

# Seniors aim high, score big in quest of colleges

The Long Spring Wait has paid off for our three graduating seniors.

The envelopes have arrived and, at publication time, Deanna Starr plans to attend Villanova on a tuition-size grant, Jazzare Mays will go to the U. of Hartford, and Abbi Awodele will enter Notre Dame in the fall.

Despite their very different career goals, from sports broadcasting to neonatal medicine to physical therapy, these students at A Better Chance of Andover employed a similar set of pragmatic rules in their college search: apply only to schools that they would be happy to attend (with a few cross-fingers favorites in the mix) knowing that, in the final analysis, they will follow the money.

For each, completing college with minimal debt is a priority. "Everyone says do not have debt," explains Awodele. "I want to go to graduate school and there is very little scholarship money out there for that." She sees herself pursuing a double degree program in medicine and public health.

"I can be happy at any of these schools," affirms Starr, adding, "My mom says 'Don't worry, honey. I'll take out loans.' And I'm like, 'No, Mom.'"

Another thing they all agree on? The waiting has been unexpectedly hard. Early



(from left) Deanna Starr, Jazzare Mays and Abbi Awodele, sport emblems of some of the colleges they may attend in the fall.

action is the way to go, confirms Awodele. "I didn't [get] any early action or decision; I thought I could wait," she explains. "But it stinks, waiting!"

Adds Mays, "I thought the supplements [essays] were bad, but then came the waiting.... That was worse!"

With the aid of board mentor Toby O'leary and pro-bono college counselor Julia Ireland Childs, Awodele applied....*(continued inside)*

## President's message: ABC seniors and our community share the praise



▶ NANCY VOGLER

Each spring, as we celebrate our graduating seniors' successful completion of the A Better Chance experience, I feel enormous pride in them and also in their champions in the Andover community.

Abbi, Deanna and Jazzare have worked extremely hard to realize ABC's life-changing promise: getting into high-quality colleges

by attending Andover High School and rising above the low expectations perpetuated by their under performing hometown schools.

With their families' support and faith in the nonprofit ABC program, these motivated scholars arrived in Andover four years ago with big hopes. But they also were so unprepared that, as one student recalled recently, she couldn't even open her high school locker.

That's when the Andover community stepped in. Tutors secured by ABC and funded by business grants and individual donations helped these promising students to prepare for the demanding coursework they were about to encounter. Then school guidance counselors led them through those initial weeks in a...*(continued inside)*

# Getting smarter about winning admission to college

A Better Chance of Andover continually fine-tunes its program for improving the college prospects of young women of color in order to keep up with the changing times.

This challenge stems from the fact that the number of smart college applicants of color is growing while colleges are giving more and more scholarship assistance to high-achieving students than to those who need financial help, according to Gaby Nossiff. An ABC volunteer, she is an Academic Committee member, a college admissions mentor and host mother to Fatouma Koné, a junior.

As ABC celebrates the acceptance of its three seniors by outstanding colleges, the program is looking at lessons learned and laying the groundwork for the aspirations of the Class of 2015.

This school year the committee, chaired by Sue Bergmeier, learned the following lessons:

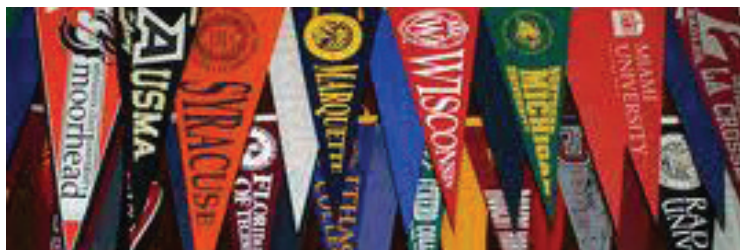
**Start early.** “We have found that, if we skip the summer because the girls are not here in Andover, we are way behind the 8-ball come September,” states Nossiff. Instead, the students will get summer assignments related to college prep.

**Curriculum counts.** Colleges are focusing on curriculum content and year-round enrichment more than ever. “Going forward we need to ensure that our girls will be taking the hardest classes that they can be successful in,” she notes.

**The college essay.** This is an opportunity for an applicant to stand out, and the process is uniquely challenging for ABC students. “Each of our students has an amazing ‘essay’ that is inside of them,” Nossiff explains, and they can impress colleges by telling it in writing.

**Plan for multiple supplemental essays.** The ABC scholars must produce three times the typical number of supplemental essays. “These girls are applying for scholarships, financial aid packages, and applying to a minimum of eight schools, each with its own supplement requirement. The number and complexity of the added essays is truly overwhelming,” says Nossiff.

There is no sure-fire algorithm for creating a successful application. The admissions process is often arbitrary and scholars of color must apply to a wide range of schools because there is no way to know if they fit the specifications that a school has set for its next freshman class.



## How ABC is working smarter in 2014

A four-member academic advisory board tracks students' academic progress weekly from day one. Each rising senior is also assigned a college mentor from outside the committee. This year Julia Ireland Childs, principal of USA College Bound and a college coaching consultant, donated her time in a key advisory role.

Here is a quick step-by-step look at the rising seniors' road ahead:

- May—Juniors are already beginning to think about colleges, and a trip to the Phillips Academy College fair allows them to get on some mailing lists and talk to college representatives.
- June—Each senior is paired with a college mentor. They meet with the mentor and Childs and have ready a résumé, a transcript and a preliminary college list.
- July 31—The seniors send a draft of their essays to Childs
- September 1—Their essays approach the final form.
- Fall term at AHS—Seniors visit and interview at colleges.

Going forward, the committee will be looking at ABC student scores as compared to their Naviance program scores, as well as other admissions data from previous years to continue to address strategic challenges. “We need to be smarter about knowing what schools are both looking for diversity and will pay for it,” says Nossiff.

Finally, the recent changes to the SAT should help students such as those in the ABC program. Studies have confirmed that SAT scores are directly correlated to family income. The changes are designed to counteract this financial influence.

The mother of an AHS senior herself, Nossiff is on the front lines of this effort. “What’s remarkable about these girls—and in contrast to many of their peers in an affluent town like Andover—is that they have done everything themselves. There is no spoon-feeding.”

## President’s message: *ABC seniors and our community share the praise...continued from page 1*

completely unfamiliar place. And in the community, each of these girls was welcomed by local hosts – their family-away-from-home for the next four school years. In addition to gaining emotional support from their host families and new school friends, they began to see how much more was possible in life. That lesson was reinforced when they met successful families of color who live in and around Andover.

As soon as each student arrived at ABC’s house on Main Street, our Academic Committee was their guide. (See article above.) Tutors were made available as needed, in-house supervisors helped, and a large team of volunteers encouraged them on. “College mentors” started working with the students in their junior year as they began the bewildering process of narrowing their college choices and applying for admission and aid.

This is where the ABC program really shines. Since its founding, all 131 of its graduates have gotten into quality colleges and universities. For high school graduates from

low-income families, like most of the students back at high schools in ABC students’ home cities, a mere 52% of the graduates go on to college and many more never graduate.

That’s why, on this 50th anniversary of the creation of the federal Civil Rights Act, I pay tribute to the small group of principled Andover residents who in 1967 created the local ABC program, backed by an overwhelming vote of support from Andover Town Meeting.

With Graduation Day approaching, I am very excited about new opportunities that await these three promising leaders and proud of the many local supporters who have helped them to achieve so much already.

Seeing talented young people of color like these three and the dedicated team that supports them, I’m sure that we are closer to closing the education gap for students of color in America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy".



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## Giving back

Lydia Bailey, AHS '07 and Temple '11 (BBA), exemplifies the spirit of the ABC scholar, bringing her talents and leadership to her professional life and commitment to giving back to her local community.



Bailey has been a human resources consultant with the Environmental Protection Agency's Mid-Atlantic Region for more than three years.

She recently was nominated for the Delaware Valley HR Rising Star of the Year Award. In addition, she is featured in the May posting of "Meet Your Members Spotlight" of the Philadelphia Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM).

Bailey also is the student-chapters coordinator for the Temple, Villanova, St. Joseph's, Holy Family, Pierce and La Salle College student SHRM chapters.

And despite her busy professional life, she is a "Big Sister" to Semaj, a 15-year-old girl from North Philadelphia in the region's Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

## Seniors aim high, score big in quest of colleges...continued

to eight schools (including Notre Dame, University of Rochester, Bates, Gettysburg, Franklin & Marshall, Colgate, Northeastern and the University of Connecticut). She pointed to the amount of available financial aid as a major factor in the decision.

Starr had an all-star support from her ABC host, Kristin Esterberg, provost of Salem State University, who was very helpful in matching Starr's interest in communication and broadcast sports journalism with a school with high-caliber teams and an exciting sports atmosphere.

Altogether, she applied to Villanova, Binghamton and three other top SUNY schools, Syracuse, Bates, Elon, Gettysburg and Wake Forest.

"I think the toughest part was figuring out what I wanted to be. Everyone says you don't have to decide that until sophomore year but, really, you have to have a good idea so you can choose colleges that have majors you are interested in." Starr decided to narrow her search to solid liberal arts colleges.

The best advice she received during the waiting process was from her host mom. "She explained the admissions process to me: the acceptance is random--if they are looking for a tuba player that day, you may have the best grades but they'll choose the tuba player. It really helped me feel less discouraged."

Jazzare Mays applied to the U. of Hartford and 10 other colleges for admission into the highly competitive Physical Therapy track. They included the University of Rochester, George Washington, Temple, Drexel, Syracuse and Quinnipiac.

She, too, received some impressive acceptances and financial aid packages, as well as some disappointments.

To keep perspective during this stressful time, Mays reminds herself that "Things happen for a reason." The self-proclaimed anti-procrastinator has this advice for the rising seniors at ABC: "Use time management. I have a huge calendar with all of the application deadlines, school breaks, everything. I tried to own the process."

As for their plans for preparing for college, all three young women are focusing on their studies--and fighting the senioritis that is a rite of passage in the final semester.

In addition to learning more about their future colleges, picking housing assignments and freshman class schedules, and stocking up on dorm room necessities, the soon-to-be ABC alumni will be looking for paid internships or paid employment over the summer.

Oh, and catching up on one very important thing, according to Awodele: sleep!

## ABC highlights

Fatouma Koné this spring won approval of a mentoring program that she designed for girls in middle and high school. The AHS junior developed the project during the 12-session MIT Leadership Training Institute. The institute is for high school students with high leadership potential.

Abbi Awodele, a senior, is a member of the AHS Chamber Choir, which recently won third place in an elite national competition in Washington, DC.

## Items Needed

Our nonprofit program makes good use of new or used donated household items and supplies. Donations may also help a scholar explore a new hobby or sport. If you can donate any of the following or have other items to offer, please tell our House Manager at [house@AndoverABC.org](mailto:house@AndoverABC.org).

- Cleaning supplies and paper goods
- Bike lock... chain or cable
- Barbeque gas grill (size: 20lb propane tank)
- Vacuum (canister-style with attachments)
- Television (32" or smaller)

Thanks to these supporters for previous donations: Emily & Kevin Donovan, Gloria Davis.

## What we do



The mission of A Better Chance of Andover is to close the education gap for students of color in American society.

We bring smart, motivated female students here to attend Andover High School and become better prepared for college. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, we provide them with a house on Main Street and a complete

network of support and love.

Our 131 graduates have been accepted by highly selective colleges and universities. Many have gone on to get graduate degrees and become leaders in their professions and communities.

For more info, go to [andoverABC.org](http://andoverABC.org) or follow us on Facebook.



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## 2008 grad returns to supervise

Jessica Spates, an ABC scholar who graduated from Andover High School in 2008, has returned to the ABC House as a resident assistant.



She received a BA in German Studies from Wesleyan University in 2012 and then went on to live in Germany for seven months before returning to the United States. She likes cats, as they are quiet pets, and has a cat named Zachary, who currently resides with Jess's mom in New York City.

In addition to her role as resident assistant, Jess works as a behavioral and youth counselor at Youth Villages, a residential program for young women in Arlington. She likes returning to Andover in the evening where, among other things, she is trying her hand at painting. "Painting is a great way to relax," she notes.

Jessica fondly remembers Friday night as scary movie night. The ABC students would rent a scary movie from Blockbuster in North Andover, back when movies came from brick and mortar stores, and all would gather in the front room to watch. It didn't matter if the movie was a foreign film with subtitles as long as it was scary.

Please join us in welcoming Jess in her new role as resident assistant.

## RDs value 'character'

A warm welcome to Catherine Okoh and Richard Komeh, a married couple with youth-group experience, who are our program's new resident directors.

The couple and two resident assistants supervise the eight student residents.

The new RDs share subtle similarities with the ABC girls, coming from what they call "humble backgrounds" in Ghana that instilled a drive to succeed through education and hard work.

The couple met while they were in high school in Ghana and both graduated from college there. They married before coming to the U.S. in 2009 to work in group services that the Eckerd Foundation ran for troubled youth.

Richard recently received a master's degree in math and Catherine will graduate this spring from Massachusetts

School of Law. Catherine wants the students to know that academic success isn't everything.

"As they prepare academically and also for leadership," she notes, "it's important that they develop their character. You may be the smartest person on earth, but you also need respect, humility and responsibility to succeed."

Catherine expects her current internship with TransCanada Corp. to become a full-time legal job after she graduates. Richard is lining up interviews for a data-related job.

Their experiences make them excellent role models for the ABC students – Catherine as lead RD and Richard supporting her and assisting the students with math.

They replace former RDs Dianne and Chris Caraviello, who have a home in Maine, where they run an art gallery.

