

8 Oklahoma City Students Earn National Spotlight at Young Enterprising Women Leadership Conference on East Coast

Eight Oklahoma City students attend national leadership conference after STEM mentorship program, with one earning a full-ride scholarship to OCCC.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, UNITED STATES, May 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Eight students from Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) attended the [Young Enterprising Women](#) National Leadership Conference last weekend (April 24–26) at the DoubleTree Hilton in Arlington, Virginia.

The students were selected following their participation in the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program, an initiative of the Enterprising Women Foundation, hosted earlier this year at [Oklahoma City Community College](#) (OCCC). The forum brought together hundreds of high school students from across the metro to engage with accomplished women CEOs, presidents, and community leaders.

OCCC Professor of Accounting Janelle Montgomery led students through the financial literacy portion of the day, providing practical guidance on budgeting, saving, credit management, and long-term financial planning. Her session focused on equipping students with real-world tools to make informed financial decisions as they prepare for college, careers, and future leadership opportunities. Through interactive discussion and relatable examples, Montgomery emphasized the importance of financial confidence and economic empowerment as foundational components of personal and professional success.

Through panel discussions, small-group mentoring sessions, financial literacy training, and hands-on STEM programming, participants gained meaningful exposure to career pathways and



Eight Oklahoma City Public Schools students stand on stage after being selected to attend the Young Enterprising Women National Leadership Conference, following their participation in the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program.

the confidence to pursue them.

The impact of the program was reinforced in local coverage, where educators and students alike highlighted its role in preparing young women for future careers. “We’re wanting to really empower young women to be ready for the workforce once they graduate Oklahoma City Public Schools,” said Amy Fullbright, STEM coordinator for Oklahoma City Public Schools. “These ladies were selected based on their interest in pursuing careers in STEM.”

Selected for their leadership, academic excellence, and demonstrated potential, these eight scholars represented Oklahoma City on a national stage.

The Oklahoma City Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program is led by Victoria Woods, Oklahoma City YEW Forum Chair and CEO and Chief Investment Advisor of [ChappelWood Financial Services](#). The program partners with Oklahoma City Public Schools and Oklahoma City Community College to identify and uplift high-achieving young women across the district.

The eight scholars representing Oklahoma City and their respective schools include: Anna Godinez (Capitol Hill High School); Ray’Onna Jenkins (Classen High School of Advanced Studies); Johnnae Vaughn, Makenzie Hardiman, and Nictajia Gatlin (Frederick Douglass High School); Ashley Cerda-Leija (Northwest Classen High School); Alexa Sanchez (Southeast High School); and Miah Hill (Star Spencer High School).

The event featured hands-on financial literacy training and a panel of accomplished women leaders, including Woods, who shared her personal journey. “I grew up with seven siblings, and we were in a little matchbox house cooking on a cook plate. I didn’t have lunch money. So



Nictajia Gatlin (Frederick Douglass High School) embraces Victoria Woods on stage after receiving her award at the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program hosted at Oklahoma City Community College.



Participants and mentors come together in a celebratory group photo at the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program at Oklahoma City Community College.

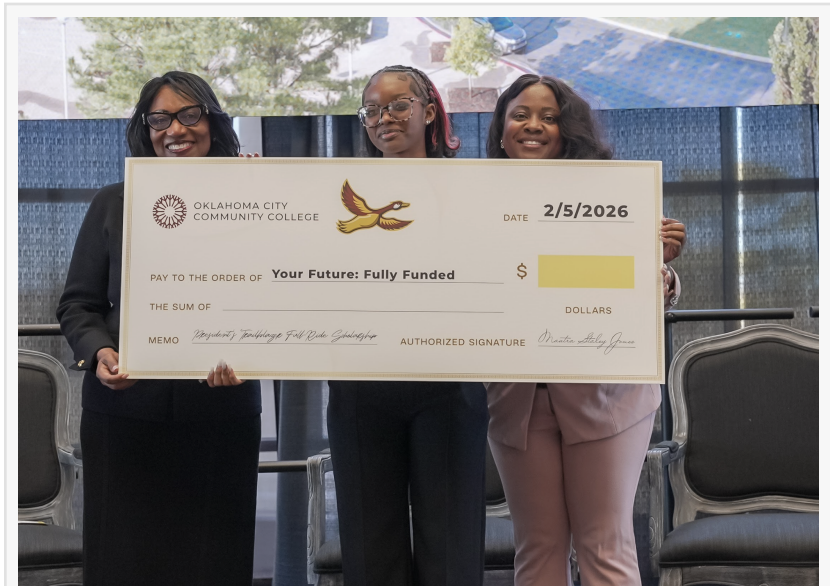
naturally, you don't have mentors," Woods said.

Her story deeply resonated with students like Nictajia Gatlin. "It really means a lot, because for me, I really don't have a lot. So, to hear them say they came from a blank piece of paper to now they are billionaires—it really means a lot to me," Gatlin said.

Fellow student Makenzie Hardiman shared her takeaway: "It's OK to be who you are and never, ever, ever let somebody tell you that you can't do something. Continue to do what you have to do."

In a powerful and unexpected moment, one participating student was awarded a full-ride scholarship to Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC), underscoring the real-world impact of the program. The scholarship was presented on-site by Dr. Vita Pickrum, Senior Vice President for Institutional Advancement and External Affairs, and Dr. Carolyn Eastlin, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs and Strategic Enrollment, in recognition of the student's academic achievement, leadership potential, and future promise.

"These scholars are truly remarkable," said Woods. "It is both an honor and a privilege to see the impact of our local OCCC event culminate in bringing these eight outstanding students from Oklahoma City Public Schools to a national stage. If you can see it and believe it, you can be it—and these young women are seeing their futures unfold. A special thank you to President Jones for sponsoring the venue and being an integral part of the success of the day. Her leadership continues to pour into the young women of our state and create opportunities that never existed."



A full-ride scholarship to Oklahoma City Community College is awarded to a participating student by Dr. Vita Pickrum and Dr. Carolyn Eastlin, recognizing academic achievement and future potential.



Students participate in a financial literacy session during the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program at Oklahoma City Community College, reinforcing real-world skills alongside STEM and leadership development.

The National Leadership Conference provides transformative experiences through plenary sessions, public speaking development, advanced STEM education, and direct engagement with some of the most successful entrepreneurial women in the United States. These opportunities are designed to equip participants with the confidence, skills, and vision needed to excel in their future academic and professional pursuits.

This milestone was made possible through the generous support of the following scholarship donors: Gayle Hodges; Jewel Shine (Granny's Kitchen); Oklahoma City Community College; Katy Boren, Cox Communications; Lance and Cindy Ruffel Family Foundation; Denver W. Meacham and Patricia F. Edwards; Red Carpet Car Wash and Laura Blakewell; Scott Arthur Klososky and Annette White-Klososky; and Sharina Perry (Utopia Genetics LLC).

The Oklahoma City Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program also extends its gratitude to Oklahoma City Community College for serving as the host venue for the local forum and for its ongoing commitment to fostering a college-going culture for young women across the metro.

Congratulations are also extended to Enterprising Women Foundation CEO Monica Smiley, National Co-Chair Edie Fraser, and the entire national leadership team for their continued dedication to empowering young women and delivering impactful programming nationwide.

For more information about the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program, please visit <https://enterprisingwomenfoundation.org>.

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About the Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program

The Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program, an initiative of the Enterprising Women Foundation, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing women's entrepreneurship globally. The program provides high school girls with opportunities to connect with accomplished women entrepreneurs, recognize their leadership potential, and build the skills needed to pursue careers in STEM fields and beyond. Oklahoma City is one of 28 U.S. cities hosting a Young Enterprising Women Mentoring Forum Program, and 2026 marks the program's second year in the Oklahoma City market.

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