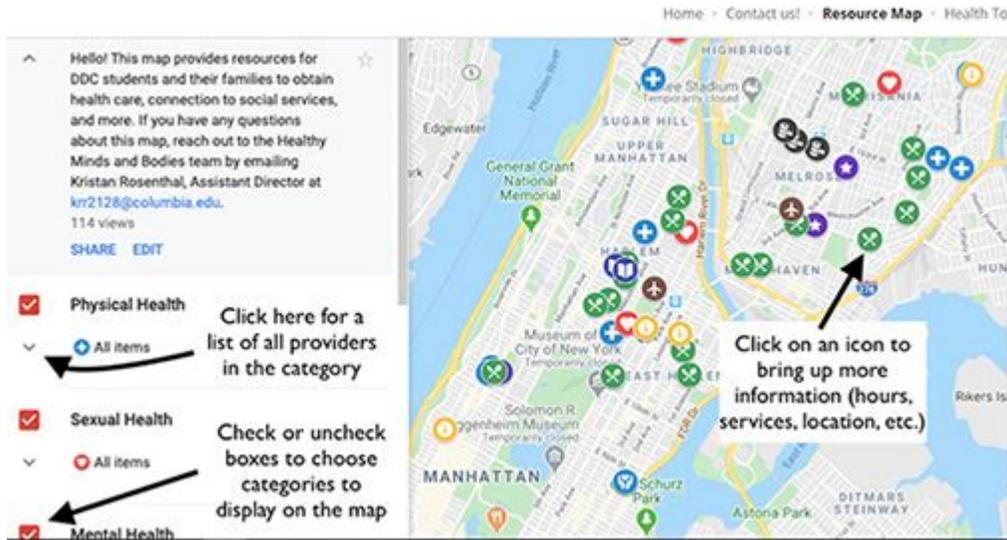




The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



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Healthy Minds & Bodies (HMB) Launches Website to Help DDC Students Cope with the COVID-19 Crisis

Through the *Resource Map* on the HMB website, students and families can now easily access information to locate and contact community-based organizations that provide services to address their different needs. Grouped under the following nine categories, the map prioritizes teen-friendly healthcare services and resources for food assistance, employment and legal advice.

- Physical Health/Primary Care
- Sexual Health
- Mental Health
- Single Stop (offers connections to a variety of social services)
- Food Pantries and SNAP
- Legal Assistance
- LGBTQ+
- Resources, Immigration
- Workforce Development

Navigating the network of social services can be confusing, says Kristan Rosenthal, Assistant Director, Healthy Minds and Bodies. This map makes the process easier and encourages more families to search for and obtain the resources they need.

What is the DDC College Success Mentor Initiative?

I watched Al, my mentee, walk to the stage at the DDC graduation with a huge smile, so excited about his future! He had been accepted in the Computer Science Program at Hunter College! says Aomeng Cui, DDC Mentor since 2018 and CC '20, who studied Biochemistry and German Literature. Aomeng will start a dual degree MD-PhD program at Columbia University this fall.

When we started working together, she adds, he lacked self-confidence, partly because he had a learning disability, but he was driven and motivated. I encouraged him to keep learning and practice for tests again and again. A few months later, his second SAT score jumped 700 points. That was a milestone in his journey to higher education. I am so grateful that as a DDC mentor, I got to be a part of his future!

The College Success Mentor Initiative for 11th graders is a key feature of DDC's College & Career Success (CCS) program, which has two goals: college admission & persistence and career exploration & readiness. The CCS program teaches students the knowledge and skills they need to successfully navigate the college admissions process, manage the college environment and culture, and map pathways from passion to career.

The volunteer mentors fulfill a crucial role as they help their mentees apply the lessons of their College Prep classes to create the deliverables required for their college applications. They also share their college experiences, which helps DDC students expand their understanding of the college process, determine their own *best-fit* colleges, and boost their self-confidence and resilience. *We have 62 students for two counselors,* says Yarisell Hernandez, DDC 11th Grade Counselor, *it can get very hectic when students need one-to-one attention.* The mentors provide much needed individualized attention and support that address each student's strengths and challenges.

DDC's mentors are students themselves, usually from Columbia, Barnard or Teachers College. They are positive academic and social role models for their mentees. For these University students, mentoring is a great opportunity to strengthen their leadership and teaching skills. It is one more way for DDC to foster the *double discovery* of mutual benefits for all involved.

The College Success Mentor recruitment process is rigorous. *Applicants must attend an information session where we review expectations, deliverables, and program timeline, so they understand what the job entails* explains Jess Yip, DDC 11th Grade Counselor. *If they are still interested, she adds, we interview them to determine the best match with our students based on personality and career interests. We also organize monthly mentor advisory sessions to review challenges and provide all mentors with professional development.*

This year, DDC paired 40 mentors with 62 students. Mentors helped each 11th grader research and develop a balanced list of about 10 *best-fit* colleges based on the student's academic profile and personal preferences; identify summer programs to strengthen skills in an area of interest and fill out the corresponding applications; and work on applications, including the personal statement, for their targeted colleges and scholarships. Many mentors continue to offer support to their DDC mentees into 12th grade, which allows both mentor and mentee to celebrate together the eagerly awaited college acceptance letters!

College admission is a very complicated undertaking and you have to start years in advance. Students are expected to pass Advanced Placement classes, be civically engaged, demonstrate self-confidence, and much more, explains Aomeng. All students need a lot of help to get through this process, but first-generation and low-income students need it more so because they do not have access to the same professional support and resources that are available to wealthier families. DDC students are wonderful and they deserve the same level of support!

Coleman Snyder is a DDC mentor and CC '20 who studied English and Psychology. He will start an MA program in Medical Anthropology at Oxford University this fall. My mentee wants to be a veterinarian because she likes science and loves animals, he says. We found a great summer program that combined both and she was so excited! She sent me her application and we edited it together. It was excellent! I was blown away by how committed and driven she was! It was wonderful to be a resource and to see I was making a difference, he added. I went through the same process five years ago and I remember how tough and exhausting it was. I admire my mentee for her dedication to succeed. I am a big fan of the DDC College Success Mentor Initiative, he adds, it has such a positive impact on the students and mentors!

The DDC staff and students extend their deepest thanks to the tutors and mentors. You have made a significant difference in the lives of our young people. Congratulations to Aomeng, Coleman and all others in the Class of 2020. We wish you much success as you take your next steps in achieving your goals!

DDC Alumna to DDC Counselor Paying It Forward: Taylor Ellis, M.S. Ed. in Education, CUNY Lehman College

I attended DDC from 9th to 12th grade, a time when you are trying to figure out the path you want for your life and you need a lot of expert advice and exposure to educational opportunities. As soon as I started, I found myself with Columbia students from very different ethnic and economic backgrounds who were volunteering as mentors, tutors, and teaching assistants. Working with them on the Columbia campus taught me a very valuable lesson – Ivy League institutions like Columbia University are within reach for public school kids in a low-income neighborhood like Harlem.

With a lot of hard work and DDC guidance every step of the way, everything fell into place. I took a lot of classes, went on college tours and then to college. Through it all, I learned lifelong skills and decided to “pay it forward”! I got an M.S. Ed. in Education from CUNY Lehman College and I am now a DDC Counselor for 9th and 10th graders. I want to give local youth the same chance to a good education and a fulfilling career that I had. There is a world of opportunities out there and DDC programs help open the doors to better life outcomes.

DDC’s high-quality programs for academic enrichment and college readiness made a big difference in my life on so many levels. DDC taught me the importance of asking for help. I was struggling with physics in junior year and I mentioned it to my DDC counselor. She immediately connected me with a tutor who was a master in physics! I went on several college tours with DDC and I learned to evaluate the student experience that each offered so I could select the best fit for me. What I appreciate the most however, is the whole array of soft skills – leadership, conflict resolution, communication and problem solving – that DDC taught me. Years later, you realize and appreciate that these skills increase your success, not only in your career but also in your everyday life.

Summer Academy was a turning point for me! The program was very community and team oriented. We all lived in Columbia dorms and took our meals together at the dining

hall. I had to positively relate to my peers. I built relationships with Resident Teaching Assistants, who were often Columbia students. From our perspective, they were adults and we looked up to them. They talked about college life and campus clubs. They made me realize how being involved in different activities, growing a network, and feeling self-confident could improve my college-readiness and my leadership skills.

In college, I decided to pursue a career in education and give back. I wanted to provide youth with the same comprehensive support system DDC offered me in high school. In 9th and 10th grade, children learn about themselves – what they like and what they do not like. They have to figure out who they are, determine their own goals and map the strategies to achieve them.

As DDC counselors, we help them shape who they are in a safe space and teach them how to act with intentionality. We do that by exposing them to as many experiences as we can to expand their options. I always encourage students to participate in the various curricular and extracurricular activities, even if at first, they are not very interested. They often discover that they enjoy a new field and they want to pursue it in college.

Many times all they need is guidance on how to address a specific challenge. A student came to see me recently, very overwhelmed because she was not good at taking tests. We explored strategies together. I told her to study, use practice tests, be confident and take AP courses. I also reminded her to nurture her growth mindset – the understanding that efforts and practice build skills while mistakes are only temporary. It is very rewarding to see students overcome this kind of obstacle.

I particularly enjoy the recruitment process at DDC when we go to partner schools. We set up classes and present the DDC programs to students and parents. Immediately following our visit, we invite them to an open house at DDC so they can enroll. That time between the school visit and DDC open house leaves us wondering whether the students will indeed enroll! It is so gratifying when you see the students arrive for the open house!

I am so happy I have this opportunity to pay it forward after having benefited myself from the wonderful DDC programs when I was in high school. I think the addition of the Healthy Minds & Bodies program last fall helps to bring it all together. There are several college preparation programs in New York City, but DDC is the only one with a comprehensive approach to college access and success through its “whole child” program model that includes academic enrichment, college advisement, and social-emotional support.

Partner with us to offer the gift of education! To help fund our programs and expand our outreach, click here: [“Change a Life”](#)

**Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!
We want to hear from you!**

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