

City students learn about life choices at a teen summit

Seminars, personal activities highlight message of 'success'

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Teen residents were invited to learn about "Winning the Game of Life" during the school district's Teen Summit in Lincoln Avenue School.

Saturday's event featured a series of seminars, workshops and performances that were geared toward dispensing the life lessons and skills needed to be successful in school and the larger world.

"It was a day of extraordinary learning, fun and food, but we were there because we want the kids to start taking life more seriously and to start taking their academics more seriously," said Laura Sacks, the school nurse at the Orange Preparatory Academy who was among the event organizers.

"We held the summit at the elementary school because there was a play being put on at our school," she continued. "I understand there is a lot going on in our students' lives, but I don't feel that they're not taking their academics and their lives as seriously as they should. I think they were given insight into the fact that they can do things when they really want to do things by all of the speakers, and the great people who came to talk to them."

Among the workshops presenters were Jeffrey A. Robinson, assistant professor at the Rutgers Business School and an advocate

for community economic development; Reginald Rosarion, assistant director of education and outreach at Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan New Jersey; and Matt Stevens, an academic counselor at Kean University who discussed social networking.

Students who attended the summit also participate in a dance class taught by Deborah Rembert, an instructor in the Orange School District and several local dance studios.

They played basketball with guest coach and former Orange resident, Lade "Majic" Prophete, founder of a nonprofit company aimed at re-directing at risk youth; a session with a young entrepreneur and recently published author, Scott McKenzie, on how to "Turn Your Craft into Cash;" and makeovers by makeup artist William Marshall, whose work has been featured in Essence, Vanity Fair and Rolling Stone.

"Years ago, Miss Sacks used to plan these kinds of conferences, but she hadn't done one in a while," said Linnie Mondestin, academy teacher and event organizer. "This year, with all the things that are going on with the kids, she said that she wanted to do something because there was so much going on. We were having a conversation and her daughter had given her the names of Jeffrey Robinson and Alex Elli. I know

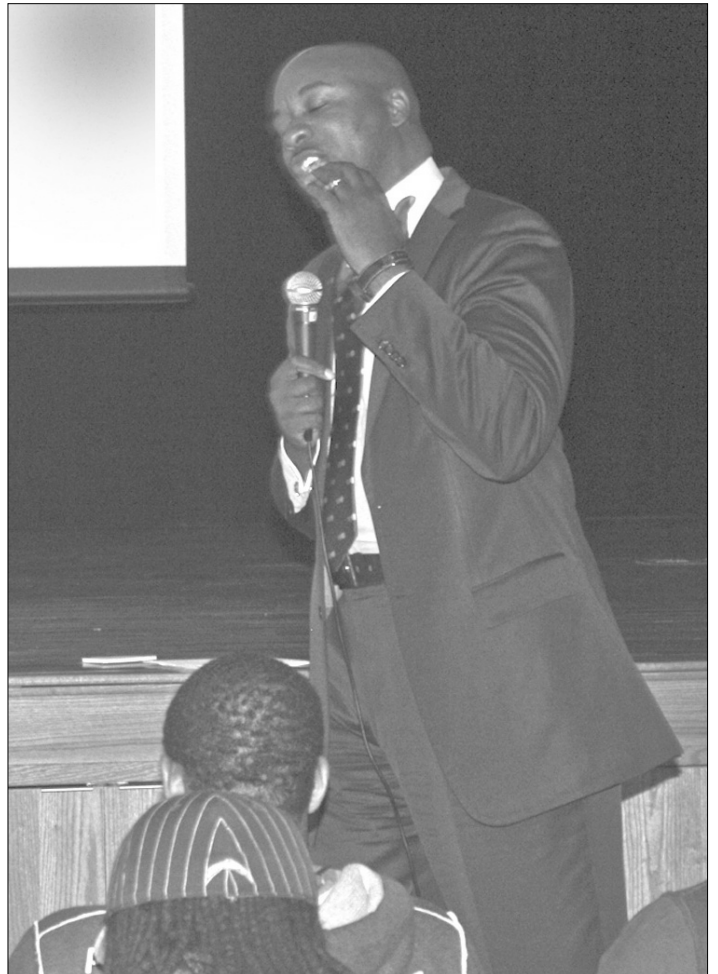


Photo Courtesy Orange School District

Motivational speaker Alex Ellis addresses male students from Orange High School and the Orange Preparatory Academy during Saturday's Teen Summit at Lincoln Avenue School.

Troy Bell, and it just became something that was bigger than it was intended to be and it worked out. We had a good turnout, the kids had a good day, and it was a really good, positive event."

Satish Van Eckelen, 17, said he believed Saturday's program was beneficial.

"I want to be a detective and a computer expert as a career, so I will be majoring in criminal justice and computers in college. I think that my time in the Orange

public schools has prepared me well to pursue those goals," Van Eckelen said. "The summit was good because it was basically telling us that we have a future if we just believe in ourselves and act like the leaders and individuals that we are. It all depends on what we want to do as individuals because we are free to make our own choices for our lives. But we have to try to make sure that we make the right decisions for our futures."