



PEAK EDUCATION
REACH HIGHER

End-of-Year Newsletter 2021-2022



Reaching Higher

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CEO Letter



Dear Peak Education Community,

We are excited to share our Spring Newsletter with you. This edition includes a moment of pause to honor our past leader Jon Stepleton whose contributions we were finally able to acknowledge publicly and in-person at the March family meeting. We also honor Marvin Strait, a longtime supporter and friend of Peak Education who passed away in late April. His call in his obituary to support Peak Education has raised \$10,000 which has only furthered his legacy of empowering students and the Peak Education community.

I'm pleased to share that Peak Education continues to grow. We recruited 85 new 6th and 7th graders into the program this year, making our projected total enrollment in the program this fall to be over 400. Even as we grow, we are continuing to find ways to provide greater depth to our programming. We are pleased to partner with Colorado College to hire a Public Interest Fellow to assist us with monthly in-school programming and college counseling during the next academic year. The new Fellow, Amy Ji, brings a passion for education and college access along with real world teaching experience as well writing coaching experience – both of which will directly support our scholars. Programs like the Impact Service Project (ISP), highlighted in this edition, also provide opportunities for our students to develop their leadership, civic engagement and problem-solving skills. Also highlighted in this edition of the newsletter is our new College Success Program which is actively working to support students in their college journey in ways that we have not before.

This academic year allowed us to start to envision an even stronger Peak Education community and to reflect on the best ways we can serve our community as well as where we want to go from here. This summer, the Peak Education team, the board and myself will be answering questions around what do we want to accomplish over the next 3 years and how do we get there. This work will culminate with a strategic plan to be released this fall that will set a vision and serve as a guide for our work through 2025. I look forward to sharing more about this with the Peak Education community shortly.

As always, we are grateful for your interest and engagement in Peak Education and the students that we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carlos Jimenez'.

Carlos Jimenez, Peak Education CEO



At the March Family meeting, we celebrated our former CEO, Jon Stepleton. As my predecessor, Jon saw Peak Education through some of the most challenging financial years the organization has faced. Despite this, the number of students grew under Jon's leadership. He was instrumental in facilitating the handoff of the REACH program (now Full STEAM Ahead) from being a program

primarily oriented toward Atlas Prep students to one exclusively serving Peak Education Scholars. Full STEAM Ahead, developed by our current staff member Anne Taylor, formerly of the Colorado Springs School, is a pivotal program for Peak Education Scholars as it introduces them to hands-on experiential learning experiences and develops their intellectual curiosity as well as serving as an entry point to Peak Education.

Jon’s persistence in continuing this program continues to have an impact, as 66 students plan to participate in this summer’s program. Jon also deepened the Peak Education signature program

and ensured that Vennita Browning was able to engage in transformative relationships with students and families through his focus on the administrative aspects of the organization. We are grateful for Jon’s contributions and efforts to ensure that Peak Education was sustained so that we could build on his and Dalton’s vision that all students have access to opportunities that allow them to reach for their potential and live meaningful and purposeful lives.



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IMPACT SERVICE PROJECT 2.0



The Green Team, joined by community volunteers, celebrated Earth Day by picking up trash at Panorama Middle School.

In January, we kicked off our second year of the Impact Service Project, made possible through a grant from L3Harris. By participating in the ISP, Peak Education Scholars have the chance to take on some of our community’s biggest challenges. In response to problems identified in local businesses, nonprofits, and educational institutions, students work in small group teams—with the support of a coach—to identify root causes of local area problems and identify solutions.

Meet our teams & their missions:

Viva Marketing & Consulting- Large scale event planning, data organization and storage

Green Team- Cleanup 80910 & 80916 neighborhoods

Harrison High School- Social Justice & Campus Culture

Innovations in Aging- Intergenerational Tech and Mentorship

College Corner

College Success Program's First Year Wrap-Up

By Anne Taylor

The support that Peak Education provides for its scholars doesn't end when they get their college acceptance letters, or even after they walk across the stage to receive their high school diplomas. In fact, we know that many of our students face significant academic, financial, and social challenges in college, and research shows that those who have strong support networks are more likely to persevere and complete their degrees. To ensure that our college students are getting the support they need as they transition to their new institutions, this year we initiated our new College Success Program, coordinated by Anne Taylor. Monthly communication and resources focus on timely topics to help students anticipate and recognize potential potholes and encourage them to access on-campus resources to help navigate the first-year experience. For example, September's theme was recognizing and overcoming imposter syndrome. Later in the fall as mid-term exam grades rolled in, understanding Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and its implications for financial aid was the focus, and students were encouraged to meet with academic advisors, access tutoring centers, and attend professors' office hours and supplemental instruction sessions.



In addition to these monthly missives, there were in-depth individual phone or Zoom conversations at least once a semester, as well as numerous follow-ups as students confronted the gamut of academic and personal challenges that come with the territory. Unfortunately, the in-person "Back-from-College" Night planned for January had to be canceled due to the Omicron-driven Covid spike, but a Zoom "College Hangout" in the fall drew several, including a few second-year students. Without a doubt, the program's most popular element was the final exam care package, filled with treats and study tips and mailed to students in the weeks leading up to fall and spring exams.

Student engagement in the program varied, as did the needs and experiences of each of our nine 2021 graduates who started their post-secondary education in the fall. Several students made other plans in the second semester, hoping to return to their post-secondary degrees later. Others are transferring schools next year, having found the first option was not their best fit but grateful for the experience, nonetheless. All learned valuable lessons about the importance of taking risks, balancing academic and other commitments, and taking advantage of the resources available--early and often.

In the fall, the Class of 2022 will be the focus of our intensive outreach; however, CSP will continue to follow and support scholars who are entering their second year, as well as staying connected with those who have stepped away, encouraging them to pursue a post-secondary program, if not a college degree. The journeys of Peak Education scholars take many routes, and we are here to support them and their families along that path for life.

College Intern

By Anne Taylor

As part of Peak Education's efforts to support scholars beyond high school graduation, this summer we interviewed and hired our first College Intern in over a decade. Many college students, especially after their first year, do not have opportunities for paid internships. In many fields, unpaid internships are the norm; yet not all students have the luxury to work without getting paid, particularly if these internships are located away from home in high-rent cities, not covered by college financial aid packages. Recognizing the need to help our college students find meaningful, resumé-building, paid employment close to home, Peak Ed secured funding for one full-time intern in the summer of 2022. Our staff interview committee was impressed with all the candidates, who submitted resúmes, cover letters and letters of recommendation to be considered for the position; however, in the end, Gisselle Zamora Ruelas emerged as the top candidate.

A 2021 graduate of Harrison High School, Gisselle recently completed her first year of college at Northeastern University in Boston, where she volunteered as an English tutor and a First-Year Program Advisory member, in addition to earning 4.0 GPA in their honors program. In addition to her obvious acumen and



work ethic, Gisselle's experience as a Peak Ed Scholar and her biliteracy in Spanish and English provide a unique perspective and in-demand skills as we seek to connect with our new families and deepen relationships with our existing ones. Before she even officially began the job, Gisselle served on a student panel speaking to newly admitted sixth graders and their families at our New Student Welcome in May, as well as explaining details of the Full STEAM Ahead summer program to Spanish-speaking families.

Gisselle will be helping in virtually all areas of Peak Ed operations this summer—from assisting Jasmine Rainey design and deliver elements of the June College Application Camp, to helping update our informational database, to possibly working with middle schoolers in the Full STEAM Ahead program.

After her first few weeks, Gisselle says, “I have really liked it so far. It provides flexibility in learning about all the various aspects of Peak Ed.” When asked what was new or surprising to her as an intern, she said, “I didn’t know how much detail we keep track of. Now I see how we can use this information to offer more activities to more students.” Gisselle will make a terrific addition to the Peak Education team, and we will undoubtedly miss her contributions when she returns to college in August.



Delianys Reyes

Harrison High School Valedictorian

Alongside her high school diploma, Delianys Reyes has earned an associate degree in psychology and 83 college credits from Pikes Peak Community College, all with an astronomical GPA of 4.65. Not surprisingly, Deli will represent her class as Harrison's Valedictorian. How does she do it? Her community mentor, Ann Carson, noted Deli's "unwavering commitment to academic excellence despite the obstacles presented by the COVID pandemic. She kept her eye on the larger goals, spending countless hours each week on her coursework, whether studying from home or at school. Her willingness to reach out for help from her teachers when needed set her up for success." Over the years, Deli has grown more confident in her own abilities and communication skills as she stepped into leadership roles. She was part of the Impact Service Project that was invited to present their results on a panel at the Colorado School Counselor Association Conference in Keystone last fall, and this year she worked with Viva Marketing to plan a festival honoring Hispanic culture and heritage. Deli possesses the wisdom and courage to define her goals and expand her world, all the while staying true to who she is and where she comes from. Deli has received the Hispanic Heritage Foundation Community Service Scholarship, and next year, she will attend Colorado College debt free where she plans to major in psychology and minor in feminist and gender studies. Ultimately, she hopes to become a clinical psychologist serving underrepresented populations and work to end the stigma surrounding mental health education. If anyone can do it, Deli Reyes can!



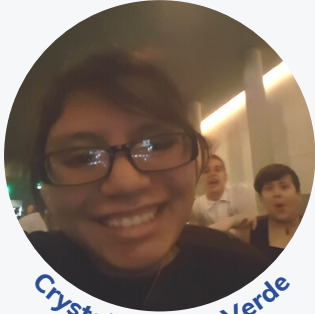
Melia Palaroan

Sierra High School Valedictorian

Melia Palaroan is graduating from Sierra High School at the top of her class. This year's valedictorian has a list of impressive accomplishments beyond a 4.5 GPA. She also earned an associate degree from Pikes Peak Community College during her junior year of high school. From student government, where she served as class president for three years and student body president this year, to National Honor Society, to four years as a varsity cheerleader, Melia engaged fully in her school community, honing her leadership skills and making the most of her time there. She also took advantage of college classes at PPCC, earning 81 college credits while still in high school. As a Peak Education scholar, she participated in community service projects at Care and Share and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute, in addition to doing work at the Children's Literacy Center. Melia is also deeply committed to her family and her Hawaiian heritage. She has often spoken about returning to Hawaii to help people live fuller lives. Her desire to serve others has led her to fluctuate between education and healthcare as potential careers. After watching some of her family members in the healthcare profession make a difference during the pandemic, she has decided to pursue a degree in nursing at UCCS where she has also received a full-tuition scholarship as a Kane Scholar.



CONGRATULATIONS TO PEAK EDUCATION'S CLASS OF 2022!



Crystal Castillo-Verde

Harrison High School
Pikes Peak State College



Hayden Decker

Sierra High School
CSU Fort Collins



Herbert Hafenrichter III

Palmer High School
Colorado School of
Mines



Joleen Mai

Sierra High School
UCCS



Marquis McLean

Harrison High School
UNC Greeley



Melia Palaroan

Sierra High School
UCCS



Semajae Parker

Sierra High School
US Navy



Adilene Resendiz Coronado

Harrison High School
Fort Lewis College



Deliannys Reyes

Harrison High School
Colorado College



Tysha Robertson

Sierra High School
UCCS



Etelin Tapia

Harrison High School
Colorado College



Michael Weber

Sierra High School
UCCS

Back-to-School Fundraiser

Breakfast @ 7:30 am
Reception @ 5:30 pm

Our team is hard at work this summer preparing for another year of programming. Join us August 16th at Almagre for our annual Back to School Fundraiser. Your support at the Back to School fundraising campaign will empower our youth to reach higher, and support our team to do the vital work to serve this community of scholars. Head to <https://www.peakedu.org/btsfundraiser> to RSVP!

Peak Ed Contact Info

Office

1645 S. Murray Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80916
connect@peakedu.org | 719-389-1249;

Carlos Jimenez (CEO)

carlos@peakedu.org | 719-232-3218

Vennita Browning (Director of Programs)

vennita@peakedu.org | 719-389-1249

Jasmine Rainey (Director of College Counseling)

jasmine@peakedu.org | 719-424-3041

Lauren Taylor (Assistant Director of Programs)

lauren@peakedu.org | 719-528-7037 ext. 2

Nataya Stepleton (Program Specialist)

nataya@peakedu.org | 719-352-2053

Grace Miller (Marketing and Communications Coordinator)

grace@peakedu.org | 719-304-4360

Gisselle Zamora (Peak Education College Intern)

gisselle@peakedu.org | 719-389-1249

Amy Ji (Public Interest Fellow)

amy@peakedu.org | 719-389-1249

Kristen Nunez (Grant Writer)

kristen@peakedu.org | 719-389-1249

Thank you
Peak Ed
Community
for another
great year!

