

In the first three minutes of Mr. Miller's CCS class, Jasmine Coleman summed up what the freshmen trip to Northwestern University meant to her: "College is a whole new life. You are on your own and nobody is here to guide you or hold your hand. I am going to look at school like my life depends on it."

The trip to Northwestern was not your ordinary college visit where the high school counselor selects the top 10 students to see an admissions session followed by a campus tour about the year the school was founded and how students go sledding down hills on lunch trays in the winter. Instead, our goals were to show students what college was really like— how hard college students work to meet the high academic expectations, some of the amazing opportunities college has to offer, and the only barrier standing between college success and any EPIC student is hard work right now. We took every EPIC freshmen student because our mission is to ensure each student is ready for college success. Here are a experiences our students had during the visit.

LaWanda Walker wants to be a nurse. With the help of some amazing Northwestern students, LaWanda's started her day off with a visit to a college Biology classroom. She had two tasks: take notes on what the professor said and observe college students to write a reflection on how they act in class. LaWanda, along with other EPIC students were shocked at the speed the professors moved. Afterwards, LaWanda thought about a change she needs to make, "The college professors talk all the way through the lecture, so I have to start listening very hard so I can get in the habit of taking thoughts down quickly."

All of our students met back at Northwestern's admissions office to learn how Northwestern what criteria they use in admissions. EPIC's Deann Kimble persistently asked and re-asked about specific tests score and class rank requirements when she did not get a direct answer. Christian Yanez, Director of Hispanic and Latino Student Affairs, motivated the students to take on the challenge of hard work NOW, and to "thrive not survive in school." Keisha Liddell realized "how important grades and participation in and outside of school matters in order to be on-track to a great college."

Our students visited dining halls all over campus to enjoy the all you can eat food but also had the serious mission of having to introduce themselves to college students and ask them 10 questions about college life. AJ Little was a star, and so engaged three Northwestern juniors that they emailed us about AJ and are working to setup a fall trip for our students to go to a Northwestern football game.

Before the day ended, all of our students listened to a panel of Northwestern students of color speak on managing time to get ahead in the classroom, adjusting to being on a campus that was majority white, and all of the activities available to students. EPIC students then broke into small groups based on their career interests for campus tours and visited buildings that featured their majors. Tierra Hurt, who aspires to be an actress, had the opportunity to visit Northwestern's theater and the backstage lighting and props. The grand finale was a step show by the Sigmas and a performance from the Northwestern drum line.

At end of the day, Shameesha Pryor best summed up the impact of the trip: "I was nervous about the competition of getting into schools like Northwestern. Now I know all I need is a goal, passion, and to apply. I also see it is a good thing that my teachers didn't make honors work an option for me – it shows me they have faith in me and see my potential."