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Dad's in prison -- but son going to college

CPS sending on more graduates; growth rate outpaces the nation

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BY [FRAN SPIELMAN](#) City Hall Reporter

With his father and role model in federal prison for dealing drugs, Corey Hardiman could easily be doing the same on the mean streets of Chicago's Roseland community.

Instead, he's heading to Morehouse College in Atlanta on a Gates Millennium Scholarship that covers the cost of his bachelor's degree, masters and PhD.

"Violence and drugs has erupted all across the Roseland community. I can look at people and say, 'I don't have to do that because I have a plan and vision for life,'" said Hardiman, 19.

On Tuesday, Hardiman was the proud face of the fifth straight year of college enrollment increases for Chicago Public Schools that outpace the nation.

Fueled by steady gains from black and Hispanic students, more than 10,000 high school graduates from the Class of 2009 are going on to college, an all-time high for CPS students.

Chicago's college enrollment rate now stands at 54.4 percent. That's still a far cry from the 70.1 percent rate nationwide. Black and Hispanic CPS students still fall short of their counterparts nationwide by 13.8 percentage points and 12.7 percentage points respectively.

But Chicago's 1.9 percent annual gain outpaced the 1.5 percent gain recorded nationwide.

"There's no miracles. If you see a miracle, don't believe it. ... These are just not quick numbers. These are steady increases — and that's what you have to do," Mayor Daley said, crediting college coaches, increased financial aid and more Advanced Placement (AP) courses in neighborhood schools.

Hardiman's story could well be characterized as a miracle — or, at the very least, a tribute to one young man's remarkable character.

In 2004, his father was convicted of drug dealing and sentenced to 13 years in a federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind.

Instead of losing hope, taking the wrong turn and being motivated by anger, Hardiman used his father's conviction as a positive springboard.

He mailed his father every report card — grades that ranked him third in his class at Corliss High School — and inspired his father to earn his G.E.D. and associate's degree behind bars.

"He was living the easy life. He was trying to make a living for us, but not the right way," Hardiman said.

"My father made a mistake, and I have to show the world that, no matter what your

parents background, you are a different person. You can go about making a better life for yourself. ... He motivated me to ... build off his mistakes and become a success. ... We motivate each other to be better.”

Hardiman has already served an internship at Loop Capital Markets, but he has bigger plans.

With Daley standing beside him at a news conference at U.S. Cellular Field, he proudly declared, “One day, I hope to stand here as mayor of Chicago.”

Daley got a kick out of the young man’s ambitions, knowing that Hardiman poses no immediate threat.

“He has to finish his education first,” the mayor said with a smile.

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