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Attending college was not up for debate in Ashanti Bennett’s house. Her mother, who was single-handedly raising her and her two brothers, knew that Ashanti would be the first in the family to graduate from college. What she didn’t know was that she would get a college degree one month before getting her high school diploma.

“My high school classes weren’t challenging enough, and I was afraid that I wouldn’t be prepared for a more rigorous curriculum. My mother heard about Berkeley Middle College, and she strongly encouraged me to apply,” laughed Bennett.

Berkeley Middle College is designed for students who want to get a head start on college, offering college-level courses at Trident Technical College’s Berkeley Campus that count toward their high school diploma and college degree. Some students will graduate from high school with college credits already banked, while others, like Bennett, can graduate with an associate degree. Claire Freeman, principal at Berkeley Middle College, cannot say enough about the student that Ashanti was during her two years at the school.

“Ashanti is a responsible young woman who always managed whatever task came her way with integrity and grace. She was respected by her teachers and peers and was friendly and outgoing, greeting everyone with a smile,” said Freeman.

Bennett was also able to take advantage of TTC’s Upward Bound Math and Science program, a federally funded program that helps talented students pursue careers in math and science, with a focus on students that are typically underrepresented in those fields. Bennett participated as both a member of the UBMS robotics and academic bowl teams.

"Two words describe Ashanti Bennett: dependable and perseverant,” said Antonio Robinson, Director of Upward Bound Math and Science. “Despite her circumstances, she always saw barriers as opportunities to overcome a challenge and because of that attitude, she is no stranger to success.”

Ashanti, now an honor student in her junior year at the University of South Carolina School of Business, feels that although her college classes at Berkeley Middle College were overwhelming at first, they taught her how to better prepare and organize. “I would not be as successful now if I hadn’t made the decision to attend BMC and participate in the Upward Bound program,” she said.
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