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Jordan High student has a big dream DeWarren Langley loves politics - and wants to be president of the U.S.

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When he flips on the television, 17-year-old DeWarren Langley would rather watch MSNBC than MTV.

The Jordan High School junior's favorite television channel is the first hint to his interests and aspirations.

Langley doesn't just watch politics, he immerses himself in them. With steely-eyed determination, he says one day he will be mayor of Durham and then the first black president of the United States.

Langley already has an extensive political résumé. Over the past year, he has become an outspoken voice for Durham youth. He is founder and executive director of Teenagers Politically Active (TPA), chapter leader of the National Student Advocacy Alliance, a member of Jordan High School's site-based decision-making team and a former page for the state House of Representatives, among a slew of other political extracurricular activities.

Through the TPA, Langley strongly believes teens should be a voice for future leadership. Designed to help influence decisions by Durham's leaders, the TPA recruits area youth to speak up about gangs, bus driver shortages and crowded classrooms.

"Young people can enlighten you if you give them the opportunity," said Langley. "If teens must abide by the same laws and pay the same taxes as adults, there should be some way our voices can be heard."

Langley's leadership and voice have not fallen on deaf ears. The Independent weekly recently gave Langley a 2001 Citizen Award, and he was highlighted in this week's edition for his efforts in the community.

Langley played down the award, but he said he was proud because the honor represented hope for what he believes in.

A 1999 trip to Washington, D.C., planted the seed for the TPA, Langley said, after he and other students presented papers on homelessness and school safety to Rep. David Price in Durham and Sen. John Edwards at the Capitol.

"The more I learned about the government, the more my interest grew in politics," he said.

After a town-meeting-style forum last spring about heightened gang activity and at-risk youth, Langley decided to focus his interest in government into something tangible.

At the insistence of his cousin, former city councilwoman Angela Langley, DeWarren Langley went to a forum led by Mayor Nick Tennyson. He said people were upset and crying about problems young people were causing.

DeWarren Langley decided to speak up against a potential curfew.

"Everybody was complaining about the problems and solutions for youth," Langley explains, "but only adults were talking."

So Langley stood up and said Durham should build a club for teens rather than enact a more costly curfew, and the press took notice. TV cameras and reporters interviewed the teen about his speech.

After the forum, both Langleys sat on the porch and discussed DeWarren's ideas. Out of that discussion, the idea for the TPA was born.

Despite Langley's emerging role as a youth leader, not all has been rosy lately. Langley admitted to being suspended from school last week for fighting.

But the time off from school gave the teen time to think about his role in the community.

"[Being a leader] is a lot of pressure, a big burden because a lot of young people support the ideas I have," Langley said.

Langley admits he made a mistake, and he doesn't want to jeopardize his role as a leader.

"I'm a teen, and I make mistakes like anybody else," Langley said. "But I realize that I have a lot of things to lose."

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