

## High Point High senior's hard work in school pays off in full

Student leaders receive college scholarships from national program

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by David Hill | Staff Writer

Years of leadership and good grades have paid off for Daniel Bonilla and Demisse Habteselasie, both seniors at High Point High School in Beltsville.

The two were among just 11 county students selected in December to receive full four-year college scholarships from the Posse Foundation, a national program based in New York that awarded 480 scholarships this year to talented students from diverse backgrounds.

"It didn't click when they told me," said Bonilla, 17, of Beltsville. "I couldn't believe it. I was just so excited."



Raphael Talisman/The Gazette

High Point High School seniors Daniel Bonilla (left), 17, of Beltsville and Demisse Habteselasie, 17, of College Park were awarded the Posse Foundation scholarship, which awards high school students for their leadership and accomplishments. The scholarship will pay for their college educations in full.

The program's 37 partner universities choose scholars in groups, or "posses," of 10, to give each student an on-campus support group. Bonilla was selected to attend Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pa., and Habteselasie will attend Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif.

"I felt a tad bit nervous because all the students were brilliant and just outstanding," said Habteselasie, 17, who lives in College Park and was informed of his acceptance by phone in December. "My heart dropped. I told my parents and they were really proud, so it was a great feeling."

Bonilla and Habteselasie were among 1,500 Washington, D.C.,-area students nominated by their schools last summer. After a series of interviews, logic games and group projects with other nominees, they were among 62 students from the region accepted to the program.

"We do look at the GPA, SAT and transcripts, but we want to see their leadership inside and outside of the school," said Joseph Peralta, who trains Posse's District-area scholars. The program has regional offices in the District, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and New York.

District-area scholars were eligible for scholarships from Bucknell; Pepperdine; Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa; Lafayette College in Easton, Pa.; Sewanee: The University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Habteselasie will study political science at Pepperdine, and plans to go to law school before pursuing a political career. Bonilla will study engineering at Bucknell, and hopes to be accepted into the school's selective biomedical engineering program.

Both students have been leaders and role models, despite distractions from less-focused classmates, said High Point guidance counselor Lydia Kohn.

Bonilla, who spoke no English when he came to the United States from Colombia at age 8, is treasurer of the school's National Honor Society and is a member of the school's soccer and tennis teams. Habteselasie is president of the Student Government Association, and a member of Youth with Purpose, a group where seniors and juniors at the school mentor and tutor underclassmen.

"Even though you have all these other obstacles and you have all these distractions ... they just tune it all out," Kohn said. "I'm just impressed. I wouldn't be able to do what they do. They deserve it."