Chance for free tuition draws hundreds

By ERIK ROBINSON

The chance for free college tuition lured hundreds of students from low-income families to Clark College on Saturday morning.

Parents saw the College Bound scholarships as the key to a better life for their children.

Covington Middle School eighth-grader Dylan Smith, for example, anticipates attending Washington State University Vancouver to study forensic science. His father works as a truck driver and his mother works part-time in retail sales.

"I worry about my future because it doesn't look like it's getting any better," he said. "I don't know how I would be able to make it."}

Even if the family's economic circumstances improve to the point that Dylan no longer qualifies for free tuition, he feels it's important to apply for the scholarship.

"I hope I'll still get it," he said. "I want to go to college and I know if I don't apply I won't have the chance."
College Bound:

From Page A1 flies for the low-income scholarship, parents Jim and Teresa Smith said they are committed to sending him to college.

"A blue-collar job used to put food on the table and a roof over your head," Jim Smith said.

Times have changed. Even with two incomes, he said, the family struggles to make ends meet. The couple said they want to make sure Dylan has the tools to enjoy a satisfying career that also pays enough to provide for his own family.

"He's not going to drive a truck, I know that," Jim Smith said.

Washington lawmakers established the College Bound scholarship program in 2007. The program, one of three nationwide, is designed for low-income families who would otherwise have a harder time sending their children to college. Students sign up for the program in seventh or eighth grade. As long as they keep their grades up and stay out of trouble, these students know they will extend their education beyond high school.

Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard led a pledge for the students to follow through.

Pollard, who was raised by a single mother with the help of relatives in Vermont, recalled a piece of advice his grandfather gave him. 

"He said, 'Royce, you have to have a college degree, but a college degree is not a sign of intelligence. It is a signal to employers that you're capable of learning and being trained,'" he said. "This program is an effort to reach into that stat and pull people up."

Like Pollard, Hudson's Bay High School freshman Angelina Espay will be the first member of her family to attend college.

The scholarship has already changed her life, said Julie Espay Joures, Angelina's mother.

"Encouraged by school counselor Elizabeth Mikaele, Angelina signed up for the scholarship last year as a student at Discovery Middle School. The 15-year-old has taken care to put school work before everything else, maintaining a 4.0 grade-point average. She's interested in studying forensic science or medicine at Washington State University Vancouver."

As one of six children, Angelina also has taken care to set an example for her siblings in keeping the household organized while her mom and stepfather work night shifts.

"Now that I know I'm going to college, it's pushed higher standards for me," she said.

The Legislature endowed $7.4 million over two years for the scholarship, which last year enrolled 17,000 low-income seventh- and eighth-graders. Because so few students applied, the Legislature extended the offer to ninth graders this year.