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Raymond School News

Opportunities Abound for Raymond High's Reach High Scholars

By Leslie O'Donnell - 11-19-12

In the midst of debates over rising school budgets and tax bills, a small group of volunteers is offering Raymond students a chance to expand their horizons and reach the heights of college education – with no cost to the taxpayer, and with no extra work for school district employees.

Reach High Scholars ranges from summer enrichment programs for middle and high school students to preparation for college entrance exams to help with financial aid applications – all geared to giving Raymond High School students the chance to attend the top colleges in the United States.

But its underlying goal is to encourage each student, whether college bound or not, to "reach high" – to be aware of the opportunities available and strive for them, and to take control of their future.

Since the Reach High Scholars program started, Raymond High has been recording the highest percentage of seniors accepted at top colleges, compared to surrounding New Hampshire high schools – including those with a much larger student body. That's been the goal of John McDaniels, who proposed the Reach High Scholars program in 2007 to provide the opportunity to today's students that he enjoyed as a member of the Raymond High School class of 1952. He went on to graduate from the Ivy League's Brown University.

McDaniels went to the RHS Alumni Association with his idea, after the Association started an RHS Alumni Sports Hall of Fame and named him to it for his basketball prowess. While Reach High Scholars has been operating as part of the alumni organization ever since, it is now in the process of securing its own 501(c)3 status.

"You have to work hard, get good grades in the toughest classes offered, do some extra things, and then good things happen," McDaniels said of the premise behind Reach High Scholars. "Money is no object.

"This is not rocket science," he added. "It involves a lot of hard work for the students. In the program's first two years, one student each year went to a top college." But with the Class of 2011, the first group to go through the whole program, seven went to top colleges. Nine did so in the Class of 2012.



Kristina Francoeur (Skidmore), Jonathan Lemay (Skidmore), Samantha Harmon (Dartmouth); Collin Spinney (Hamilton), Abrielle Webster (Simmons); Jacob Leavitt (Brown) and Ami Neeper (Holy Cross)

The message is basic – getting students to see that learning can be fun and that goals can be attained. It begins at Iber Holmes Gove Middle School with seventh and eighth graders who attend a summer enrichment program in Raymond offered by Phillips Exeter Academy. Known as the Raymond Round

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"You are what you do, not what you say you will do."
 ~ Carl Gustav Jung ~

Make your actions look like your words.

"Bullies need people to control, and when they can't play the game with you, they find another victim."

Don't become their victim.
 ~ Claire Cook ~
The Wildwater Walking Club

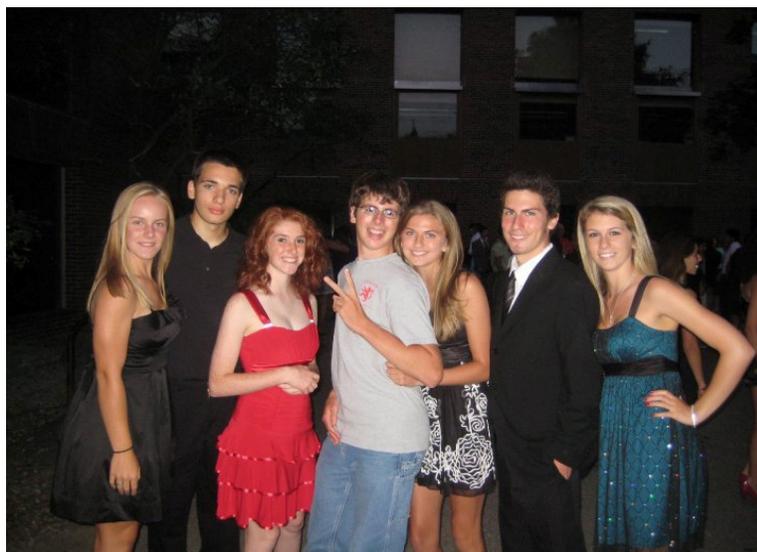
Tables, after the tables used in Exeter's Harkness teaching method, the program brings one English teacher and one math teacher from Exeter Academy to Raymond each summer. Last summer, 36 Raymond students attended.

Many of those students go on, following their sophomore year at Raymond High, to attend Exeter Academy's summer school on the academy campus, followed by summer school at St. Paul's School in Concord or at Brown University after their junior year. While enhancing their education, the students are also building powerful resumes that stand out.

That's the concept of "mud on the wall" – presenting college admissions counselors with something extra that helps a student from a high school like Raymond, which doesn't offer the number of Advanced Placement classes, for example, that many of the top high schools in the state do.

But McDaniels is quick to emphasize that "there's nothing wrong with Raymond High School. Everything we do is supplemental to what the school has the resources to offer," he said. "And what we do is at no cost to the taxpayer."

Working through the Raymond High School Alumni Association, Reach High Scholars has raised \$90,000. None of that comes from taxes. But it helps pay for Raymond students' college applications, college visits, and college admissions testing, which otherwise might be unaffordable.



Abbey Schlagen (Trinity), Shaun Gallagher (Lafayette), Nicole Lee (Bennington), Charles De Benedetto (Hobart & William Smith), Ashley Lord (Dartmouth), Jesse Hardman (Skidmore) and Jaclyn Dugas (Salve Regina)

McDaniels said the program has a list of about 85 top-ranked colleges. "The schools we talk about have significant endowments available for students, and we need that financial aid for almost every student we deal with," he said. "Need-based grants have been eliminated from state colleges in New Hampshire, but need-based grants are essential to our students."

And it's often the top small liberal arts colleges that have the most financial aid available.

While the program started small, it's growing and impacting more students. "The more kids who do this, the more other kids can't say they can't go to a good college because 'I'm from Raymond High'," said Deirdre Doyle, Raymond High English teacher and advisor to the Reach High Scholars Club.

"We started to knock down issues like not being able to attend college because they can't afford it," McDaniels said. Reach High Scholars, for example, pays for about half of visits to college campuses, trips parents are encouraged to attend with their teens.

"UNH is fantastic – I went there myself – but these colleges give the students an edge," said Doyle said. "Their alumni networks are priceless."

The Raymond High program now includes SEAD – Summer Enrichment at Dartmouth – to reach even more students. "Right here in New Hampshire, we have three of the best educational institutions in the world – Phillips Exeter Academy, St. Paul's School in Concord, and Dartmouth College – and our students can benefit from each one," McDaniels said.

SEAD accepts six students from Raymond who may not be performing up to their full potential. The SEAD program also accepts students from The Bronx, N.Y., Schenectady, N.Y., West Virginia and East Boston.

The students begin SEAD in their freshman year and take four courses in the summer for two or three weeks, in what McDaniels describes as a very "hands on" program. In addition, a Dartmouth student comes to Raymond for three nine-week sessions during the school year to work with the SEAD participants and help spread the word.

Meanwhile, the student-run Reach High Club has no entrance requirements and is a great way for information to be shared. Students talk about colleges, what different ones offer, what options are out there.

But there's more to the club – and the program – than getting into an elite college.

Jon Lemay, who graduated from Raymond High in 2011 and is now a sophomore at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., said, "A really big part of the program is awareness. That's the first and foremost goal. Parents and students need to know things – the club is not elitist – but it's about getting kids to do a bit more than just get by, and that applies to everyone."

He underscores the importance of the Reach High Scholars Club. "At first it was seen as a club for smart kids to hang out and 'be smart,'" he said. "Now it's attracted lots more kids. It's not just for kids who do really well and go to the best colleges, but for other kids to reach high and strive for something more than they thought they could."

Lemay is an example. He is majoring in English and theater, with the goal of becoming a college professor of English.

He gives a lot of credit to his success to Doyle, his freshman and sophomore Honors English teacher at Raymond. He noted that she required his English class to attend a meeting about the St. Paul's summer program. "It sounded awesome, and I wanted to do whatever it took to get into college," Lemay said of the result of that one meeting. "Then there was the Exeter summer program meeting a few weeks later." He attended with his mother, and they met McDaniels.

He was accepted at the Exeter summer program, and was one of six from Raymond to attend it that year. "That group became the foundation of the Reach High Scholars program," he said. "We were all interested in academics and going to college."

Homeschooled until the eighth grade, Lemay said he knew he wanted to attend college but had heard of just two schools – the University of New Hampshire and Harvard.

"Ms. Doyle is responsible for all of this for me," he said. "She took me under her wing. She met with me after school, and was very encouraging. Just about everyone in the Reach High Scholars program was in her freshman Honors English class."

He praised Doyle for being able to spot potential in her students. "She wants to make parents understand that their kids can go to college" in spite of its cost, he said. "The goal of Reach High Scholars is college awareness – there are lots of resources out there that people don't know about." And what he and his mother have learned about the college admissions process should be a benefit to his younger brother, he said.

Doyle underscored the support group role of the Reach High Scholars Club. It offers help when it's needed and support all the time, she said, adding that it has expanded from its initial group of about a dozen to more than 30, a significant minority of students at the school.

"They need each other," she said of the club members. "Kids need models, and when they start to see that enough, it has an effect."

"And now they're being noticed by other kids who I hope might start to think about their future as well," she said, adding that the culture of the school is starting to change. "For kids, it has to be personal. I feel like we're starting to have an impact."

Doyle said Raymond High does a great job of getting every student through school, but she's also concerned with how they are prepared for the rest of their lives. "I think that's also part of our bailiwick," she said. "We value academic endeavors, and that's not elitist for a school. We want it to become a movement to see how much you can do, rather than how little."

And Reach High Scholars doesn't stop when RHS grads go on to college. "I have pretty strong bonds with the students and we keep in touch," Doyle said, noting they use Facebook and Twitter. They have a closed Facebook page for club members only, as well as a public page.

Lemay calls himself passionate about Reach High Scholars. He serves as a resource for younger students, offers to proofread their college application essays, and tries to meet with the Reach High Scholars Club when he gets home.

"It's very fulfilling," he said. "I know how much it meant to me for someone to help me with the college application process. If my involvement can help one person go to a college where they are happy, it's worth everything."

Please notify us of upcoming community activities, events, fundraisers or meetings. We reserve the right to edit submissions to the Raymond Area News website. Contact us at

info@raymondareanews.com

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Charlie DeBenedetto is a freshman at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y. He's considering an Asian Studies major and a music minor. That wasn't always in the plans.

"When I was a freshman in high school, I didn't even think about college," he said. "Maybe I thought about community college."

He said he always did well in school but never tried to excel. "I was not thinking long term, just passing my classes," he said. When he started visiting colleges in his sophomore year with a friend, it was a wake-up call for him.

That friend, Collin Spinney, who now attends Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., asked DeBenedetto if he would go with him to a college boards preparation class because his mother was co-teaching it.

"In those classes, I'd talk with Mr. McDaniels and he saw what I was like, and he encouraged me to go on college trips and consider other options," DeBenedetto recalled. "It snowballed from there – nothing deliberate, it just kind of happened.

"I started learning what I should do, and realized I needed to do as much as I could," DeBenedetto said. "I'd never even seen a college until my sophomore year in high school – never thought about it."

He got involved with Reach High Scholars and attended St. Paul's after his junior year at RHS. At St. Paul's, he studied Mandarin. He will be continuing that language this spring, and has tested out of the introductory college course.

Like most high school students, DeBenedetto didn't have a full picture of his future life. "I still don't," he acknowledged, although he now has a path in mind. In his freshman year of high school, he said he was satisfied with just getting by. "Then I was exposed to other things, and I saw there was a lot more I could – and should – be doing," he said.

DeBenedetto, who was awarded a Trustees Scholarship from his college, is attending Hobart and William Smith for less money than what it would cost at UNH.

And he's enjoying himself. "I like it here more than I can say," he said. "You realize how beneficial it is to make the effort."

What would he tell a Raymond High freshman today? He would urge the youth to talk with as many people as possible.

"It's one thing to listen to John (McDaniels) or a teacher say you need to get good grades, but it's another to talk to Raymond graduates," he said. "I would tell him to look at the older kids who are not doing those things. I would encourage him to see the whole spectrum – it's great to see kids be successful in college but also to see what kids are doing who took a different path. From my class, seven or eight of us are at college, but there's another 68 or 70 kids. Look at everyone's opportunities and then see what you want to strive for.

"And make as many opportunities as you can for yourself," he added.

Reach High Scholars' goal is not only to get students into top colleges. "We'd consider it a huge win if we could have gotten some of the students to go to community college," DeBenedetto said.

These days, Reach High Scholars is a program that charitable organizations find appealing, McDaniels noted. "I've probably received as many phone calls that were unsolicited to donate money as calls I've made," he noted. "And we can show them outcomes." Such as the Raymond High graduates who have gone on to excel at top colleges.

For more information, visit: reachhighscholars.org.

Raymond High Class of 2012 Valedictorian and Salutatorian

By Leslie O'Donnell



Ashley Lord, Valedictorian and Abbey Schlangen, Salutatorian

Ashley Lord and Abbey Schlangen have been best friends throughout high school. So it's particularly special for them that they are the Valedictorian and Salutatorian of the Class of 2012 at Raymond High School.

Ashley, 18, daughter of Eric and Samantha Lord, will graduate with the highest grade point average in her class. She has lived most of her life in Raymond, and has attended Raymond schools since first grade. In the fall, she heads to Dartmouth College in Hanover, where she was accepted early admission and was recruited for her ability in track.

Ashley has been in varsity track four years and has served as her class president for four years as well. She played varsity soccer her sophomore through senior years – playing JV soccer as a freshman – and is a member of the Raymond High chapter of the National Honor Society, Interact Club, yearbook, and the Reach High Scholars Program. She was state champion three times in track – once for the 300-meter indoors, twice for the 400-meter outdoors. Last year she was ranked 50th in the country.

While she is undecided on her college major, she said her interests in academics have changed through the years. She favors math and science, but said during the past year and a half, she has been leaning toward English as well.

Her advice to incoming RHS freshmen? "If you have a goal, go all out for it," Ashley said. "Put forth the effort. Anything good takes effort, so give it all you've got. You need a social life, but stay oriented toward your dream." She said Dartmouth has been her first choice college for years, ever since she received a Dartmouth shirt as a child. "I fell in love with it when I visited," she said of the Ivy League campus. "I told myself in my freshman year that I would give myself a chance to reach that goal."

Ashley said she took all the honors and Advanced Placement classes offered at RHS – AP Biology in her junior year, and AP calculus, English and U.S. History in her senior year. She attended summer school a few years ago at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Outside of school and track, she enjoys painting and drawing, and spending time with family and friends. She has an older brother, Mike, and two younger brothers, Mason and Aidan.

Ashley said she credits John McDaniels with helping her reach her dream of being accepted at Dartmouth. "I met him my sophomore year, and he saw my chance to reach my goal with athletics," she said. McDaniels leads the Reach High Scholars Program, whose objective is to encourage RHS students to "reach high" at one of the top colleges in the country.

And she also thanks Abbey. "I have to thank her a lot for my success," she said. "We push each other, and we're best friends."

Abbey Schlangen, 17, is Salutatorian for the Class of 2012, and has gone through her high school years with plenty of academic and track triumphs. The daughter of Molly and Steve Schlangen, she has lived in Raymond all her life. She has an older sister.

In the fall, she will enroll at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., to continue in her pursuit of academics and sports. While she has not declared a major, she hopes eventually to work in advertising and marketing design.

At Raymond High, Abbey played varsity soccer for four years, and was on the varsity indoor track team three years and outdoor track team four years, competing at the state meet. She was secretary of her class, and a member of the Raymond High chapter of the National Honor Society, Rotary programs, and Reach High. She studied piano prior to attending high school.

In her spare time, she enjoys photography and painting. Her advice to incoming freshmen is to "work hard to find a balance between academics and social life – that's one of the hardest things to do. And do not be afraid to take the rigorous classes the school offers," she said.

"Every teacher in the building," she said, "is willing to help. Kids just have to not be afraid to speak up and to ask for help."

Abbey took AP Biology, Calculus, U.S. History and English Literature – all the Advanced Placement classes offered at Raymond – and said she had good relationships with her teachers.

When she entered high school, she favored math, but recently has found her English classes to be her favorite. "In those classes, we had discussions – I really like that," she said. "I came into high school afraid to turn in a paper, and that has really changed."

She credits the summer school she attended at Phillips Exeter Academy a couple of years ago with turning her interest to class discussions, something she hopes will continue in college.

Having a best friend to share academic and sports pursuits was rewarding, Abbey said. "Best friends can be a bad influence, but we're competitive and super close," she said.

Abbey was recruited to Trinity to run track, and said that it's going to be different not being at the same school with Ashley. But with both of them attending college in New England and both competing in track, she hopes they will get to see each other at meets during the school year.

"I know lots of people rag on the high school, but it was really rewarding for me," Abbey concluded. "It's a place where if you put in the effort and are open to learning, you'll find there are a lot of talented educators in the building ready to help."

And she is looking forward to college. When she visited Trinity, she found the students were excited to be there. "I'm excited too," she said.

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