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13th Annual Take Flight College Send-Off Bids Farewell to 180 CHA Students Heading to College

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About 180 public housing students preparing to embark on college life celebrated with a giant trunk party Wednesday at the Chicago Housing Authority's 13th annual Take Flight College Send-Off at the United Center.

Schools from as close as University of Illinois Chicago to the University of Southern California were represented. The trunk party was made possible thanks to the generous support of Molina Healthcare, AT&T and the Chicago Bulls. It was hosted by Springboard to Success, the nonprofit partner of CHA.

"Many of you are receiving financial aid to help you pay for tuition, but we also understand that financial aid doesn't cover everything, and that there are a lot of out-of-pocket expenses that come with going off to college," said CHA CEO Tracey Scott, who was the emcee. "That's why we started Take Flight 13 years ago - to meet a critical need by providing students with dorm room necessities like linens, towels, lamps and pillows."

The growth of Take Flight over the years has been due in large part to CHA's nonprofit partner Springboard to Success and its fundraising efforts. CEO Scott thanked S2S for that support.

Meanwhile, soon-to-be freshmen wrote their goals on the Affirmation Board, took photos in graduation cutouts and pinned the local and national map where their college is located.

One of the attendees was Demarion Brown, who will be attending UIC this Fall. As a senior at Johnson College Prep last year, he noticed a bump on his thigh. Before he knew it, he was undergoing tests. Surgery was needed to remove a cancerous tumor.

Brown still has a way to go before he gets the all clear from doctors, but he was happy to be at Thursday's event. He is interested in entrepreneurship.

“I’m doing ok,” he said. “I’m just waiting to get these surgeries over with. But my summer job helps me stay motivated and humble. And I’m excited to meet new people and make new friends in college.”

Meanwhile, Brown’s mother, Charlene, has faith that Demarion will overcome this health crisis.

“After all this, he remains humble and never complains – he just goes about his day,” she said. “I am so proud.”

Demarion, who last year was awarded a Chicago Hope scholarship that removes financial barriers for CPS students to receive awards that cover tuition, room and board and books and fees, was especially excited about being in the United Center Thursday. He describes himself as a “sports head” and hopes to own his own sports business one day.