

Area teens get help in pursuing teaching careers

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AURORA -- Kierston Castleberry knows what it's like to attend a school of need. Her elementary, junior and high school days were spent at schools with low-income students and below-par test scores. Though she faced adversity daily, the East Aurora High School senior and class president never let it get her down, choosing to persevere instead.

This month, her hard work paid off.

Castleberry, and Emily Densmore of Waubonsie Valley High School, are two of 125 Illinois students chosen by the Golden Apple Foundation to receive financial assistance to attend one of 53 universities across the state as they begin their careers as educators. The girls will be inducted as Golden Apple scholars at 5 p.m. today at the DePaul University Student Center, 2250 N. Sheffield Ave. in Chicago.

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Emily Densmore

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Kierston Castleberry

In addition to financial assistance, Castleberry and Densmore will also attend a five-week summer program at DePaul University while teaching in Chicago schools during the day and taking classes in the afternoon and evening on various aspects of teaching. They will have supplemental camps every summer for four years.

"Teaching is something I'm really passionate about," Castleberry said. "This way I get to practice and get to learn and be two steps ahead (when I get out of college)."

The girls were nominated, and wrote seven essays on diversity, their life goals and passions for teaching. They were also interviewed.

In return for financial assistance, Golden Apple scholars must agree to teach for at least five years at an Illinois school in need after receiving their bachelor's degree and teaching certificate.

Castleberry said that as a teacher, she hopes to raise the work ethic at schools in need. She will attend St. Xavier University in Chicago in the fall.

Densmore will attend Aurora University in the fall, where she will study elementary education. She works as a nanny and is part of the golf team and student council at Waubonsie Valley.

"I just know that I've been given the gift of teaching," Densmore said of her passion. "I've been called to teach."

Today, 1,142 Golden Apple Scholars are either teaching or on their way to teaching at schools across the state.

The Golden Apple Foundation is the largest pre-service teacher-support program in the nation. About 55 percent of recipients are low-income, and 56 percent are minorities.

Each scholar will receive tuition assistance of \$2,500 per year for four years paid directly to their college or university, \$2,000 per summer for participation in the summer institute, and advanced teacher preparation designed for their success in teaching children in challenging school settings.

"I'm going to get so much extra experience (through the Golden Apple Foundation)," said Densmore. "I'm going to pick up things they don't teach in school. I'll be working in the field."

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