

To&Through Student Stories



Meet Marcquan

Marcquan is a Black CPS graduate who grew up in Englewood. After graduating from Wells Community High School (Wells) in 2025, he attended two Chicago City Colleges, beginning at Malcolm X College and quickly transferring to Olive-Harvey College, before stepping away due to financial difficulties. Marcquan is a passionate young man whose wisdom far transcends his years.

Elementary School

As a child, Marcquan moved between different neighborhoods in Chicago as well as Gary and Hammond, Indiana. Though he spent the majority of his middle school years at A. Phillip Randolph Elementary School, he remembers his time in Gary as being especially difficult. Struggling to acclimate, he felt the city's educational resources were not as strong as in Chicago.

At Randolph, Marcquan recalls receiving a lot of valuable support and feedback from teachers:

"They'd stay on me whenever I slipped up...just try[ing] to get me into things like sports and always ask[ing], 'how's life been going?' and 'how's your mom?' Simple things like that really go a long way."

What Marcquan notes here is **intentional, active mentorship**. Teachers who cultivate relationships with their students, demonstrating genuine interest in their well-being, often leave a lasting impression.

To&Through Student Stories

Marcquan remembers having difficulties with maintaining good grades. He attributes this to his frequent moving, which made it hard for him to focus on his academic and social belonging.

High School

Going into Wells Community High School, Marcquan set out to develop a “toughness,” or confidence, that he felt was lacking. He achieved this by finding community through various sports, including basketball and baseball.

Though he found Wells to be “chaotic at times,” he generally enjoyed his experience there and found solid support. One example is Ms. Hern, a mentor who pushed Marcquan to plan for his future and consider college.

Marcquan had strong relationships with his teachers, yet struggled with his grades and overall relationship with school. “I think my GPA was kind of low. I’m smart, but I just never try to put the effort in... My whole focus was on fast money. Like I always wanted to get paid.” In particular, school did not address his financial difficulties Marcquan and his family were facing

During his junior year, Marcquan began to consider life after high school and felt somewhat stuck and unsure of where to go. Under the guidance of Ms. Hern, he was able to persist through these academic difficulties and eventually begin coursework at Malcolm X Community College. Upon matriculation, his goal was to pursue a career in nursing.

College

Attending Malcolm X Community College, Marcquan felt overwhelmed by the general education requirements. He remembers failing his English classes and receiving minimal support from his professors.

Dissatisfied, he swiftly transferred to Olive-Harvey College, where he found himself much happier. Marcquan notes that the **higher Black population** at Olive-Harvey enhanced his sense of belonging. Because of this, he felt better understood as part of a greater community. Regarding his new English classes, Marcquan says, “You know, I bounced back! I had a better teacher. She was still strict, but she cared.”

To&Through Student Stories

Marcquan also felt supported by his Physical Science professor, Mohamed Sherriff. “He helped us, [and] under[stood] our absence[s]...he actually cared for us.” His professor actively connected with Marcquan and encouraged him to engage in class. This tremendously motivated him. “I actually went above and beyond,” Marcquan remembers.

Marcquan’s experiences demonstrate the difference a passionate teacher can make to help students grow their sense of belonging in the classroom. While the workload remained the same—if not greater—having more hands-on educators seemed to cultivate a demonstrated change: Marcquan’s grades rose.

Across his college journey, Marcquan took speech classes which he values highly. He describes himself as a shy individual. Speech coursework gave him the skill set to communicate more consistently and effectively, in and out of the classroom. He found that his development enabled him to better connect with other students at Olive-Harvey.

Unfortunately, Marcquan encountered financial difficulties and became unable to pay for classes at Olive-Harvey. He stepped away from his studies and is now investigating possible career paths, including work for the Chicago Transit Authority or the Chicago Police Department. He intends to soon acquire his driver’s license as he has determined it is a frequent requirement for city jobs.

What worked for Marcquan

- **Educators who fostered personal and academic growth.** From elementary school through college, Marcquan succeeded academically when his educators connected with him. He vividly remembers powerful one-on-ones where educators would ask him about his family and encourage him to focus on school. Having those caring relationships helped Marcquan feel motivated in class. These educators also actively guided him to “learn everything step by step.” Marcquan felt supported not just as a student, but as his whole self. Their instruction and connection motivated him to excel in class.
- **Attending a school with a higher Black student enrollment.** When Marquan transferred to Olive-Harvey College, he was appreciative that he had more Black classmates. This helped him develop a stronger sense of belonging and community than he felt at his previous college. This, in turn, supported his academics.

Marcquan's Hopes for the Field

For Schools

- **Maintain and Bolster External Partnerships** - Marcquan highlights the importance of existing student support programs, like the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago. He urges public schools to deepen their relationships with such organizations to offer students better opportunities for financial, emotional, and social assistance.
- **Enforce Student-Teacher Connectivity** - Marcquan's story reflects the impact that caring teachers can have on a student. He discusses being able to tell the difference between a teacher who cares and one who does not. The former pushes students to do better and grow closer to success.

For Students

- **Intentionality** - Marcquan draws attention to high rates of crime in disenfranchised or underserved communities. He believes that the way to make a safer Chicago is through students, parents, and schools working together with charged force. "The grown people can't stop the cycle." Change, he believes, also depends on young people who must internalize the lessons of their mentors and seek to better themselves.
- **Learn outside of the classroom** - Marcquan encourages students to seek education in and out of the classroom. In his view, "education determines your life." He recommends that students take the time to learn, especially about business and financial management.