

- [1. Home](#)
- [2. Entity Print](#)

[Print Page](#)

[Press Releases](#)

200 college-bound students get send-off at largest CHA Take Flight event in history

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Nearly 60 schools locally and from across the country were represented Tuesday at the Take Flight College Send-Off - the largest turnout in the event's 14-year history with 200 incoming freshman being provided a fond farewell at Huntington Bank Stadium Club days before leaving for college.

Students received words of encouragement and parting gifts, as they embark on the next chapter.

"While CHA youth may receive financial aid to pay for tuition, they still face a significant gap between their financial aid award and their family's ability to pay the cost of other out-of-pocket expenses," CHA CEO Tracey Scott said. "Take Flight meets a critical need by providing students with dorm room necessities such as linens, towels, toiletries and school supplies."

The students also received a surprise - free laptops, courtesy of AT&T.

The CHA trunk party was made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship support of AT&T, Molina Healthcare, Meijer, Enterprise, and SnapChat. The event was hosted by Springboard to Success, CHA's non-profit partner.

Among the national schools represented were Spelman University, Gettysburg College, Texas Southern and Connecticut College. The breakdown of the local school representation:

- 8 are attending Eastern Illinois
- 13 are attending Western Illinois
- 15 are attending U of I Champaign Urbana
- 20 are attending Northern Illinois
- And a whopping 49 are attending Illinois State

Among the Take Flight participants was Lanya Scott, who got a full scholarship to Loyola University to study nursing. She was inspired by her grandmother, who she'd take to doctor's appointments when she was a young girl of six years old.

“Watching how doctors helped my grandmother, I want to help and inform others as much as I can,” said Lanya, who grew up in the Austin neighborhood and graduated from North-Grand High School.

Tatiana Belcastro, who will be attending University of Illinois this year, is on the pre-law track and will major in Psychology and minor in Criminology. She said CHA and the Take Flight event makes her feel supported.

“It feels good knowing there are people I can turn to when things get rough,” she said.

Tristan Smith, who won both an academic and basketball scholarship from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, said: “I’ve been preparing myself for this since I started high school. My family is real big on education. My dad was telling me he loves me playing basketball. He always told me when the ball stops bouncing, focus on education, be successful and make a lot of money.”

Photo Caption: College-bound students receive their gifts at CHA’s 14th Annual Take Flight College Send-Off Tuesday, Aug. 6, 2024 at Huntington Bank Stadium Club.