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High 5: Kenwood tops



The folks at **Kenwood** Academy High School think of themselves as the little neighborhood school that could.

But this year, their bragging rights are earned, with five of their graduating seniors receiving the prestigious **Gates** Millennium Scholarship, which will completely pay for their college education, all the way through a Ph.D.

That's the highest number in any Chicago public school to win the competitive national award from the Bill & Melinda **Gates** Foundation this year.

And that put **Kenwood** in a second-place tie for the highest number of African-American students from any one high school across the nation to get the coveted award, which is in its 12th year.

"I didn't think it was real," Destinee Heknatpour, 17, of Hyde Park, said of the envelope that came at spring break. She has a 4.3 grade point average and is headed to the University of Illinois to study business and English.

"I felt like all of my hard work paid off," said Heknatpour, whose older sibling had to take a break from college after junior year because of financial problems.

The school, at 5015 S. Blackstone Ave., has a 90 percent African-American population, and 80 percent of its students are low-income.

Its graduation rate is 83 percent, the same percentage of students who go on to four-year colleges.

“When we found out, we were actually on a college tour to Harvard, Yale and Princeton,” said Principal Elizabeth Kirby, who recently was appointed to Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel’s Education Transition Team.

“The students started finding out on Twitter, then every few minutes, someone was coming in saying, ‘so and so’ won as well. It was really exciting,” Kirby said. “Proud doesn’t even capture it. At our school, our mission is college, so every student comes in knowing what the expectation is. These five kids have inspired the whole school.”

The four other **Kenwood** winners are Ahkibah Lott, 17, of Bronzeville; Janelli Barrow, 18, of Englewood; Genesis Davis, 18, of South Shore, and Anthony Johnson, 17, also of South Shore.

About 1,000 **scholarships** are awarded annually through the program, which was established in 1999 to make college accessible to outstanding low-income African-American, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian students.

“Education has always been the best pathway to opportunity, and we believe that college costs should not be an obstacle,” said Jim Larimore, deputy director for student success at the **Gates** Foundation.

Johnson, who has a 4.2 GPA and is headed to Emory University in Atlanta to study business, said the news brought relief, as well as gratitude. His mother is unemployed.

“I was overwhelmed with joy, and couldn’t do anything but be appreciative of everyone at the school who made sure I got my application in,” he said. “When I got it, I ran upstairs and told my mother, and we hugged and cried.”

Former **Kenwood Academy** graduate Inez Jones (left), a **Gates** alumna, poses with the five new **Gates** Millennium scholars from **Kenwood**: Genesis Davis (left), Destinee Heknatpour, Anthony Johnson, Janelli Barrow and Ahkibah Lott. | Keith Hale~Sun-Times

Pull Quote: “Proud doesn’t even capture it.” Elizabeth Kirby, **Kenwood** principal
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