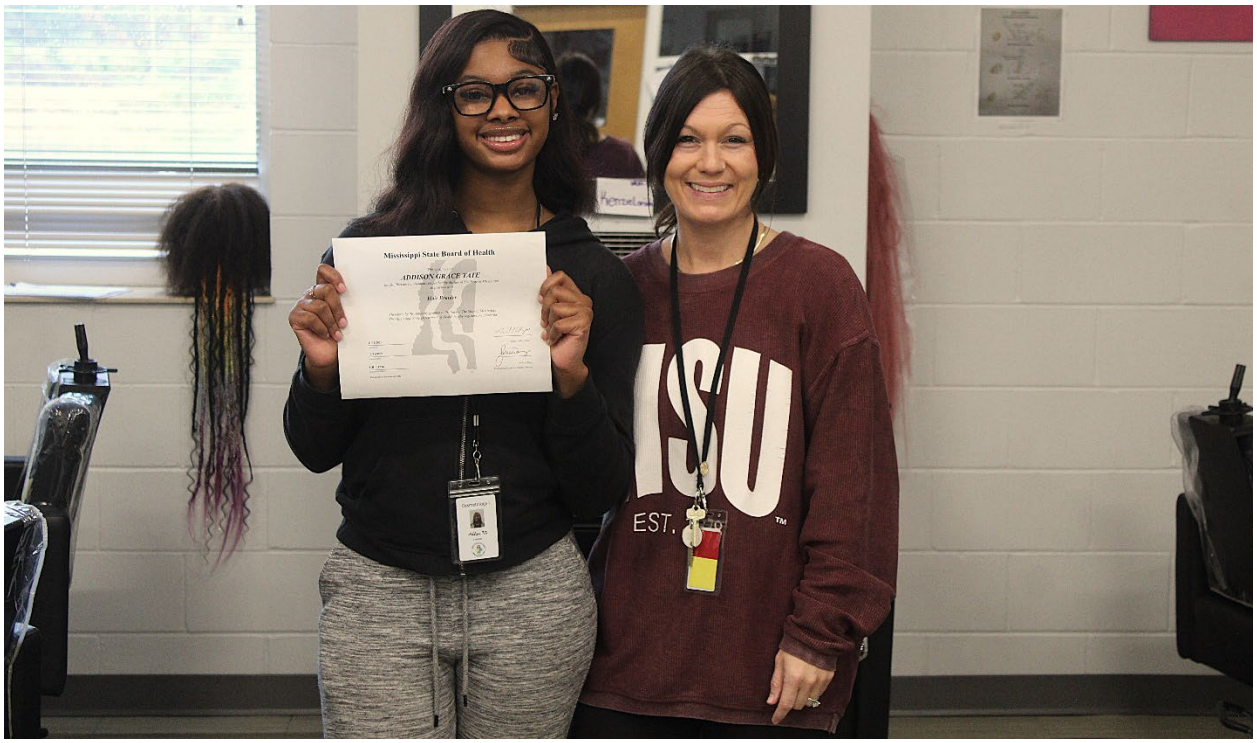


Addison Tate didn't know teenagers could get a license to braid hair in the state of Mississippi.

The idea of getting paid to do something she has loved for years intrigued the West Lowndes High School junior.

Still, given she is 16 and the fact she wasn't sure if she wanted to go through the process, Tate didn't immediately realize the opportunity.

It wasn't until Career Technology Center Cosmetology instructor Jessica Allen-Boulware encouraged Tate to take the next step and make the most of her talents that she committed to completing the online application.

On Tuesday, Tate received a certificate from the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) that allows her to work as a hair braider in the state. She is the first student at the CTC to earn a hair braiding certificate.

“It’s very exciting,” said Tate, who is in her first year taking classes at the CTC. “I think I am ready. I have prepared my mind. I have talked to myself. I have talked to my mama. I have talked to God. I think I am ready.”

Tate said she started braiding hair when she was 4 or 5 years old and hasn’t stopped. She said she has learned to do more, including wigs, roller sets, pixie cuts, so she wanted to take the Cosmetology class to learn how to do things the “right” way. She is contemplating going to Cosmetology School or to college to study Business. Either way, she said she is looking forward to working with other professionals and gaining experience so one day she will be able to open her own salon.

Fortunately, Tate’s mother has been in contact with the family friend who taught Addison how to braid hair years ago. Those conversations have revealed there may be an opportunity to work at Martha’s Kut & Kurl, a salon in Columbus, so she can get paid for her skills and she can learn the “salon experience”, which includes running a business and handling and relating to customers.

Tate already has some experience in that area. Ever since she learned how to braid hair, Addison said she has had a stable of “clients” to test her skills on, including her mother, grandmother, cousin, best friend, little cousin, aunt and other family members. She said everyone has provided “constructive criticism” so she is able to fix something at that time or she can learn from the experience.

“I am a perfectionist,” Tate said. “I am not going to stop until it is perfect. It can take me all day. I don’t care.”

Tate credits Allen-Boulware for her help with the MSDH licensure and for her encouragement. She recently completed the online application

process and waited until her mother received an email informing her Addison had received her certificate.

The MSDH regulates hair braiding, not the Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology and Barbering. While some states without licenses require braiders to work for themselves, the state of Mississippi allows hair braiders to work in salons. However, hair braiders can't perform any cosmetology services outside of braiding, which means they can't shampoo, blow dry or prepare the hair in any way. Clients must come in with their hair already prepared or have a licensed cosmetologist prepare the hair prior to the braiding service.

To obtain a cosmetology license, students need to complete 1,500 hours of cosmetology school and pass one test to be able to do haircuts or provide services like dyeing, bleaching, perming or chemical straightening.

Allen-Boulware said she encouraged Tate to get a license because she has the skill and having the certificate will enable her to work and gain valuable experience while she is still in high school.

"She showed me some of her work and she did such a phenomenal job," Allen-Boulware said. "I am super proud of her for taking that next step with her career."

Allen-Boulware said earning the certificate will enable Tate to build a client base as she continues her educational path. She hopes Tate taking the initiative to become the first Cosmetology student at the CTC to earn her Braiding certificate will impact other Cosmetology students at the CTC.

"Age should never be a roadblock because there is no age on the Braiding certificate," Allen-Boulware said. "This will be her first job. Practicing the skills young will give her the opportunity to do something

she loves and it will help with customer service skills and provide building blocks for her future, even if she steps outside the Cosmetology realm.

“She is going to set an example for future students. They might say, ‘Oh, wow, I didn’t realize I could get a Braiding certificate and go ahead and start working’. I think she is going to be a wonderful example of the possibilities for students in the future because you can be taught all day to braid, but if you don’t practice, it all falls on you and how much time you put into your art and your skills.”