



**Open Door: Gear-Up Project
Wilbur Cross School, Bridgeport, CT**

In collaboration with the Connecticut State GearUp Project at Wilbur Cross School and Casey Family Services, YES supported the training and follow-up of a GearUp team to organize a symposium for their classmates. The goal for the symposium was to help 8th-grade students anticipate and prepare for high school enrollment and create an open door for school success. With the approval of their school principal, the GearUp team worked over the course of the school year to implement the symposium that was held on the campus of the University of Bridgeport.

The GearUp team was given the responsibility to plan the entire symposium. The students named their event Open the Door and chose a focus on positive character as key to opening the door for success. They also chose to include workshops with guest speakers. Many of speakers were graduates of Wilbur Cross who had become successful professionals. Planning for the Open the Door symposium required many hours and the GearUp team successfully maintained their academic performance while completing the project. A YES training workshop, and the planning tools included in the YES training guide, helped the GearUp students unite as a team and provided an outline to create their implementation plan.

Almost 90 students attended the Open the Door symposium that was held on May 26. The GearUp team identified the character goals of respect, cooperation and responsibility on the cover of the symposium program. The students believed that individuals who demonstrated these character traits would find success in high school and beyond. Arthur West, Jr. of Clipper Magazine presented a keynote address for the full symposium and



Representatives of GearUp team at the Open the Door Symposium (May 2005).

other speakers presented in workshops designed specifically for the young men or young women. A theme for all of the speakers noted strategies to successfully complete high school. The students were encouraged to commit themselves to finish high school and look beyond to the potential of post-high school education. In addition, speakers noted the following points to be successful in school and life-- stay true to themselves, learn to listen, stay cool in the face of adversity and chose to be successful through education and not the temptations on the streets. Evaluation responses from students were very positive at the end of the symposium. Many students noted the hope of pursuing post-high school education as a goal.

GearUp team members reflected on their preparation through the YES training as extremely helpful for developing their teamwork and providing them planning skills. Students noted that, "...teamwork was essential. We had to cooperate with each other and practice listening and respecting the opinion of others and not just push our own an idea." The YES staff agrees that teamwork can be powerful and hope to collaborate again with GearUp in the future.