Jennifer Aldridge knows she is going to college. She’s sure she wants a career in sports medicine, or maybe child psychology.

But the 17-year-old from Detroit didn’t know what to expect as an undergraduate until she spent four highly anticipated weeks at Michigan State University last summer. She is a Summer High School Scholar, one of more than 500 high-achieving students from urban school districts who have been invited to campus for an experience that can’t be matched at home or in school.

The scholars live in residence halls and experience college life. They take the ACT and develop skills for writing and using technology (see article, page 34). With MSU students as mentors, participants learn about issues of social justice and—most of all—what it will take to achieve their dreams.

“I think I have grown and matured a lot since I’ve been here,” Aldridge said a few days before the program ended—the first time she was away from her family for more than one week. “This helped me realize that college is going to be a challenge, but it’s also going to help me reach my goals in the future.”

The Summer High School Scholars program began in 2004 as part of the Broad Partnership between the College of Education and Detroit Public Schools, a $6 million collaboration designed to develop well-trained teachers for urban environments. Today it continues to increase urban teenagers’ knowledge about higher education as a successful “pipeline” to MSU academic programs, and particularly teacher education. In addition to Detroit, high schools in Chicago, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Flint and Lansing also now send students.

The number of students from Detroit Public Schools pursuing teacher preparation at MSU has grown significantly, from 21 students during fall 2003 to 71 as of spring 2010. Many of them focus on preparing to teach in city settings as members of the Urban Educators Cohort Program.

“I’ve always wanted to be a teacher, but the program made me even more interested,” said Amber Lawson, a DPS graduate who attended the summer scholars program three times before eventually enrolling in the teacher preparation program at MSU. “It also made me want to go into urban education. The classes revealed the truth about stereotypes applied to urban students, and how as a teacher I should help change those stereotypes.”

The scholars complete an intense academic program that includes developing effective study habits and writing skills. They conduct research to debate current issues in education that are particularly important in their lives. Scholars also enjoy participating in daily physical activity and discussing health disparities, as well as a talent show production.

“The classes helped me feel like I have a voice,” said Lindsay Marshall, a student at Detroit’s Renaissance High School who returned for her second summer in 2010. “I always wanted to go to college. This year, I decided I want to be a Spartan.

“It just feels right.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION
The 2011 Summer High School Scholars program will be open to students in partnering urban school districts entering 10th, 11th or 12th grade for the 2011-12 school year. Students must provide an application and recommendation form, an essay and transcripts (unofficial). Visit www.education.msu.edu/summerscholars or contact James E. Neely, Jr. at neelyj@msu.edu or (517) 432-0451.