feel comfortable talking about himself. "They say I'm smart," he says.

"I hear he's funny," his mother adds.

"I'm not funny," Tamarr says quickly. "I'm serious."

David Ward says he will never forget the two weeks his mother came to Faubion PK-8 School and sat in each of his classes to see why her gifted student and musician had become such a discipline problem. She also brought two rolls of duct tape and threatened to tape his mouth shut if he talked out of turn.

"I wasn't the only one shaping up after that one," David says, about his rowdy classmates. "She yells at people and chastises them. But, at the end of the day, they love her. I'm like 'You can't love her more than me.'"

Gregarious, funny and smart, David knows his teachers and his parents, Brian and Vanessa Ward, have high expectations. But sometimes, he couldn't help but be a mischievous kid.

"I'm a leader, they say, and people follow the things I do," David says. "If I'm on task, they'll stay on task. I'm not asking to be a leader, but I have no choice."

David plays drums in an award-winning community jazz band. He also plays baseball and football, and writes rap lyrics. He wishes he could play basketball but doesn't have enough time.

"We're trying to teach him his priorities and commitments," his mother says, "because he has so many things that he wants to do."

Earlier this school year, his teacher caught him goofing off and made him prepare first-graders for a school talent show by teaching them how to make beats with sticks and buckets. David's advice to other students: "I would tell them not to do all that stuff because you could get in trouble in school. But the worst part," he says with a smile, "is coming home to your parents."



David Ward

Grade 7
Faubion PK-8
School

**"Can't is not a word
in my vocabulary."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Iceis White

Grade 8
Boise-Eliot PK-8
School

**"I love to learn
anything that
has to do with
learning."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Peer pressure has helped Iceis White focus on what is really important. Her first year in middle school, Iceis was teased about her clothes and hair. She was picked on for completing her homework. She was harassed for being too nice to teachers.

The constant bullying was relentless, so she transferred schools. Then it happened again. It even got physical once. So, Iceis transferred back to her neighborhood school in the eighth grade.

"I didn't think and do and act the way they did, so they kind of messed with me because of that," says Iceis, who was given the "Content of Character Award" at Boise-Eliot PK-8 School's Martin Luther King Jr. assembly. "Really, the only thing you have to do is block them out. That is one thing I got really good at."

At home, her parents, Dion and Therisa Ragsdale, regularly encouraged Iceis to "mind your business and do your work." Therisa Ragsdale says she dropped out of school in the ninth grade. So, she expected Iceis to be a role model to her four younger siblings, ages 4 to 12.

"She has tremendous integrity," notes Principal Molly Chun. "Iceis has the courage to stand up for what is right."

Iceis wants to become a lawyer and an actress. Her bedroom walls are populated with her penciled drawings, and her journals are full of poetry.

"No matter what," Iceis says, "I'm still this happy person with a big ol' smile on my face."

Three years ago, Imani Whitley's father died. Then, Hurricane Katrina pushed her family out of New Orleans and into Portland. They moved into Southwest Portland, where Imani, then a second-grader, got the culture shock of her life: She was the only black kid in her entire school.

"I didn't want to go there, but my mom encouraged me," Imani says of Rieke Elementary. "I was very nervous. But after a few years, I got used to it."

Now a fourth-grader, Imani says she has made friends, which helped her get over her shyness. Always a focused, cheerful student, Imani works hard to finish her work. She plays basketball and was a leader in initiating an in-school fundraising drive for Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

"She tackles difficult lessons with a high level of achievement and drive," notes her teacher, Sandra Donnelly. "She maintains a positive attitude despite the hardships and difficulties she has endured in her young life."

Imani says she hasn't decided what she will pursue as a career, though she loves writing stories.

"I have a lot of things going through my mind," she says. "I'm very curious about doing things."

So far, her top choices include lawyer, scientist, doctor and poet. But she says she's also willing to consider being a fashion designer or a police officer.

"One of the things I like about her the most is she's self-motivated," her mother, Marcie, says. "She's like a perfect sister. She treats her little sister like a princess."

Imani's advice for other students is to always be yourself. "It's OK to be afraid," she says. "The reason why you're different is God made you unique."



Imani Whitley

Grade 4
Rieke Elementary
School

**"I want to make
people proud."**

**YOUNG GIFTED
AND
BLACK**



Warren Yoakum

Grade 8
Lane Middle
School

“Think ahead.”

**YOUNG
GIFTED
AND
BLACK**

Warren Yoakum laughed when he saw the notification letter of his Young, Gifted and Black award. Young, yes. Gifted, yes. But “black” is someone else’s definition and Warren doesn’t like fitting into anyone’s boxes.

“When you look at me,” he says, “I’m just Warren.”

His mother, Juanita, explained that she, Warren’s stepfather and Warren’s older brother are a mixture of ethnicities. “Our family doesn’t believe in race,” she says. “We believe in culture.”

Warren’s family, friends and teachers at Lane Middle School, all see him as a natural born leader who has been noted for perfect attendance, being on the honor roll, excelling on the basketball team and serving as a student mentor for AVID, a college preparatory class. The eighth-grader is tall and strong, but he’s also charming, well-spoken and sensitive. His charisma, ready smile and blue eyes quickly draw people in.

“I don’t know why,” he says, “but most teachers love me.”

Warren and his mother credit Lane teachers for providing opportunities for him to shape his potential. He is the school’s student body president, he is taking high school algebra, and he was invited several times to demonstrate his writing, thinking and questioning skills at teacher professional-development workshops. When he grows up, Warren wants to become a surgeon or a freestyle rapper.

“Ever since sixth grade, they’ve been picking on me,” he teasingly about his teachers. “If I start messing around, they get mad because I’m supposed to be setting an example.”

The *Young, Gifted and Black* tribute was a collaboration between PPS staff, special contributors and the community including:

Reiko Williams, creator and curator

Renee Mitchell, writer

Marquis Stoudamire, photographer

Francisco Garcia, graphic designer

Support Staff: Andrea Wade, Erin Barnett, Terry Proctor, Randy Chambers, Princess Johnson, Lorenzo Poe and Robb Cowie

YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK 2011

The 2011 Young, Gifted and Black project highlights the benefits of persistence and hard work, and the realized potential that often accompanies high expectations. It has been said that education is the great equalizer of humankind — yet, in public education as in life, black children too often face cultural isolation, low expectations, negative stereotypes and racism. All are factors that adversely affect black student academic and personal success. The students represented as part of the Young, Gifted and Black project are a small representation of all the successful black students in PPS; this year we received well over 130 nominations.

We must not minimize the significance of families and community members in the success of our honorees. They are an integral part of the success and achievement of our students. We must continue to work to create educational environments that are inclusive and equitable, and that reflect the varied experiences of the students and families we serve. We can and we must strive to ensure that a child's race is not a predictor of educational outcomes.

Reiko Williams

Family and Community Engagement Manager

Portland Public Schools