

Students Gain From Parallel Relationship - Atypical Madison Sophomores Mentor HHS Counterparts

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HARRISONBURG -

Becca Frasier doesn't feel like she fits the mold of the typical James Madison University student.

Her family isn't well-to-do. She attends the university on a full-ride scholarship through a program that aims to increase diversity at JMU and help students who might not otherwise be able to afford college.

As such, the sophomore from Colonial Heights can relate to current high school students in similar situations.

"It's definitely a parallel relationship," said Frasier, a participant in the **Centennial** Scholars Program.

Called "**Centennials**," Frasier and a couple of dozen of her peers mentor Harrisonburg High School students through a program called Class of 2013, which held its kickoff event for the year Friday at JMU's Memorial Hall.

If all involved persevere with their studies, the high school and college students will graduate together in three years.

CSP requires its beneficiaries to, among other things, maintain a minimum grade-point average, perform community service, attend meetings and workshops, and participate in campus activities.

Class of 2013 brought together **Centennials**, many of whom are first-generation college students, with Blue Streaks who participate in AVID, an academic program similar to CSP but at the high school level.

AVID - short for Advancement Via Individual Determination - is a national college readiness program for disadvantaged youth designed to increase the number of students who enroll in four-year colleges, according to its website.

Centennials can serve as role models to students in AVID in a unique way, said Michele Estes, a JMU professor and one of the founders of Class of 2013.

"Having someone else who's like you who's doing it is good," Estes said.

HHS students said their mentors have helped them stay focused and organized, but also helped with personal issues as well.

The relationship, **Centennials** say, is mutually beneficial.

"It's been a support group for me," said Keisha Rhoades, a JMU sophomore from Richmond. "I feel like I have a whole family here now."

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