

2020 Abramson Scholars



Pernell Brown recently graduated from Duke Ellington School of the Arts, where he was a full and active participant in virtually every aspect of the school community. He played in the Marching Band, competed successfully in jazz and wind ensemble competitions, and, as a senior, was a star sprinter and co-captain of the track team. During his junior year, he and another student took over the responsibility of leading the sax jazz ensemble when the teacher in that position retired. Standing in the teacher's shoes, Pernell and his co-leader were responsible for the caliber not only of their own performances but that of other students as well.

Pernell has also been active in the broader community, providing weekly open rehearsals at the Washington Jazz Arts Institute for elementary and middle school aspiring jazz musicians, participating in Men of Strength, volunteering as a Bible school teacher for young children, and playing sax for the music ministry of a local church. He was also selected for mentoring by Cox + Graae + Spack, the local architectural firm. In addition, Pernell has spent much of his weekends, while his grandparents are at work, caring for and seeing to the needs of his 11-year old cousin, who suffers from sickle-cell anemia. When he attends Morgan State University in the fall as a First Generation College student, Pernell plans to pursue his long time interest in drawing by studying architectural design and drafting.



Ayiana Davis Polen graduated from Duke Ellington School of the Arts where she excelled both academically and musically. She took 6 Honors classes and another 6 AP classes and graduated with a GPA of 4.02. She was accepted into the DCPS Dual Enrollment program at George Washington University, through which she took both an English and a Sociology class. Ayiana plays both harp and classical and jazz piano. She participated in a number of activities to enhance the lives of younger students at Ellington; she assisted with the Freshman Lock-In as a Peer Counselor, the tradition for welcoming new students, and volunteered as a member of the Student Ambassadors team, guiding 8th graders

through the school's admission process. She also volunteered in activities at her younger sister's school. Ayiana served on student government for three of her four years at Ellington, acted as Vice President of her Senior class, and performed as the Jazz Academy Orchestra Pianist. As a senior, she captained the Elegant Elite, Ellington's showband dance group that performs for various shows and parades, including the Howard University Homecoming. Two years in a row, she co-wrote articles with the National Women's Law Center, entitled Dress Coded and Dress Coded II. Ayiana has fully embraced her dual heritage as both an African American and a Latina and proudly describes herself as a "Blacktina." Ayiana will attend Spelman College where she plans to double major in Sociology & Anthropology, and Music Performance.



Daysha De La Cruz graduated from Benjamin Banneker Academic High School with a 3.46 GPA. She is a member of both the National Honor Society and the National Spanish Honor Society. She was a member of Banneker's Softball team, which she co-managed for three years and co-captained for two. She was Editor of her High School Yearbook and served as Vice President of the Student Government Association. She also participated in the Financial Literacy Club, where students learned about balancing a budget and making good financial decisions, and Global Kids, where students learned about and discussed current global affairs. Daysha committed more than 300 hours to community service during high school, much of that time

volunteering at the Randall Recreation Center leading activities for children, some of them as young as 5 years old. Before her senior year, Daysha participated in the High School Summer Enrichment Academy, a month-long residential program at Howard University, where she took classes in Pharmacy, volunteered in the hospital, and shadowed a pharmacist. In part inspired by that experience, Daysha will attend Hampton University as a first generation student, where she hopes to pursue Health Sciences with the goal of either becoming a pharmacist or pursuing another medical-related field.



Sosina Gebremichael graduated from Benjamin Banneker Academic High School with a 4.18 GPA. Sosina took several AP classes and was named the Most Outstanding Student in AP Macroeconomics, AP US History, and AP English Language and Composition. She won the Science Fair in 2018 in Microbiology and in 2019 in Behavioral Science. The summer before her senior year, Sosina participated in the OSSE Summer Enrichment Program at Northwestern University where she earned college credit in Microeconomics and worked as an Economics research assistant. She has won numerous oratorical and essay writing contests and is president of the National Spanish Honor Society, and a member of the National Honors Society and the Mu

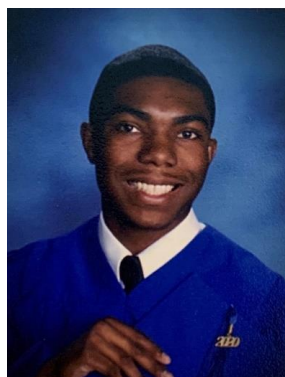
Alpha Theta Honors Society. She was on the Honor Roll and received the Principal's Commendation all four years of high school, won the Oberlin College Book Award for Achievement in Social Justice and an award for the Spirit of Ethics. Sosina was also active in many school organizations. She worked with an economics teacher to develop a curriculum, which enabled students to learn about trading and investing, and she designed an interactive financial literacy course with virtual finance games. She mentored participants in the National High School Ethics Bowl, was an editor and writer for the Newspaper Club, co-founded a Coding Club, and was a mentor and Varsity Debater with the Washington Urban Debate League. She was also a Mentor in the Women Inspiring Strength and Empowerment Club which, among other activities, works to improve participants' skills to take public action to prevent violence against women. In addition, Sosina was appointed to lobby Congress alongside the President of the College Board to increase funding for and access to the AP curriculum. Sosina has also engaged in hundreds of hours of community service. She volunteered at the Latin American Youth Center, where she co-founded a group to engage young people in racial justice and advocacy efforts. She acted as Lead Tutor and Program Manager at the Rita Bright Family and Youth Center, where she designed and implemented an incentivized program to minimize disruption and increase student engagement. She also

volunteered with United We Dream to write petitions bringing attention to the plight of immigrants detained by ICE and advocating for their access to higher education. This past year, she was a Volunteer Coordinator at Mary's Center on Georgia Avenue. Also, for a few summers, Sosina helped Ethiopian immigrants resettle through cultural and linguistic services and facilitated tutoring services at the Ethiopian Community Center. She will attend American University as a First-Generation Student. She plans to study International Affairs with a focus on Africa, and also Computer Science and Economics.



Joshua Iwu graduated from BASIS, DC, where he earned a 3.31 GPA. The curriculum at BASIS is AP oriented; the school requires that each student take 7 AP classes and 6 AP exams. Joshua far exceeded that requirement during his 9th to 11th grade years, taking 13 AP classes in everything from Literature to Biology. He followed that up with 4 Capstone classes his senior year. Most of his other classes during his years at BASIS were Honors level. Joshua participated in one summer at Brown University and also took a summer class in coding at George Washington University. He participated in the Model UN, the Science Olympiad, and the Green Team. When Joshua's not at school his hobbies include sharing his review on books he has read with his

friends and improving his cooking skills. He is a member of the National Honor Society. During his interview, Joshua spoke with passion about his interest in Robotics. However, his intellectual curiosity is not limited to STEM; the summer before his senior year, Joshua pursued one of his other interests, taking a studio arts program. Joshua volunteered in various food and coat drives and also at the library. Along with his volunteer work Joshua also has experience working as a technical theater aid and a community garden assistant. Joshua will attend George Washington University, where he plans to study Biomedical Engineering, Programming, or Environmental Science.



Mekhai Morrison-Gaskins graduated from Benjamin Banneker Academic High School with a GPA of 4.16. At Banneker, Mekhai took 6 AP courses and participated in Debate and the Men of Strength Club. He also helped co-found the Financial Life Skills Club. He was a member of the National Honor Society, the French Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta Honor Society. Mekhai won a Gold Medal in the National Latin Exam. He also won the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute Rookie of the Year Award and the Johns Hopkins University Book Award. But Mekhai is not only an excellent student; during his high school years, he spent more than 260 hours engaged in various

types of community service. He volunteered at the Latin American Youth Center, Boys & Girls Clubhouse #6, the Howard University School of Architecture and Engineering, Impact One Church, Bison Buddies and at the Shepherd Park Library. For the last four years, Mekhai has been active in College Bound. His site for the organization was the Walker Memorial Baptist Church, where he stood out as a leader and was elected to become the Site Ambassador. He represented his site at monthly meetings and also shared information about College Bound resources throughout the city. Also, through College Bound, Mekhai participated in the International Study Tour to Ghana, West Africa, in the fall of 2018. Mekhai has been selected as a POSSE scholar. He will attend the University of Rochester where he plans to study Engineering and Math.



Sahara Trask graduated from Washington Latin Public Charter School as a Latin Scholar and with a GPA of 3.3. In addition to two AP classes, Sahara took several Honors classes, ranging in focus from liberal arts to science and math. She was recognized for her Outstanding Performance in the National Latin Exam. And she participated in 2018 PATRIOTS, a Cyber Security Competition, where her Computer Forensics Investigator Team won First Place. Sahara also participated in Cheerleading and led the Business Club, where she proctored discussions about the stock market. In addition, she committed hundreds of hours to community service. Sahara was both the founder

and leader of the Red Hearts Club, a campus service organization to help the underserved population in the surrounding community. One of its projects was to raise money for a women's shelter. She was an ambassador for She Rocks The World, which organizes activities for girls to learn to use their voices for activism; this gave her the opportunity to interview three Congresswomen in a panel discussion. She volunteered at Art Stream – Perform Your Heart Out, where she helped adults with disabilities learn their lines and their moves for performances; the goal is to help participants build confidence and social skills. Sahara was also a Kinderhaus Child Care volunteer, where she worked with toddlers. The summer before her senior year, Sahara was selected to participate in the Meteor Internship, where she shadowed medical professionals in Neurology at Children's Hospital, observed surgical procedures, and learned medical skills. Sahara was already interested in Neurology and the Meteor experience further sparked her interest, prompting her to take a Science Research Methods class her senior year and shaping her goals for college. Sahara will attend Spelman College where she wants to study Biology, on a Pre-Med track.



Annia Ward graduated from School Without Walls with a GPA of 4.42. That number only tells a small part of her story. During her first two years of high school, in addition to her other classes, Annia took two AP's and four Honors classes and excelled in all of them. She also participated in a one month long CIEE Language Immersion Trip to the Dominican Republic, where she stayed with a local family, took Spanish classes and visited major historical sites in Santiago. Then she made a leap. She was one of only 15 students accepted into the George Washington Early College Program, which enabled her to take college classes at GW and to graduate with her high school degree and a college Associates' degree simultaneously. Her GPA in her GW

classes was 3.75. She is a member of the National Society of Leadership & Success, the National Honor Society, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, and the National Society of High School Scholars. Annia managed to be active in both her school and her college communities. She played Flag Football and Softball at Walls. She Co-Founded the Architecture and Urban Design Club, through which students worked to become proficient in Computer Aided Design (CAD) software and learned about local architects' offices. She was active in and Treasurer for the Future Business Leaders of America and, in connection with that, was able to participate in a Rotary Youth Leadership Conference retreat over President's Day weekend. She also was a member of the Red Cross Club to increase CPR and in the Natural Beauty Club which promotes Black Beauty on the Walls campus. At GW, Annia participated in both the Multicultural Business Student Association and the Organization of Latin American

Students. Annia was also active in community service. As a sophomore, she was a DC Bilingual volunteer, working at an elementary school helping 5th grade teachers grade assignments and engage with students. Her junior year, she was a Howard Sports Media Volunteer, and, at the end of the year, went on a one-week service and study-abroad trip to Costa Rica where she worked with other students to help create a green space in a recreation center for a Nicaraguan refugee community. Her senior year, she collaborated with La Union, a DC non-profit, to create financial literacy workshops and seminars for DC youth in order to address the lack of financial literacy in communities of color. During the pandemic, she has tutored for the Latino Student Fund. Annia will attend GW, where she has already accumulated two years' worth of credits. Annia is interested in both Architecture and Business and plans to major in Organizational Science and would ultimately like to get an MBA. Annia would very much like to be a role model as a Black entrepreneur.



Rasheda White graduated with a GPA of 4.31 from Woodrow Wilson High School, where she followed the Health and Biomedical Careers Pathway in the SciMaTech (Science Math & Technology) Academy. Her academic record was stellar. In addition to many Honors classes, Rasheda also took 8 AP classes and earned almost all A's. She was on Honor Roll for all 4 years and is a member of the National Honor Society. The summer before her junior year, Rasheda participated in the six-week Summer College Experience Program, a college, and career readiness camp, at the Latin American Youth Center for which she won the Citizenship Award. The next summer, she attended the

Carnegie Academy for Science Education Summer Stars program, a six-week research experience course in Astrobiology. At Wilson, Rasheda was a Cheerleader, sang in the Choir for three years, was a member of the Recycling Club, and, senior year, participated in the Black Student Union. She also engaged in a number of activities serving the Wilson community, including providing administrative support at the school and helping renovate and decorate the cafeteria. She tutored underclassmen in Biology and Honors Biology and also acted as a Cheer Team Tutor, providing academic support for her cheerleading teammates. Outside of school, Rasheda has been active in the In His Name Dance Ministry for most of her life and in the Circle of Sisterhood for the last 4 years. In addition, for the last several months, Rasheda has been a Youth Ministry Representative for the First Seventh Day Adventist Church. Her most significant non-classroom time commitment has been to the Young Women's Project (YWP), a non-profit that works with agencies in DC to create policies and implement programs relating to sexual education for teens, youth employment, foster care, voting rights, and many other issues. Rasheda has taken on many roles for the YWP. She has been a Peer Health Educator, sharing sexual education information and resources with her peers, with the goal of reducing pregnancy and decreasing STI and HIV infection rates. She has also been a Youth Advocate Intern. Rasheda conducted research and developed policy recommendations related to the expansion of mental health support in the DC Public Schools (DCPS) and the importance of part-time job opportunities for youth. Her recommendations have become the basis for one of the main advocacy campaigns for the YWP this year. And, in connection with that work, Rasheda testified at the DC Council Government Oversight Hearing on Mental Health in DCPS this past February. Rasheda has also worked on the Advanced Teams of the YWP. Rasheda will attend Temple where she plans to study Public Health.