**GatesFoundation\_JessicaRivera\_MarkeishaGrant\_FINAL**

Jessica Rivera and Markeisha Grant talk about their work guiding students through the college admissions process. They are both part of the New Tech Network, which partners with schools to provide college and career readiness for all students.

**Markeisha:** I'm originally from the West Indies, so I went to elementary school up until seventh grade in Jamaica, and I felt like my first six years, I was very average. My mom actually made me repeat the sixth grade, and once I repeated that grade, I just transitioned into like the top of my class. So when I came to the U.S., school was very easy for me. I graduated valedictorian of my middle school, my high school. I think it built my confidence a lot.

**Jessica:** I felt the opposite. I didn't have a whole lot of support from my parents. There wasn't really any attention to the four kids. My mom definitely wasn't going to be able to help any of us pay for college. She didn't go to college, and so it wasn't really a priority. And the students around me did have that support and were very secure in what was going to come next. It was a little intimidating. I didn't know what we know now about the financial opportunities that are out there. I felt lost.

**Markeisha:** I also feel like I didn't have much guidance. I'm a first generation college student, a first generation immigrant, and neither of my parents went to college. So thankfully, one teacher in particular really guided me and motivated me and really encouraged me to go visit colleges. If it wasn't for that support, I would have felt lost as well.

**Jessica:** We do have a lot of first generation college students. They do need every bit of guidance that we can offer. The application process itself is one thing, but to know where you're applying to, to really know what that college has to offer, sometimes the students don't know what to look for, what to ask.

**Markeisha:** I feel like the challenges I hear are very similar, like students not wanting to go too far away from family. A lot of students are really scared of the sticker price that they see when they go onto a college's website to find out the tuition. Students not understanding how you get financial aid, especially the scholarships and the grants. There are a lot of students who are scared about taking out loans.

**Jessica:** I don't remember anybody guiding us, and now I'm so happy to be in this role. I feel very grateful to help our students.

**Markeisha:** One of the most exciting experiences I had is when I visited your school and I did those focus groups with the students, and they felt like they were learning so much about the college application process. So when I talk to them about my journey to where I am, they always have so many questions. I always walk away just feeling like that is the best part of coming to campus, being able to talk to the students. It really gets me excited about wanting to continue doing this work.