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## SJSU, East Side Union district put college student's vision into action

By Joshua Molina  
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Michael Carter, a chipper 20-year-old, was sipping hot chocolate at the Almaden Roasting Company last year with former United Way chief Mark Walker, yearning for some constructive feedback on his big idea.

A San Jose native, Carter wanted to help high school kids get into college. "What do you think?" Carter asked during the November conversation.

Walker responded, "I like it. I like it a lot."

That epiphanous moment between a young man and his mentor has blossomed into Strive For College, a non-profit that aims to connect low-income high school students with undergraduate mentors.

In less than a year's time, Carter, a history major at Washington University in St. Louis who will be a junior in the fall, has linked 44 students in the St. Louis area with mentors. On Sunday, Strive announced a partnership with San Jose State University and the East Side Union High School District.

The non-profit expects to open chapters at Yale, Georgetown and a handful of other universities later this year. Eventually, Carter hopes to start 250 chapters across the country.

Each year, he said, more than 200,000 qualified

students don't pursue education after high school because no one ever explains to them how to navigate the cumbersome application process.

"They have overcome all the adversities and obstacles, and yet they still don't go," Carter said. "We have created a very complex process."

As a trade-off for receiving help, he said, high school students who make it to college through the program must commit to starting a Strive chapter at his or her university.

Carter admits he had it pretty good growing up. His father was an attorney and his mother a schoolteacher and political activist. He attended private schools most of his youth, from St. Stephen's Preschool to Bellarmine College Preparatory. It wasn't until his junior year, when he transferred to Prospect High School in Saratoga, that his eyes opened.

"I saw a lot of inherent inequalities in terms of guidance, support, mentor systems and opportunities," he said. "I started to realize how fortunate I had been and the different mentors I had in my life."

Besides his parents and grandparents, Carter said those mentors include Walker. He was friends with two of Walker's children, and the two families attended the same church.

Walker recalls hearing Carter's idea and being stunned that so many good students weren't attending universities. But he was even more blown away by Carter's crisp vision for how to help.

"You often hear these great ideas from people who want to start a non-profit," said Walker, now the managing director at Applied Materials Foundation. "You are always a little skeptical. Did he ever

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surprise me."

Walker was so impressed he decided to join Strive's board of directors. He said Carter has an "uncanny" ability to network, and he marvels over how fast the non-profit has grown in such a short span of time.

Though Strive has an impressive list of advisers - including former Yahoo Senior Vice President Tim Brady and former Knight Foundation head Hodding Carter III - Walker said Carter's already in a league of his own.

"He doesn't need us," Walker said.

### IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Go to [www.striveforcollege.org](http://www.striveforcollege.org) for more information.

Contact Joshua Molina at [jmolina@mercurynews.com](mailto:jmolina@mercurynews.com) or (408) 275-2002

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