



**YOUNG GIFTED  
AND  
BLACK**



**A photo gallery  
of success**



**PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

“Education is the most powerful  
weapon which you can use to  
change the world.”

**-Nelson Mandela**

It is always a pleasure to recognize the students selected for the Young, Gifted and Black program. Please join me in commending these exceptional young people, and thank them for their dedication to excellence. Congratulations to our honorees, and all those who nurtured their talents and gifts.

**Carole Smith**  
Superintendent  
Portland Public Schools

# **Young, Gifted and Black**

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

## **Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing**

*Alonzo Chadwick, vocalist*

*Michael Dean, pianist*

*Graduates of Jefferson High School*

## **Greeting of Guests/Welcome**

*Carole Smith, Superintendent*

*Portland Public Schools*

## **Dream Keeper**

*Reiko Williams, Assistant Principal*

*Rosa Parks Elementary School*

## **Introduction of Speaker**

*Dr. Keith Dempsey*

*Assistant Professor, Counseling*

*George Fox University*

*Graduate of Benson High School*

## **Keynote Address**

*Charles McGee*

*President and CEO of Black Parent Initiative (BPI)*

*Graduate of Franklin High School*

## **Recognition of Parents/Families/Guests**

*Greg Belisle, Board of Education*

*Portland Public Schools*

## **Presentation of Honorees**

*Carolyn Leonard*

*Retired Administrator*

*Portland Public School*

*Graduate of Girls Polytechnic High School*

## **A Tribute**

*Esther R. Harris, J.D.*

*Special Education Family & Community Liaison*

*Portland Public Schools*

## **Closing Remarks**

*Macarre Traynham, Principal*

*Metropolitan Learning Center*

*Portland Public Schools*

## **To Be Young, Gifted and Black**

*Alonzo Chadwick, vocalist*

*Michael Dean, pianist*

## **Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing**

*by James Weldon Johnson*

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the  
slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met  
Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget  
Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.



## **Mohamad Abdalla** 5th Grade • Markham K-5 School

### **Mohamad Abdalla**

As a 5th grader, Mohamad already exhibits all the qualities of a good student and a good human being! His 5th grade teacher says: "Mohamad is one of the nicest and kindest students I have ever met. His patience is outstanding and his perseverance is contagious. Mohamad tries so hard on all tasks and never gives up. He is an ELL<sup>1</sup> student and struggles a bit with reading, but he is willing to work hard to gain the knowledge that is necessary. Mohamad is always checking in with people and making sure everyone is happy. He is extremely helpful and always positive. He is completely trustworthy. Mohamad exemplifies 'greatness' with his attitude towards others, his schoolwork, and himself. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to be Mohamad's teacher and feel like I have learned so much from him about how to be a good person."

What sets Mohamad apart is his drive; he says he studies really hard at school and gets A+s on his homework. He also takes advantage of after school math classes and reinforces his learning by playing educational games. Mohamad acknowledges and says that he really appreciates the teachers who provide him help and support.

Mohamad's favorite sport is basketball. When asked what he would change about his educational experience, Mohamad emphatically states —"more PE." He wants to be a basketball player when he grows up, and has taken the time to help other students learn to play the game. When he can't play basketball anymore, Mohamad says he would like to be a police officer. Towards that end, he plans to continue getting good grades and stay involved in school so he can get a college scholarship.

Mohamad describes himself as "Athletic," "Smart" and "Kind."

## Mohamed Abdulahi

Mohamed is a model student and a budding engineer, who has a vision for a peaceful world. He is described by his teacher as a “really smart” student who “absolutely loves learning new things.” “His positive attitude, curiosity and active participation in the classroom contribute to the overall learning environment.”

One should not be surprised that science is Mohamed’s favorite subject because he likes to experiment and discover new things. Mohamed constantly strives to do better work and to always read more. He participates in, and is grateful for, the math and reading clubs at his school. He is an active learner who always raises relevant questions when things are unclear or he does not understand something.

At an early age, Mohamed developed good habits such as continually setting high standards for himself, taking advantage of opportunities that are available, completing assignments on time and being organized, all of which will help him to be prepared for a positive academic experience in middle school.

Mohamed’s role model is his mother. She taught him to always treat others with respect. It is evident that Mohamed has followed her advice because his teachers acknowledge “his positive attitude, the kindness he shows his peers, and his willingness to help and stand up for other students.”

Looking into the future, Mohamed has high expectations for himself. He definitely wants to play soccer and believes he wants to go to college to become an engineer.

If there is one thing that Mohamed could change in the world, he says it would be to “end violence so there would be peace around the world.”



**Mohamed Abdulahi**  
5th Grade • Rosa Parks K-5 School



**Michael "Tre" Belcha**  
Sophomore • Jefferson High School

## Michael "Tre" Belcha

Michael or "Tre" as he likes to be called, is a sophomore at Jefferson High School, who overcomes his physical challenges and is a three-sport athlete. He is described by his teachers as: "a bright, cheerful student who always welcomes the day with a smile. He comes to class ready to learn, and is always available to help other students. He encourages his peers to challenge themselves, and 'strive for success' with his words, and his actions."

Despite being diagnosed with cerebral palsy at the age of two, Tre plays football and baseball, and wrestles. Maintaining a schedule that can at times be overwhelming because of his extracurricular activities, Tre keeps his 3.74 or better GPA. As a sophomore, Tre is already looking towards college. He has visited both the University of Oregon and Oregon State University. While still enrolled at Jefferson, Tre says he will take as many dual-credit courses as he can at Portland Community College. This will increase the number of credits he earns prior to graduating from Jefferson High School.

Tre knows he is a leader and tries to set an example for his peers. His advice to them is: "Always challenge yourself to succeed!" Tre likes to focus on "eliminating barriers and overcoming challenges." His motto is: "Continue to put your foot forward and see where it takes you."

Tre's role model is his cousin Keedrontye Collier because: "He taught me to be strong and believe in myself." He credits Self Enhancement, Inc., his family and his teachers at Jefferson High School for contributing to his overall success. He says that his "mother is always pushing him to become the person he truly is meant to be."

While Tre is not sure yet what career path he will follow, he is interested in pursuing music, after his grandpa who is a bass player, or perhaps sports medicine. Tre wants to also participate in varsity wrestling in college. He knows for sure that he wants "to pay it forward" by giving back to his community.

"Respectful," "Happy" and "Leader" are three words Tre uses to describe himself.



## Javon Carter

Javon Carter, a senior at Grant High School, has achieved what we want to see in our students – achievement in the academic, art, physical and leadership domains. He is a strong scholar, a gifted performer, a talented football player and a committed leader.

As a student, Javon earned a 4.0 in his junior year. He played the lead part in a number of musical theater performances at Grant, and was featured in the local papers for his outstanding performance in a play at the Northwest Children's Theatre. He is a member of the Royal Blues which is the highest level of auditioned choir at Grant. In April 2014, he entered a talent competition and the jazz piece he wrote and sang won him the grand prize--\$5,000. He is also a four-year member of Grant Football Team.

What is more, Javon has the impressive qualities of a natural born leader. He is articulate, enthusiastic and great public speaker. His counselor, Megan Schlicker says: "Javon Carter is someone who is committed to making the community he lives in a better place. This became clear in the role he played in the student government. Javon was part of the redesign of Grant's student government. This was a huge time commitment, but Javon made the commitment in spite of his busy senior schedule because it was important to his school community."

Javon's life is not without adversity, but he says that he overcomes difficult challenges by doing his personal best, critiquing himself and working on getting better. His advice to his peers is: "Stay true to yourself; don't follow the crowd. Maintain your integrity."

One person who has had a very positive impact on Javon is his history teacher Kevin Alvord. Javon says: "He is down to earth, offers information that is 'super pertinent' and helps me understand what to expect in the real world."

After graduation from Grant High School, Javon plans on attending Morehouse College where he will pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Business and Economics. He also plans to study abroad. Javon describes himself as "Competent," "Kind" and "Inquisitive."



**Javon Carter**  
Senior • Grant High School



**Shatoria Cherisme**  
Junior • Franklin High School

## Shatoria Cherisme

Shatoria, is a senior at Franklin High School, who experienced overwhelming circumstances:

- egregious acts of violence, overt racism and discrimination during her elementary and middle school years.
- the untimely loss of several family members during her first two years of high school.

Yet “through prayer and faith in God,” she survived and became a strong leader in the Advanced Scholars program. “In spite of challenges at home, Shatoria has managed to maintain a positive attitude and prides herself on being a successful student, not a victim.”

Her teachers says: “Shatoria is a powerful young woman with unwavering strength and dedication to her studies and all of her extra-curricular activities.”

Shatoria is part of Franklin’s Dance Ensemble & Franklin Dance Team, Cheer team and a Basketball player. She has managed to maintain an A average.

Shatoria is a caring soul who would drop everything in a moment to help a struggling peer in need. She is always willing to take on new tasks, and will commit to something whether she likes it or not because she knows the importance of follow through. After high school she is determined to be a lawyer and continue educating herself in the Arts.”

To her peers who face what appears to be insurmountable difficulties, Shatoria advice is:

**“Don’t let anyone determine your future.”**

**“Be in control of your own actions.”**

**“It is up to you to see what change is needed; then make it.”**

Among the people who helped Shatoria are: her principal “Ms. Shay, because she encourages me and holds me accountable”; “Ms. Torres, my dance teacher, pushes me and lets me know that I can be anything I want to be”; and “Mr. McGee ‘keeps it real’... and tells me that I’m in control of my own future.”

Shatoria often volunteers her time to help with homework and dance. “Strong,” “Smart,” “Inspired” and “Determined” are words she uses to describe herself. She is determined to see the graduation statistics for African Americans increase and wants to collaborate with others so that African Americans will be better represented in higher level and advanced placement courses.

## Robert Collins

Robert Collins is an 8th grade student at Jason Lee, who is a talented comic book artist. With no formal training other than art offered at his elementary school, “Rob has gained recognition for his comic art and created professional-looking comic books—with characters that come alive through witty dialogues and elaborate Sci-Fi scenes.”

While most people know Rob’s talent for drawing cartoons, his art portfolio is much more diverse and includes a pencil portrait of his grandmother that is so detailed and life-like that it could easily be part of a professional art exhibit. With detailed shading, he has created a face that radiates gentleness, kindness, and love.

Though art is Robert’s passion, his favorite subject is math. His teachers say Rob is a hard worker and “tries his best to break boundaries.” He has earned a 4.0 GPA. As busy as he is with his art, and studying, serving his community is a priority. Rob volunteers with his mother at VFW centers. He says that he probably will not join the military, but he believes that the men and women who serve our country deserve to be acknowledged and supported. His great grandfather served during WWII and his mother was in the US Army.

Robert W. Collins wants to graduate from high school and college so that he can open a business that involves animation and art. He is grateful to his “mom, grandma and granddad who support and encourage him.

Rob describes himself as “Kind,” “Smart,” “Talented” and “Driven.”



**Robert Collins**  
8th Grade • Jason Lee K-8 School



**Toriandre Givens**  
8th Grade • Woodlawn PK-8 School

## **Toriandre Givens**

Toriandre Givens is an 8th grade student at Woodlawn PK-8 who, according to his teacher, is “not just a leader of the 8th grade” class, but “a leader for the entire school.” Toriandre has shown his leadership abilities in many ways.

Every Friday, the staff, students and parents of Woodlawn School have become accustomed to hearing Toriandre’s voice as he makes the school’s announcements on the intercom. When the opportunity presents itself, he also emcees school events, including Poetry Nights and the school carnival.

Following a phone call requesting Woodlawn students to become involved in a drive to support children with cancer, Tori organized a student leadership committee. This group of students created a fundraiser and raised \$740 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to support children battling cancer.

Tori’s favorite subjects include Math, Social Studies and Technology. When asked what he does for fun, Tori responded that he does math packets and plays math games.

Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are two role models that Tori admires. He says Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. taught him about life and about how “love overpowers hate.”

Tori thinks that he would like to be a police officer or an FBI agent when he grows up so he can have a chance to help people and give back to the community.

Tori describes himself as “Dedicated,” “Leader” and “Powerful.”

If there is one thing that Tori could change in the world, he would “end homelessness and hunger so that everybody has a chance to succeed in life without pain and suffering.”

## Enora “Nori” Hall

Enora Hall or “Nori,” as she is called by her friends, is described by her teacher Lauren as a “kind, compassionate, creative, and thoughtful fifth grade student who excels in mathematics.”

Nori is a child who displays strength in both the left and right side of her brain. She has a “fondness” for math and likes art too—including origami and batik. Since her class is studying poetry, she is engaged in writing her own poems and enjoys writing Haiku with her friends.

In spite of her multiple talents, Nori remains humble. “Joyful,” “Dedicated” and “Enthusiastic” are words Nori uses to describe herself.

Nori loves animals and spends a great deal of time reading non-fiction books about dogs. As a result, she is able to identify almost any breed. She can’t wait until she turns twelve because she will be able to volunteer at the Oregon Humane Society. If Nori could do anything she wanted, she would move to a farm and raise animals. In fact, after graduation from high school, Nori plans to go to college to become a veterinarian.

When asked what she is proud of, Nori indicates that she “works hard, stays focused and doesn’t procrastinate” and the result is that she receives very high marks in school. She is grateful for the support that she receives from her mom and dad, her grandparents and “her wonderful teacher Lauren.” She also thanks her teacher Sara for getting her into 7th grade math.

Olivia, Nori’s big sister, is her role model because she worked hard and got a scholarship at Oberlin College. Nori says she will continue “to stay focused, keep getting good grades, continue to be creative, and ... always be self-motivated.” As young as Nori is, she understands that every decision she makes changes her life.



**Enora “Nori” Hall**  
5th Grade • Trillium Charter School



**Taylor Hall-Debnam**  
Senior • Grant High School

## Taylor Hall-Debnam

Taylor, who is currently a senior at Grant High School, has distinguished herself as a student leader and a scholar.

According to her counselor, “She is ambitious and sets high goals, for which she has repeatedly demonstrated that she can ‘rise to the occasion’ academically as well as with individual and team sports. Taylor is enrolled in multiple advanced and dual credit college courses.”

As a member of the National Honor Society, Taylor maintains a 3.7 GPA. She is part of the Grant High School’s Constitution Team that took second place at the State competition, the president of the Black Student Union and a varsity cheerleader. Taylor’s academic achievement, extracurricular activities, her exposure to different cultures and interactions with students across racial and economic lines has prepared her to be an ambassador for the Grant High School student body. In 2014, she was chosen as the Grant High School Rose Festival Princess.

While Taylor says that she has learned a great deal from her wide range of experiences—whether it was be working as a swimming instructor for Portland Parks and Recreation, varsity cheerleading, working as an intern for the Urban League or simply advising her peers in the Black Student Union—it was her summer experience that had the greatest impact on her.

As a volunteer at a religious camp where Taylor served long hours as a member of the kitchen crew, she acquired a new level of understanding regarding the issues and challenges different populations must confront. She recounts how at the camp she and the camp participants began as strangers but, by the end of each session, she had built meaningful relationships with teen mothers and their children, youth experiencing homelessness, and youth with mental and physical challenges. Taylor says that she was enriched beyond words by what she calls a “self-sacrificing experience.”

Through study, leadership, extra-curricular activities and volunteerism, Taylor has found her voice and developed the courage to advocate for herself and others. She has learned how to respectfully speak her truth.

Taylor says that she is Honest, “Goal-Oriented” and Thoughtful.” She is currently considering Spelman College or Howard University and plans to pursue a law degree.

## Alexandra Harrison

There are very few African American young women who are recognized for their excellence in math. Alexandra Harrison is one of them. Her math teacher at Roosevelt High School describes Alexandra as being “among the top 3% of all the students she has taught over the last twelve years.” According to her math teacher, “Alexandra is an amazing math student who enlivens every lecture with interesting questions and ideas of how to tackle difficult problems.”

Mathematics is not the only area where Alexandra has demonstrated her commitment to excellence. She plays the alto saxophone and received an outstanding soloist award from the University of Portland for playing in a jazz band. Alexandra also loves art, is fluent in Spanish and wants to expand her language speaking skills to learn German and sign language. She maintains a grade point average of 3.7.

Alexandra attributes her success in school to the support of a number of teachers at Roosevelt including Mr. Margolis, Ms. Crock, and Ms. Taylor who continually pushes her towards her goals. In addition, the Step-Up program provides her both academic and emotional support.

Alexandra says she will continue to hold herself to a very high standard. She wants to maintain a high GPA and enroll in the University of Portland so she can major in nursing and minor in psychology. She might eventually attend OHSU and study to be an obstetrician.

Describing herself as: “Empathetic,” “Inquisitive” and “Welcoming,” Alexandra says that she will take time to “give back to the people and organizations that have helped her accomplish her goals.”

Alexandra says that she wants her peers who may face difficult challenges to remember that even though times may be hard, one should never give up because everyone is worth it.



**Alexandra Harrison**  
Junior • Roosevelt High School



**Mykia Hernandez-Taylor**  
Junior • Metropolitan Learning Center

## **Mykia Hernandez-Taylor**

A fast learner and quick thinker, Mykia Hernandez-Taylor, skipped 8th grade to start high school at Metropolitan Learning Center. A teacher at MLC describes her as “an amazing student who moves at a speed faster than light and when an idea comes forward, she is always the first to spring to action.”

Since Mykia joined MLC, “she has been involved in leadership, organizing fundraisers and assemblies. She is an integral part of the MLC community, volunteering both in and out of the building at various places. Being one of the few students of color in the building, she is never afraid to speak her mind.” “Hard-working,” “Intelligent” and “Dedicated” are words that Mykia uses to describe herself. As she reflects on her progress, she feels, losing her father at a young age, pushes her to work hard.

When it comes to overcoming adversity or dealing with a difficult challenge, Mykia’s advice is “to step away and evaluate the situation before reacting.” She says that Ke’Shalya Brown (a 2013 graduate of MLC) is her model because she knows what it is like to be the only Black person in a predominantly white school. She advised Mykia to: “Know you are as good as anyone else.”

Looking forward what will come next, Mykia plans to go to Spelman College to study law. If there was one thing that she could change, it would be “equity and equality for women.”

Mykia believes that perseverance is the key to success.



## Hawi Hussien

Born in Ethiopia, Hawi Hussien came to the United States and immediately earned a reputation for being a hard worker and an exemplary student who serves as a role model for her peers. Hawi is fluent in her native languages of Oromo and Amharic and although English is not her first language, she challenged herself along with native English speakers by taking Advanced Placement courses in English, Chemistry and Pre-Calculus and she has maintained a 3.9 GPA.

Hawi applied the same dedication to tennis. Unlike most students she started playing tennis for the first time as a freshman and by her junior year has become one of the top tennis players at Roosevelt.

Hawi credits her success in school to her hard work and persistence, the staff at Roosevelt High School who motivate her to do her best, her AVID<sup>1</sup> class, and the support of her parents who are always there for her.

Hawi considers her older brother, who is the first in the family to go to college, as her role model. She hopes to learn from him the best strategies for selecting and gaining admission to a college that will match her needs. She will definitely share what she learns with her younger sister. Her advice to other students is to: "Work hard and never give up!"

Hawi describes herself as: "Kind," "Caring" and "Spiritual." She wants to go to college, and medical school so she can become a doctor. When she accomplishes her goal, she hopes to travel the world to help people in who are in need.

If Hawi could change one thing in the world, she would: "end war" and provide "educational opportunities to everyone."



**Hawi Hussien**  
Senior • Roosevelt High School

<sup>1</sup> AVID (Advance Via Individual Determination) is a college readiness system designed to accelerate student learning.



**Benjamin Kitoko**  
Sophomore • Roosevelt High School

## **Benjamin Kitoko**

"I have never met a student as intellectually curious or actively engaged in his education as Ben Kitoko," says Ben's teacher at Roosevelt High school.

Ben has an exceptional academic record which includes earning high school credits completed in middle school and studying two world languages-- Spanish and Japanese (in addition to Swahili). As a sophomore, he is enrolled in AP Physics and Human Geography. Ben is interested in so many courses that he often struggles to narrow his choices during forecasting.

"Ben describes himself as a focused, persistent and tenacious worker. He views every day as another opportunity and literally will not let his potential for success go to waste. He has participated in the Oregon Young Scholars' Program through the University of Oregon for three years, the 'I Am Academy' (a leadership group for young black men) for three years, Minds Matter for one year, basketball for four years and he still managed to make time for a job at the Oregon Convention Center for the past year."

"His internal motivation has and will continue to serve him well on every path he pursues in life."

Currently, Ben has a 3.95 GPA. When asked what has contributed to his success, he said, one has to:

- Consciously choose the people you want to be around.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Take criticism and fix things.
- Remember, your habits today determine where you will be tomorrow.

Ben considers Ms. Charlene Williams, principal of Roosevelt High School, to be one of his role models. He appreciates and is grateful for the support he has received from Mr. Ray Leary, Ms. Brenda Ranos and Mr. Phillip Dirks. Minds Matter, AVID and being part of a Black male group have helped Ben focus and enhanced his critical thinking and planning skills.

As Ben thinks about his post-high school experience, he says he wants to go to Stanford University. If he could make one change in this world, he would "eliminate the inequality that exists."

## **Kumasi Lockett**

You can't miss Kumasi Lockett in a crowd of high school students. Unlike a typical teenager, Kumasi wears a shirt and tie to school. Every single day. This, coupled with his charismatic and passionate personality, makes Kumasi stand out in any crowd.

Kumasi's mother was a teacher in international schools so Kumasi, who is named after a city in Ghana, spent a good part of his formative years living in different parts of the world. These experiences shaped Kumasi into who he is today.

Before he came to high school Kumasi had already lived in China, and travelled to Israel, Canada, Mexico and various parts of Europe. While this broadened Kumasi's understanding and appreciation of different countries and cultures, he also experienced isolation and racism that he cannot forget. Once while living in Macau, China, Kumasi was riding public transportation when an elderly Chinese man began yelling at him because he was black. Fortunately, a woman stepped up and apologized for the man's racist behavior. While Kumasi learned a lot from his travels, he is glad to have found stability in his high school years at Madison where he has a predictable school environment.

Kumasi's favorite subject in school is History. Here too Kumasi stands out. According to his history teacher, Kumasi has an analytical mind and an understanding of the world which is uncommon for a junior in high school. His hunger for knowledge and engagement with history is striking. The teacher notes that in his history class, Kumasi is always raising questions about the roots of injustice which shows his concern for justice. Kumasi cares about others and regularly helping students who struggle in class. He balances schoolwork with his participation in the track program, where he excels in sprint and long jump events where he worked up to third in the PIL for the long jump.

Kumasi says if he chooses to graduate with his class, he will get a job at UPS and enter community college. Kumasi is looking forward to spending this summer in Kumasi, Ghana." Interesting", "Fast" and "Proficient" are three words that Kumasi uses to describe himself.



**Kumasi Lockett**  
Junior • Madison High School



## **Fatuma Mohamed** 4th Grade • Scott K-8 School

### **Fatuma Mohamed**

Fatuma Mohamed is only a 4th grader, but she already exhibits a drive that makes her a role model for all students. She came to the United States from Kenya less than two years ago and was enrolled in second grade.

“Prior to coming to the United States, Fatuma had very little schooling in her home country and found school here very hard. She read at the rate of 7 words per minute and hardly ever spoke in class. Within just a couple of months, by winter break, Fatuma began to read 45 words per minute and by the end of the year, she met the state standard in reading. What was even more amazing was that Fatuma was able to do this without any help at home. She does not have an adult sitting down and reading to her. This is what astounds her teacher at Scott elementary who said “I have been teaching for 17 years and there are a handful of students that pop up in my mind when I think about amazing learning curves. Fatuma’s trajectory is one of those. Fatuma’s personal transformation is also striking. She went from a shy, quiet girl, who kept her head down, to a girl who holds her head high with a contagious laugh. She is also a girl who has a lot of questions. She not only participates actively in class, but has questions even at recess and in the cafeteria.”

Math and Social Studies are Fatuma’s favorite subjects. She attributes her success to her mother and sisters who encourage her, her teacher Ms. Jackson, and Homework Club at the Hacienda. With middle school just months away, Fatuma says she will work hard to continue to get good grades. She is also willing to share her strategies for learning to help her peers.

Fatuma shares that she would like to expand her knowledge by taking more geometry and chemistry. She plans to go to college, learn new languages, travel to different countries, and work in a field where she can help people.

Looking back at her experience of moving from Kenya to the United States, Fatuma says “it was weird meeting new people and it was a life changing experience.”

Fatuma describes herself as: “Smart,” “Caring” and “Faithful.”

## Linnea Rohdin-Bibby

Linnea is a senior at Lincoln High School. She is known for her dedication as a dancer and as a leader who is an asset not only to her school but to the greater Lincoln community. In spite of her involvement in all aspects of her school and volunteering in the community, Linnea maintains a 3.86 grade point GPA.

"In her freshman year in high school, Linnea tried out for the Lincoln dance team and didn't make it. However, Linnea didn't give up. She contacted the dance coach and asked what she could improve on. She took dance classes, practiced a lot, got better at dance and got into a performing arts company. She worked all her freshman year to improve her technique and performance in dance. Her hard work and persistence paid off, because when she tried out again sophomore year, she not only made it to the dance team, she won sophomore of the year. She also went on to win All-Star two years in a row at the summer dance camp."

According to one of her teachers, "Linnea is the kind of leader everyone respects, appreciates and emulates. She is 'diligent, outgoing, humble and focused' and has the ability to include everyone and make them feel comfortable." Linnea has given so much to the Lincoln community. "She and her friends started CommuniCare Club, which raised money to contribute to local non-profit organizations and to Lincoln clubs, sports and teachers. She helped come up with ideas for assemblies and cultural activities and organized class competitions, anti-bullying campaigns, breast cancer awareness and other cultural awareness events."

Linnea values community service outside of school as well and volunteers every week at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. She is giving some thought to entering a career in the medical field.

Being one of the few black kids in a predominantly white school, Linnea has given some thought as to what it means to be black. She says over time she has discovered that the way someone talks or acts doesn't make them black. "There is no such thing as being 'too white' when you are mixed like I am." "I used to joke about it all the time that I am the whitest black girl out there." However, during "my sophomore year I joined the Black Student Union." Linnea is proud of her Black and Swedish heritage.

If there was one change Linnea could make, she says that she would: "Make getting a quality education possible for everyone because education opens so many doors that otherwise would not be opened."



**Linnea Rohdin-Bibby**  
Senior • Lincoln High School



**Tanysha Ross**  
Senior • Grant High School

## Tanysha Ross

Tanysha Ross is a senior at Grant High School who is described by her teacher as a perceptive, critical thinker who is an outspoken champion of what is right.

Through high school, Tanysha was recognized for her abilities with awards such as Homecoming Queen in her freshman year, the Oregon Alliance for Black School Educators' Award for Involvement and Achievement and a Medal from Portland State University for her team's "Elevator Pitch."

One of the challenges Tanysha has had to face at Grant was "being the only black student in some of her accelerated classes." This challenge convinced Tanysha that she needs to "be more assertive and voice her opinion whenever and where ever she thinks it should be heard." One of the most transformational experiences in her high school happened in spring this year, when Tanysha accompanied her classmates to Selma, Alabama to commemorate Bloody Sunday in the struggle for voting rights during the Civil Rights Movement. According to her teachers, Tanysha matured into a natural leader in Selma, and helped handle some difficult situations during the trip.

Tanysha has worked to maintain a 3.4 or better grade point average while playing softball and volley ball and participating in extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering at the Oregon Food Bank.

For Tanysha, her mother is her role model. She is grateful to her mother for always supporting her financially and giving her (and her sister) an amazing childhood. Tanysha is also appreciative of her business teacher Ms. Burton, but wishes some of her other teachers "cared more."

If there is one thing Tanysha could change, she wants to help create a better educational system. She hopes that leaving Oregon and becoming a part or full-time student, while working as a model, will move her toward her dream of "running her own business."

## Khadija Salah

Khadijah Salah, a senior at Cleveland exemplifies what it means to achieve and give back to the community. She came to the United States with her family seven years ago from Somalia, via a refugee camp in Kenya. When Khadija arrived, she spoke no English. She not only was able to graduate out of ELD<sup>1</sup>, today she is working as a mentor with the ELD teacher to help students, like her who come to this country with limited English.

Khadijah is a highly motivated student. When she found her math classes to be challenging, she joined homework club and sought help at Africa House through IRCO. Having a Somali teacher assist Khadija in her studies made the difference and Khadija's persistence has paid off. She earned a 3.7 GPA.

Khadija is grateful for the support she received from her ESL<sup>2</sup> teacher, and the other teachers at Cleveland, as well as her counselor who has helped her track her progress. She worked diligently with her counselor in order for her to be able to graduate a year early.

Graduating one year ahead of her class is important to Khadija because she knows she is committed and mature enough to begin her post-high school education at a community college. This will allow her to enter a university fully prepared to complete her bachelor's degree. Khadija is considering entering the medical field and perhaps will become a doctor or a nurse.

Khadija considers her cousin to be her role model because she was able to complete her high school education earlier than her peers. "Kind," "Helpful," and "Smart" are words Khadija uses to describe herself.

When asked if there was one thing in this world that she would change, Khadija says she would like to "get rid of racism."



**Khadija Salah**  
Senior • Cleveland High School

<sup>1</sup> English Language Development  
<sup>2</sup> English as a Second Language



**Talia Sanders**  
Kindergarten • Sabin PK-8 School

## **Talia Sanders**

Talia Sanders is a kindergarten student at Sabin PK-8 and has already distinguished herself as someone with traits and attitudes of a successful student.

According to her teacher, as a student in the Sabin International Baccalaureate Program, Talia works independently, challenging herself to write in her journal daily. She takes academic risks sounding out unknown words, exploring new math concepts, and asking inquiry based questions during circle time. Talia also works well in small groups and has balance in her social relationships. She has a variety of friends she enjoys working and playing with and works to resolve complaints with others.

Talia says, "Learning is fun!" However, her favorite part of the day is "the end of the day." She likes art, physical education and writing. She is curious about a lot of things and wants to know "what bones are made of" and "wants to get to see what germs look like." Talia likes her teachers in school, and she believes if she tries hard, she can do anything. Outside of school Talia likes to play golf and to go on family vacations.

She admires and would like to be like her cousin because "he's funny." If Talia could do anything she wants with her life, she would work at a job her dad does. "He takes car parts apart and sells them to people."

If Talia could change things at her school, she would change the school lunches because she says the "nuggets have gristle."



## Danielle Thomas

Danielle Thomas is a senior who has shown herself to be a responsible and committed leader, while overcoming a lot of personal challenges in her life.

Danielle showed her leadership skills in high school as a co-president of the Black Student Union for two years, where she ran weekly meetings and coordinated field trips to the state capitol. She participated in the planning and implementing action of the African American Youth Leadership Conference, and worked to plan Madison High School's annual Black History Assembly. During her three years in Leadership class, Danielle also assisted with welcoming freshman and new students at orientation, and helped out at after-school events and planned pep assemblies.

Danielle is a caring and involved student, who is committed to helping younger students. She volunteers for the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program, has been an intern for SUN School at Madison and does tutoring in the library. What draws people to Danielle is her sweet temperament. She is always smiling and has a positive attitude.

Though she is involved with a full schedule of extra-curricular activities, Danielle never neglects her academics. She always puts her school work first and is working to maintain and improve her 3.38 grade point average. Being involved in AVID<sup>1</sup> for four years and Leadership class for three years has had a positive impact on Danielle. She is appreciative of the support she has received from AVID and Leadership teachers, and will always remember Mr. Gregory, the advisor to the Black Student Union.

Danielle lives with her older sister who is her role model because she has come through a lot with her. Through prayer and working together, she and her sister are overcoming the challenges that come their way.

Danielle was recently awarded the Act Six Scholarship which gives her a "full ride" at George Fox University. In the fall, she will focus on psychology because her ultimate goal is to become a marriage and family therapist. Danielle wants to earn a bachelor's and a master's so that she can help youth and families who have been impacted by domestic violence.



**Danielle Thomas**  
Senior • Madison High School

<sup>1</sup> AVID (Advance Via Individual Determination) is a college readiness system designed to accelerate student learning.



**Kinji Tlehhema**  
6th Grade • Harrison Park K-8 School

## **Kinji Tlehhema**

Kinji is a 6th grade student at Harrison Park School who is gifted with an inquisitive mind and qualities that make him excel in school. According to his teacher, "He is one of those rare students who seems at first glance to be fairly unfocused, yet at the end of the day, knows more about what was learned than anyone in the class."

Kinji is a bright eyed and articulate student who loves science and enjoys being one of the few talented and gifted students who is allowed to work on math at his own pace. He loves to learn and share the strategies he has learned to help his classmates. He shows a tremendous amount of patience and persistence in exploring and sharing a variety of strategies of learning because he knows that all students do not learn in the same way.

Finding a way to multi-task excites Kinji. His teacher observes that he often sings and moves about while he works. He loves creative writing and one day he plans to finish two stories that he began writing when he was in third grade.

Kinji has extensive interests outside of school. He likes fencing and learning new "sword techniques," aikido, and Hip Hop dancing.

When asked what he would change about his educational experience, without hesitation Kinji says: "Music! More music!"

Kinji has a 4.0 grade point average. He says that: "Mr. Swan [his teacher], my parents, my aunt, my friends, my fencing and aikido instructors, the SUN teachers, and sometimes my grandparents encourage and support me." The three words he uses to describe himself are: "Friendly," "Goofy" and "Awesome."

When he grows up, Kinji wants to become an artist, a lawyer and maybe a singer.

**The Young, Gifted and Black tribute is collaboration between PPS staff, special contributors and the community including:**

Reiko Williams, creator and curator

Willie Poinsette, Interim Director, School-Family Partnerships

Dr. Carolyn Leonard, researcher and writer

Marquis Stoudamire, photographer

Leif Sjoquist, graphic designer

Erica Patten, printing support

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## YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK 2014 NOMINEES

Mohamad Abdalla  
Markham Elementary

Tashi Clayton  
Sabin PK-8

Kyley Goodman  
Atkinson K-5

Mohamed Abdulahi  
Rosa Parks K-5

Robert Collins  
Jason Lee K-8

Enora Hall  
Trillium Charter School

Brandon Addleman  
Kelly K-5

Deja Curtis  
Jason Lee K-8

Taylor Hall-Debnam  
Grant High School

Aday Alemseged  
ACCESS Academy

Ilaali Dinka  
Lane Middle School

Olivia Hall-Gomez  
Harrison Park K-8

Natoryia Arnold  
Madison High School

Nina Edwards-Schroeder  
Grout K-5

Nathaniel Harold-Golden  
Grant High School

Michael Belcha  
Jefferson High School

Justice English  
Cesar Chavez K-8

Alexandra Harrison  
Roosevelt High School

Brianna Belisle  
Madison High School

Monae Ferguson  
Lincoln High School

Edil Hassan  
ACCESS Academy

Shaelynn Benjamin  
Roosevelt High School

Kyleshia Ford  
Grant High School

Labreeya Hayes  
Rigler K-8

Ella Bradley  
Peninsula K-8

Bella Freeman-Moule  
Rigler K-8

Mykia Hernandez  
Metropolitan Learning Center

Marquandre Brown  
Madison High School

Drecion Gates  
Sabin PK-8

Aojah Hill  
Roosevelt High School

Javon Carter  
Grant High School

Toriandre Givens  
Woodlawn PK-8

Hawi Hussen  
Roosevelt High School

Shatoria Cherisme  
Franklin High School

Malia Glover  
Harrison Park K-8

Olisaemeka Ikejiani  
Scott K-8

## YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK 2014 NOMINEES

Faith Isibor  
Rigler K-8

Sundrisha McPherson  
Jason Lee K-8

Paris Soots  
Astor K-8

John Jackson  
Lincoln High School

Paris Meyer  
Rigler K-8

Anthony Sylvester  
Roosevelt High School

Jalayah Jointer  
Woodlawn PK-8

Fatuma Mohamed  
Scott K-8

Malia Thomas  
Jefferson High School

Michaela Joseph  
Cleveland High School

Jeremiah Moore  
Cesar Chavez K-8

Danielle Thomas  
Madison High School

Joshua Kelly  
James John K-5

Mykia Nelson  
Bridger K-8

Khaylub Thompson-Calvin  
Roosevelt High School

Quinci King  
Buckman Arts K-5

Cassius Pettit  
Grant High School

Kinji Tlehhema  
Harrison Park K-8

Zaccai King Mode  
Sabin PK-8

Linnea Rohdin-Bibby  
Lincoln High School

Rashay Walker  
Arleta K-8

Ben Kitoko  
Roosevelt High School

Tanysha Ross  
Grant High School

Kamaria Watson  
Astor K-8

Trevon Leahy  
Woodstock K-5

Khadija Salah  
Cleveland High School

Kendall Wilson  
Grant High School

Kumasi Lockett  
Madison High School

Talia Sanders  
Sabin PK-8

Julian Wyatt  
da Vinci Arts Middle School

Muwuena Lux  
Grout K-5

DeMarcus Singleton  
Scott K-8

Mar'Isha Martinez  
Grout K-5

Jada Smith  
Lincoln High School



View the complete history of  
Young, Gifted and Black  
at our web site,  
[www.pps.net/students/2954.htm](http://www.pps.net/students/2954.htm)



# YOUNG, GIFTED & BLACK

— 2014 —

Young, Gifted and Black brings together an interrelated community of students from various backgrounds – racial, socioeconomic, religious, cultural – to create a rich culture for growing the mind and the heart of the individual student and the school itself. Experiencing diversity prepares students for life-long learning in an increasingly interdependent world. It opens minds organically; merely by being a part of a mixed group students expand themselves, their world and their knowledge. Young, Gifted and Black highlights Portland Public Schools' and the community's dedication to celebrate the success of our Black students.

This is the fifth year that we have honored Black students who are excelling academically and in the community. The students being honored this year were selected from a pool of over 85 applicants. The honorees represent unique backgrounds, experiences, family structures, home language, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, school and grade level. What these young people have in common is their commitment to achieve, despite the many obstacles life has presented to them. This unified celebration reframes the achievement debate for Black students.

Education is not just about acquiring knowledge but motivating someone to want to learn, both for its own sake and for advancement. As W. B. Yeats once said, "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire." Teachers, administrators, counselors and other support staff are the catalyst for fueling the fire of our Young Gifted and Black students. The communication of student success gives us all hope and encourages us to make changes that will eliminate previously unacknowledged barriers.

It is because of **YOU** that we are celebrating the fifth year of Young, Gifted and Black. Without fuel—your resources, time and energy—the vehicle of this courageous endeavor would stall. "We are a movement by ourselves, but we are a force when we are together." (Neyo)

**Esther R. Harris**

Special Education Family & Community Liaison  
Portland Public Schools

**Andréa Wade**

Program Coordinator  
Portland Public Schools



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