

PEAK EDUCATION

Spring 2020 Newsletter

YOU DIDNT COME THIS
FAR TO ONLY COME
THIS FAR

Dear Peak Education Community,

Since joining Peak Education in August, I've been tasked with several important initiatives including strengthening our curriculum, enhancing college and scholarship counseling efforts, exploring the possibility of expanding Peak Education's work to other schools, and developing stronger communications for our stakeholders and families.

This newly revamped newsletter is one way to strengthen our communication. Through these updates we would like to share more about the leadership, as well as what the Peak Education family is up to. In addition, in February we relaunched our social media communications on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. We hope this can further draw you into our collective story and allow for more connectivity between all of us. If you are on these platforms, please like or follow us at [peakeducationcos](#) on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

We have also ramped up our college counseling activities this year. In December we implemented CollegePlannerPro, a software system designed to assist juniors and seniors with selecting colleges and streamlining scholarship resources. In partnership with the Sachs Foundation, we will be hiring an additional college counselor to assist with high school program curriculum development and provide direct college and scholarship counseling to our scholars.

Peak Education is expanding! Soon, we will add new cohorts from North Middle School (D 11), Fox Meadow (D2), and Manitou Springs (D14). We remain committed to our students and families in Harrison schools and anticipate that we will recruit and enroll slightly larger cohorts from Carmel, Panorama, and Mountain Vista in the near future.

Finally, I wanted to say thank you to the many families, students, alumni and stakeholders who have taken time to welcome me and teach me more about the history and impact of Peak Education. This is an incredible organization to have joined, and I'm excited for what lies ahead in our future.

Sincerely,
Carlos

COO, Direct of College Counseling

IMPORTANT SPRING EVENTS

Moniker Scholarship Deadline:
April 15th

Leading Edge Summer Program Application Deadline:
April 15th

G.I. Forum Scholarship Deadline:
June 1st

Student Feature

Senior Olivia Fernandez reflects on her years as a Peak Ed scholar

Olivia Fernandez is one of almost 300 scholars that make up the Peak Education family. She joined the program in sixth grade and is now a senior in her final semester of high school and making big plans for college next year. Olivia recently took time out of her busy schedule of challenging classes and essay writing for college and scholarship applications to reflect on her journey.

Like most Peak Ed middle schoolers, Olivia attended REACH (now Full STEAM Ahead or FSA) at the Colorado Springs School for several summers, where she made important academic, social and personal discoveries. “Students that I usually wouldn’t have talked to have made lifelong friendships with me, and we still talk frequently and share memories.” Things she learned in the “Brain Matters” class there helped her “drastically” in her AP Psychology class in high school, and the Innovation Lab pushed her to think creatively. Olivia is one of three Peak Ed scholars so far who have come back to serve as paid mentors at FSA. One of her motivations was “so my students could see someone that looked like them and went through some of the same experiences. I hope I made them want to come back to FSA as a mentor, too.”



Olivia mentors a group of rising 7th grade Peak Education scholars at Full STEAM Ahead in 2019.



Olivia shows younger students how to conquer their fears in her role as a mentor at Full STEAM Ahead last summer.

Other Peak Ed activities Olivia has most enjoyed are the community clean-ups. “These have definitely been the most memorable to me because it makes me feel good knowing I’m giving back and helping out my community.”

Olivia credits Peak Ed COO and Director of College Counseling, Carlos Jiménez, with motivating her this year. “He’s been very adamant about helping me get into college and get scholarships. I could tell that he really wants to help by reading my essays and answering any questions I have.”

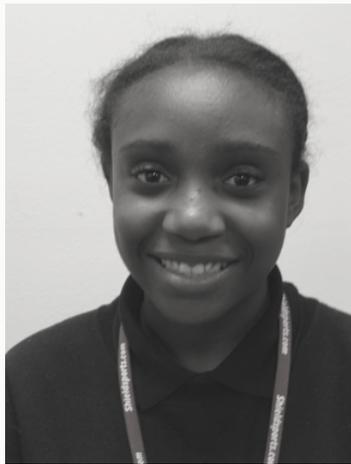
Olivia is not the only Peak Ed scholar in her family; her older sister Elisia now attends college in Florida. She reflects on the impact of the Peak Ed program on her journey through middle and high school: “Peak Ed has given me lots of opportunities for college, scholarships, and volunteer jobs. The program has shown me that it doesn’t have to be scary going to college, and there are lots of people that are willing to help me achieve my dreams.”

Alumni Feature

Porschae Chitmon-Turner gives back as Peak Ed board member and teacher

Porschae Chitmon-Turner is the first Peak Education alumna to become a member of our Board of Directors. A graduate of Harrison High School, Colorado College and the Master's program in English at Arizona State, Porschae has taught English for the past five years at Harrison High School. Porschae recently sat down with members of Peak Education to share the story of her educational journey and Peak Education's role in it.

Looking back on her time at Carmel Middle School and Harrison High School, Porschae can't recall many overwhelming challenges because "Peak



Porschae in 6th grade, entering the program.

Education was always there; I knew I could get help." The confidence she needed to succeed there and beyond was built in those early years. "It was Dalton's [Peak Ed Founder Dr. H. Dalton Conner] faith in me, Rick Price's [Carmel Middle School Principal] faith in me. They didn't talk down to you, no matter your age. It was always about encouragement, always about the goal...the plan."

When it came time for post-secondary education, she recalls sitting down with Dalton for college recommendations, noting how observant he was. "He saw qualities in me that I didn't see." Porschae also had great support from her family, who always pushed her to do her best and grow. She remembers her first Peak Education family meeting. "My entire family was there; that's just what they do, whether you want them to be there or not. Even today, I can't imagine life without their support."

Porschae always knew she wanted to attend Colorado College, but when she got there it was even more challenging than she had imagined, with more stringent expectations for writing and oral presentations than in high school. She persevered by taking to hear what Peak Education had taught her about perseverance and never giving up.

Kids coming from predominantly low-income areas, she says, are met with stereotypes about their potential. Peak Education helped her get past these by bringing in speakers and scheduling meetings to work on breaking through stereotypes. While completing her degree in English at CC, she worked at the Peak Education office across the street which helped ground her and provided encouragement. "The little moments stand out, not the grand gestures. The one-on-one, always a smile, Vennita's laughter... Dalton and Vennita emphasized not stopping because someone says you can't; they wanted Peak Education scholars to push through obstacles, to get out in the community to see what the world has to offer, and do what we always dreamed about." They emphasized that every kid has immense potential, even if it's not consistently evident.

After she graduated from CC, Porschae was somewhat unsure of what she wanted to do, but when she thought about all of her experiences, she realized that most of them involved working with kids, so she decided to enter the Teach for America program, which helped her recognize her passion for teaching. Thus began her career teaching English at her alma mater. Why Harrison? "Once a Panther, always a Panther," she responds. She loves talking about books with her students, especially Shakespeare, especially Julius Caesar. "I could do that every day."

In addition to, and perhaps even more important than teaching literature, she sees her job in more holistic terms. "See the kid, not the problems, the barriers... Learn to love them regardless of where they're at." And at the end of it all, when they walk across the stage at graduation, she says, "it's a really good feeling."



Porschae at her college graduation at CC.

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Alumni Feature Cont'd

As a new member of the Peak Education Board, Porschae brings her passion to give back to her community with her time and energy, not to mention her experience. She says she is still learning how things operate, but she clearly sees how hard people in the organization work, and is impressed by how much they are doing to grow the program, to search for new opportunities and hopes that she can bring her (former) student perspective to bear. When talking to donors, she states, "I'm an example of what Peak Ed can do."

When asked what she would like today's Peak Ed scholars to know, she encouraged them to dream, but also to have a Plan B. "The world is getting incredibly competitive, so not to increase your skill set is an injustice to you. Put yourself out there...Dive into the impossible, even if you don't get to where you want to go. Don't worry about failure, but about not giving yourself a chance to fail. It's okay to fail, but it's not okay to quit."



Accolades

- As of March 30, Peak Ed scholars have earned 58 college acceptances. Acceptances come from 16 different colleges/universities from those who have reported. Top institutions so far: UCCS(7), CSU-Fort Collins (6), CU-Denver (5), UNC (3).
- Peak Ed scholars have been offered nearly \$200,000 in need-based, institutional and merit scholarships so far--we expect this number to continue to trend upward in the coming weeks!
- Program Director Vennita Browning was selected by the Rocky Mountain Association for College Admission Counseling (RMACAC) to receive a scholarship to attend their upcoming spring conference in Albuquerque, NM.
- Keenan Wright (Harrison,'15, Colorado College '19) was accepted to the University of Michigan's doctoral program in Chemistry with the support of the Gates Millennium Scholarship.



Give! Campaign Results

- #1** in "Young Donor" category (356 donations)
- #12** of 100 non-profits for most money raised
- 467** individual donations
- 167** scholar donations
- 23** alumni donations
- \$34, 019** total amount raised

Thank you to all of our generous donors!

- The Lane Foundation \$50,000
- Edmonson Foundation \$30,000
- Bloom Foundation \$100,000
- Bristol Brewing Company: Black Lager Event

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