

CASE
STUDY

College-School Partnerships

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THE CHRONICLE
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Ascendium Education Group is excited to support The Chronicle of Higher Education's initiative to prioritize student success. Throughout the duration of the project, this partnership will produce special virtual events, focused reports and a new online resource center, where colleges can search and find creative solutions and useful content from The Chronicle's extensive archives of best practices.

Our support of this project promises a comprehensive look at new and innovative approaches to helping students achieve success. By collecting voices and perspectives from across higher education, The Chronicle's expert journalists can guide colleges to make actionable changes that will help close achievement gaps and fulfill the promise of socioeconomic mobility for all students.

Ascendium supports initiatives that seek to create large-scale change so more learners from low-income backgrounds can achieve their educational and career goals. We share with The Chronicle a passion and purpose to inform and empower higher education trustees, leaders, administrators and faculty members about the pressing issues facing students today. That includes shining a light on students of color and transfer students, as well as those who are the first in their family to attend college.

We believe in the power of education and training beyond high school to transform the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds. The COVID-19 health crisis has exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put these learners at a disadvantage relative to their peers. This makes the solutions raised by this initiative all the more vital.

Thank you for your interest in this initiative. To learn more about Ascendium, please [subscribe to our monthly newsletter](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Kerwin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Amy Kerwin
Vice President – Education Philanthropy
Ascendium Education Group





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“Impatience.”

That, in a word, is why Mitchell E. Daniels Jr., president of Purdue University, initiated Purdue Polytechnic High School, one of four college-and-high-school partnerships explored in this case study.

Like most institutions of higher education, Daniels says, Purdue wants to aid the success of students from low-income households, first-generation college families, and underrepresented minority groups. But too few students, particularly from less-affluent neighborhoods in Indianapolis, were applying to Purdue. Daniels, who became the university’s president in 2013 after serving as Indiana’s governor, shook his head over the numbers he was seeing. In 2016, for example, out of the roughly 23,000 students in the Indianapolis Public Schools, only 12 entered Purdue and only five of those students were Black.

“If we wait on the public-school system, we’re never going to make progress,” Daniels realized. The solution? “Build our own pipeline.”

Purdue did, and now Indianapolis schools, including the open-enrollment Purdue Polytechnic High School campuses, send 47 students annually to Purdue. There are now about 60 former PPHS students at Purdue, and the university hopes that number will consistently inch upward. A total of nearly 1,000 students are enrolled at the three PPHS campuses — with a fourth campus scheduled to open soon.

Hands-on work and group projects are a feature of a PPHS education. Here a group of students — drawing on skills and concepts learned from earlier algebra and physics classes — design and create catapults.

PPHS students, if they meet basic academic and other requirements, are guaranteed admission to Purdue. Moreover, with the help of state and Purdue scholarships, tuition and living expenses for low-income students are largely or completely covered. Whether students decide to go to Purdue, to other colleges, or follow a different path, says Keeanna Warren, PPHS associate executive director, staff members try to make sure the graduates have solid and financially sensible plans.

Fees are also covered for Purdue's one- to four-week on-campus summer programs in which low-income high-school students from PPHS and elsewhere can get a feel for college life and academic demands, earning college credits at the same time. Those credits can shave a semester or two off of students' work toward a bachelor's degree, saving even more time and money.

We knew we'd "better make high school look different" in order to get different results from its potential low-income first-year college students, says Scott Bess, executive director of PPHS. So the PPHS curriculum emphasizes STEM subjects and group projects not under the supervision of teachers, but of "coaches," who, in pedagogical approach, are more "guide on the side" than "sage on the stage."

Bess and his PPHS colleagues want graduates who can reflect, analyze, and think critically, using "[design thinking](#)" to define and tackle a problem. PPHS tracks graduates' academic paths — down to seeing how PPHS has prepared them for Purdue chemistry courses, for instance — and adjusts its programs accordingly, Bess says.

BRIGHT HORIZONS FOR ALUMNI

Analytical reasoning and design thinking may sound like vague, jargony concepts. However, they have helped shape the academic skills of alumni like Victor Chukwuocha, PPHS Class of 2022. An 18-year-old Purdue freshman studying integrated business and engineering, he'd like to become a project manager or consultant. PPHS group projects, Chukwuocha recalls, taught him to think big: How can the world feed nine billion people by 2050? How can industry make solar panels cheaper, accessible, and easier to install?



PHOTO BY PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Victor Chukwuocha, a PPHS graduate and first-year student at Purdue, hopes to pursue a master's in public-policy administration.

Chukwuocha was born a year after his parents immigrated to Indianapolis from Nigeria. Like more than 140 other PPHS students, he attended high-school summer programs at Purdue and might be able to knock a semester off of college, getting a head start on his planned master's in public-policy administration.

His PPHS classmate and fellow Purdue first-year student Brionna DeWeese is studying human services and would like to work in the foster-care system, where she spent some of her early years before her grandmother adopted her and her three siblings.

Although she's not pursuing a STEM field, DeWeese values how her high-school

education prepared her for college. Group projects, like one on making semitrailer trucks safer on highways, helped not only her critical thinking but her presentation skills, she says. Before participating in the Purdue summer program, DeWeese says, "I was not thinking about college at all." She didn't consider herself smart enough.

When she got to campus that summer, however, she liked the independence and a setting in which she could focus. When the going got tough in a sociology class, her classmates boosted her morale and assured her that she could handle the material.

Kayla Owens, 19, was the first student admitted to PPHS and is now a Purdue



“Before participating in the Purdue summer program, I was not thinking about college at all.”

Brionna DeWeese's summer experiences at Purdue gave her the confidence to go to college. She is currently a first-year at Purdue, studying human services.

PHOTO BY PURDUE UNIVERSITY



Kayla Owens, 19, was the first student admitted to PPHS and is a sophomore at Purdue. She hopes to manage a data network for a corporation someday.

“My mom always told me school came first, so that’s always been my motto.”

campus in 2027, a decade after the high schools’ first class was admitted: Students of color and low-income students will be more of a presence among the 50,000 undergraduates, with, he hopes, hundreds of PPHS graduates among them. The results are incremental but substantial. “We’re actually starting to move the needle,” he says.

For his part, Daniels, who has announced that he’ll retire from the Purdue presidency at the end of 2022, says he is gratified to see his brainchild starting to mature. He has tried not to micromanage. Still, he sometimes reminds the Purdue Polytechnic High School team: “Remember whose name is on that school. What you’re doing reflects on us.”

A SUMMER HEAD START

Colorado College’s summer Stroud Scholars program started in 2019 and has so far benefitted more than 65 students from 18 local high schools across eight school districts in the Pikes Peak area.

The college accepts 25 of these scholars annually, at no cost to them, into the three-summer program. Many Stroud Scholars are from low-income households. Quantitative reasoning and composition courses are complemented by offerings in computer science and other subjects, community-service and other enrichment projects, and campus perks like an e-sports lounge and skating rink.

sophomore studying computer and information technology with a minor in organizational leadership. She wants someday to manage a corporation’s data network.

Her single-parent mother has been a role model, Owens says, running her own work-force-development consulting company while earning a bachelor’s and two master’s degrees and working toward a doctoral degree in adult and community education. PPHS and three summers at Purdue taught Owens how to manage her time. Of the Covid lockdown, she says, “honestly, it was a breeze for me because we were already doing things online.”

Owens plans to graduate a semester early from Purdue. She enjoys her social life but is pretty much all business. “My mom always told me school came first, so that’s always been my motto.”

Big goals aren’t reached overnight, but Owens, Chukwuocha, and DeWeese are Purdue pipeline pioneers. Bess, PPHS’s executive director, pictures the Purdue

PHOTO BY PURDUE UNIVERSITY

“They kind of have a taste of what it’s like to be a college student and find their interests,” says AliciaRose Martinez, the college-access specialist who manages the program. Stroud Scholars also receive yearlong mentorship from the college’s faculty, staff, and students.

Students who complete the three summers and have a minimum 3.2 GPA earn admission to Colorado College with comprehensive financial-aid packages. This year the college will see how many of the initial cohort apply there. But, says Jim Burke, director of the summer session, “we’re excited for whatever their postsecondary adventure is.”

A LONGSTANDING DUAL-ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

Dual-enrollment programs are a proven way to give high-school students a head start on college, keeping them academically engaged and potentially saving them tuition costs for college credits earned.

Lorain County Community College, in Ohio, started its Early College High School program in 2004. From 2013 through 2022, 607 graduates of the program earned 40,704 credits, valued at \$7.6 million in LCCC rates or \$17.9 million at public-university rates. Of those 607 students, 575 earned associate degrees.

“We have worked with local community organizations like the Urban League, NAACP, El Centro, and others to ensure our community understands the value of this opportunity and the support students and families receive when participating in the Early College experience,” says Cindy Kushner, the college’s director of school, community, and work-force partnerships. “This gives students the necessary nudges needed to commit to a challenging program like the Early College. That’s what it takes to build a program.”

“They kind of have a taste of what it’s like to be a college student and find their interests.”



PHOTO BY PURDUE UNIVERSITY

A student works on a project at PPHS.

“Our relationship is so deep with Lorain College that it kind of feels like they are part of the family,” says Ann Schloss, superintendent of the Elyria City School District. That closeness plays out in many ways, including curricular design, with plans to embed in Early College more career technical training in nursing, information technology, and robotics.

FLEXIBLE OPTIONS SPUR GROWTH

Another dual-enrollment program, Post University’s High School Academy, offers eight-week accelerated online classes, 16-week classes taught in high schools by specially trained high-school instructors, and 16-week classes on the Post campus in Waterbury, Conn.

The academy, in its current form, is only a few years old, but it has achieved impressive growth, in part because Covid lockdowns drew students to its small 15-student classes. In 2019 it had 10 students from four partner schools; now it has 350 students from 27 partner schools, 24 in Connecticut, one in Massachusetts and two in Texas, says Chad McGuire, Post’s director of the academy and continuing education. The academy is in talks with New York City public schools as well.

Many of the students are from low-income families. Some are working toward an associate degree in accounting, marketing, management, early-childhood studies, criminal justice, or legal studies. Others earn 30-credit certification in paralegal studies, or assemble various health-studies or other classes to explore a range of fields and get started on their bachelor’s degrees.

Post worked with local school officials to decide those degree and credit pathways. “We did that collaboratively,”



Gabrielle Bynum took dual-enrollment classes at Post U.’s High School Academy, finishing a bachelor’s degree by the end of her senior year in high school.

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says Verna Ruffin, superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools, “and we also took a really good dive into the economic development and the career strands that were of particular interest for the area.”

Post charges \$300 per course, but schools usually cover part or all of that because if they are public, losing a student will cost them about \$14,000 in enrollment-based funding, McGuire says. The academy is a recruiting tool in that its participants, if they choose to enroll at Post, get a 20-percent tuition reduction renewable for all four years.

The High School Academy is particularly attractive to self-motivated, hard-charging students like Gabrielle Bynum.

Bynum and her two younger siblings have been raised in West Haven and New Haven, Conn., by a single-parent mother working as a licensed practical nurse and studying for her RN degree. Bynum wrestles with anxiety and depression but finds academics therapeutic. “School has been my life pretty much forever,” she says. During the Covid lockdown, she doubled down on those studies. “There was nothing else to do. ... It was definitely a moment to just keep my head in the books.”

Bynum soared through her Post dual-enrollment credits, earning her bachelor’s degree by the end of her senior year of high school. “I’m earning a free bachelor’s degree right now,” she thought to herself,

deepening her motivation even more. She says it was an opportunity for her “to become first generation and do things my mom hasn’t had a chance to do.”

“School has been my life pretty much forever.”

Her academic momentum carried her right into business studies at Quinnipiac University. She graduated from there in August with an MBA and is interested in project management and consulting. Bynum is going to work for a while and then apply to law school, preferably an Ivy. By the way, she’s 19.

Questions or comments about this Case Study? Email us at ci@chronicle.com.

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