

SIX Seniors at Oyler School in Lower Price Hill are Accepted at the Highly Selective Berea College



March 10, 2023

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By Mike Templeton

Oyler School in Lower Price Hill has gone through a legitimate transformation over the years. From an elementary and middle school that largely reflected the struggles of a struggling neighborhood, Oyler School is now a paragon of student accomplishment. The Urban Appalachian Council, then located in the neighborhood, was involved in the advocacy leading to the school's transformation into a neighborhood learning center that focused on student health as much as educational needs. Since that time, Oyler has become something altogether new. When we consider that one of the main goals of the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition has historically been to help urban Appalachians find opportunities through education, it is gratifying to see a school in an historically urban Appalachian neighborhood succeed. This year's graduating class will set the bar for student achievement.

Student success is not a recent development for Oyler School in Lower Price Hill. As a community learning center and neighborhood anchor, Oyler has a great track record of placing students not just in college but sending them off with scholarships and honors to put them in line for continued progress. Thomas More University and Urban Appalachian Leadership Project graduate Elizabeth Fahey is one such example. But this year has shaped up to be truly remarkable. Six seniors from Oyler School applied to the highly competitive Berea College in the Appalachian region of Kentucky, and all six made the cut. Prior to this year, Oyler has only placed one student at Berea College.

Brian Talbert is the College Readiness Coordinator at Oyler School. He told me there were plenty of clues that this level of attainment may have been on the horizon: "We knew coming into this year that this senior class was exceptional. These students were already looking at college as we came into the fall." Talbert helped get the ball rolling with the first of two trips to Berea College. Part of what put a few of these students on track for Berea College was the competition for the Dr. Carter G. Woodson Scholar Award for African American High School Juniors that is awarded through Berea College. Talbert said three of his students applied for and won this prestigious award.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson is known today as the "Father of Black History." The child of former slaves, Dr. Woodson overcame numerous obstacles to pursue education. He attended Berea College, but was formally prevented from graduating because he was black. He went on to become only the second African American to obtain a Ph.D. from Harvard University. Dr. Woodson clearly saw the ways black people and black history had been systemically excluded, and he "founded the [Association for the Study of Negro Life and History](#) in 1915 in Chicago" to offer a way for people to study what he defined as the "the neglected aspects of Negro Life and History." Berea College provides the award in honor of his legacy.

As part of the process, Talbert took two of the three scholarship winners to visit Berea College. Talbert explained the visiting the college is part of the process that Berea College favors for admission. Talbert explained that Berea College's admissions process is a little different than other colleges: "A personal visit is a booster, as is a personal statement and getting the application done in less than thirty days." After this first visit, Talbert took another four students to visit Berea. They met with the Vice President of Admissions and got acquainted with the College. Talbert told me he mentioned to his colleagues that "this could be the year we get a student into Berea College." It was, as Brian Talbert told me, "Sometime in December that we got word that the first student was accepted for admission." Then they found out another was accepted. In total, six Oyler seniors were accepted to Berea College. Brian Talbert said, "we were just ecstatic."

Paulayza Kelly, a senior at Oyler, says in a Cincinnati Public School article, "It was hard to believe at first. I knew I was there academically, but actually seeing the offer made it all real. To have Berea acknowledge me as a top scholar they wanted was so validating."

This senior class has stood out in every way. The acceptance of the six students to Berea is just one example of how students from Oyler School thrive. "We have four kids with scholarships to Xavier University. One student has a full ride to the University of Cincinnati. Another has received a full ride to Miami University," Talbert said. These stellar accomplishments demonstrate the overall success of Oyler School. To have such academic achievement from any school is excellent. For them to have all come from our small neighborhood school in Lower Price Hill indicates that Oyler School is a leader in encouraging academic achievement in Greater Cincinnati. *PBS News Hour* highlighted Oyler School in 2015, and a documentary about the school was presented on *Marketplace* in 2013.

Opportunity through education has long been a chief priority for the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition. Lower Price Hill has been one of the main neighborhoods where the Urban Appalachian Council focused its efforts to help people gain traction through programs including adult education, youth activities, environmental leadership, and educational advocacy. The Urban Appalachian Community Coalition has continued the collaboration with the neighborhood through Core Member Nancy Laird and Pauletta Hansel's direct involvement with residents, including Oyler students and parents, and through partnerships with the neighborhood's grassroots organizations. Now Lower Price Hill's Oyler School is leading the way in college admission, and this includes distinguished academic scholarships. We should count Oyler School as a jewel among Cincinnati schools, and we wish the six students who were accepted at Berea College, and all of this year's seniors at Oyler School all the best.

The *PBS News Hour* on Oyler School is at this link: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/oyler-school>

The documentary story on *Marketplace* is at this

link: <https://features.marketplace.org/oneschool/documentary.html#:~:text=Based%20on%20the%20award%2Dwinning,school%20and%20go%20to%20college.>

Cover photo source: Cincinnati Public Schools Facebook

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