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District Office
620 East University Avenue
Gainesville, Florida
32601-5498

www.sbac.edu
(352) 955-7300

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NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:
Jackie Johnson/(352)955-7545

For Immediate Release

Scholarship will help student achieve dream of becoming a teacher

Ultimately, Gainesville High School senior Zaynah Smith wants to return to her alma mater and help train other future teachers.

That dream is a step closer to reality after Smith was chosen to receive the Alachua County Public Schools' first Florida Prepaid Superintendent Scholarship, which was made possible by a partnership between the district and the Florida Prepaid Scholarship Foundation.

Smith, who is graduating from GHS' Academy for Future Teachers (AFT), will receive a \$7000 scholarship that will allow her to attend Santa Fe College for the next two years. She then plans to go on to earn a master's degree and teaching certificate.

The AFT is one of several career tech academies offered in Alachua County Public Schools. Those academies provide students a rigorous and relevant curriculum along with real-world experiences in their chosen fields. Smith says she learned about topics ranging from building lesson plans to human growth and development to the impact of environment on a student's education.

"It's such a cool and genuine place to be," she said of the program. "It gave me an insight into teaching and an appreciation for teachers because I realized how much they have to go through."

Smith has already put a lot of what she's learned in the AFT to practical use in her job at a local childcare program for five- to ten-year-olds.

"They have so much energy, it really perks me up," she said. "I think you can lose that energy as time goes on, so I like being around that and drawing on it. I've heard it keeps you young."

Although she enjoys working with younger children, Smith's long-term goal is to work with high school students.

(more)

“I enjoy the connection between high schoolers and their teachers,” she said. “It’s really important during a big stage in your life,”

Smith says AFT director Katie Martinez-Malo is one of the teachers she’s really connected with—so much so that one day she’d like to come back and work with Ms. Martinez-Malo in the AFT program.

“She’s one of the biggest helps I’ve ever had in school,” she said. “I can come in here if I’ve had a bad day, and she’s always there for me.”

Zaynah has an innate ability to inspire others,” said Martinez-Malo. “I have witnessed her bubbly personality and enthusiasm towards education engage students when she teaches lessons. I look forward to seeing her blossom in her field and impact her future students.”

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