Student Attends Congress of Future Medical Leaders

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10/15/2020

Cottonwood High School in the Granite School District is a long-time partner of the USU STARS! GEAR UP program. The GEAR UP program at the school encourages rigorous academic studies, provides tutoring, and supports students by removing barriers to continuing education after high school.

Will Sintyl attended the Congress of Future Medical Leaders, an honors-only program for high school students interested in medical fields. Credit: Lorraine Levanger-Behling

Will is shown with Principal Roylance and Lorraine Levanger-Behling from Cottonwood High School.

Wilkerline (Will) Sintyl, a senior at Cottonwood High School in Murray, fulfilled a dream by attending the Congress of Future Medical Leaders last spring with the help of USU STARS! GEAR UP. The Congress is an honors-only program for high school students who want to become physicians or go into medical research fields. It was established to honor, inspire, motivate, and direct top students in the country interested in medical careers. Will was one of only nine Utah students invited to attend the Congress in the spring. Since it was held virtually, he has

a spot saved at the next in-person event in Boston MA, in spring 2021.

GEAR UP helps reduce barriers to students, in this case covering the cost of the event. Lorraine Levanger-Behling, site coordinator at Cottonwood High School, said that as part of the GEAR UP team at the school, she “values the relationships we have created with many of our students.” Will came to the United States from Haiti in September of 2018 with his twin sister, Kiki, because of their mother’s medical emergency. She returned to Haiti afterward, but Will and his sister stayed in Utah, living with family, to continue their education here and pursue their dreams of attending college.

Being away from their mother during their pivotal teenage years has created many challenges, requiring them to mature quickly. They have grown to meet these challenges. When Will arrived in Utah, he knew very little English and had to adapt quickly to the new culture. With hard work and resiliency, he is thriving. He has made many friends, and is on the track team. His grades are good, and he is enrolled in the pharmacy tech program at the Granite Technical Institute this year. Will is always one of the first people to take advantage of programs offered by the GEAR UP Cottonwood High School team. He has logged 50 hours of activities, including campus visits, career exploration, and lots of financial aid, along with academic and tutoring support.

“By offering services in classrooms and individually meeting with students, we are able to learn more about the obstacles they face and become valuable assets in helping them navigate, and hopefully overcome, some of those difficulties,” said Levanger-Behling. “We were so happy that Will shared his dream with us and hope to be instrumental in helping many more students reach their goals of college and career readiness.” Will is passionate about the medical field and if you ask him he will exuberantly tell you ‘I love everything about medicine!’ He is currently thinking he would like to go into cardiology but whatever path he takes his determination, positive attitude, and infectious smile will be key factors in helping him succeed.

Cottonwood High School has been a partner of the USU STARS! GEAR UP program since the second grant started in 2017. The school is included in three GEAR UP grants, working with students in the class of 2021, 2023, and 2024. In addition to Levanger-Behling, the GEAR UP team at Cottonwood includes Jennifer Vasquez-Acevedo as a data assistant and Ashley Johnson as a GEAR UP assistant. Sharla Bynum is a site coordinator for grant four at the school, working with the class of 2024.
The USU STARS! GEAR UP program is part of the Center for the School of the Future in the Emma Eccles Jones College. The program will continue to focus on helping students by reducing barriers to higher education and building a college-going culture.

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