



Supporting Students



Wherever They Are

Dear Peak Education Community,

This has been a strange and difficult school year so far; hang in there! We know that many of you are going through so much right now, and we want you to know that we are here for you. Students, we've been so humbled by the level of participation in our programming this fall. It hasn't always been easy to get onto another Zoom call or to find a little extra time to connect with your mentor or push through redrafting that college essay one more time. Yet, you are doing it, and we recognize and appreciate your determination. Parents, a volatile school schedule and the challenges of work have been daunting these past few months. While there may not be a clear light at the end of the tunnel just yet, you are doing amazing. Stick with it and know that we are here for support if you need it. Partners, your continued support is removing barriers and ensuring that students in our community can pursue the dreams and goals that are commensurate with their accomplishments and abilities.

Thank you to everyone in the Peak Education community for your continued involvement despite the challenges of this moment. With this newsletter, I am excited to update you on our work and feature the story of a particular Peak Education alumna, Alejandra Pedraza. I hope you will find as much inspiration from her letter as I did. When I received Alejandra's letter earlier this fall, I felt that it captured the essential values Peak Education tries to embody and promote amongst our students, families, and staff: *be present* throughout the journey; *be available* during key moments; *be around* for the long term. Alejandra's story is incredible, and we are so proud of her as she is now pursuing her PhD at the University of Oregon.

While the pandemic has presented many challenges, it also has presented opportunities for innovative thinking about ways that we can do things differently. I'm amazed by our team's creativity and commitment to providing quality programming and engagement opportunities even as some of our traditional connection points with the Peak Education community have been limited. Lauren's updates on fall programming provide an overview to those who are less familiar with what we've been up to this fall. Her announcement of the Impact Service Project is especially exciting. Read on (and see the blurb on the back) to learn how students, coaches, and business partners can get involved with this awesome opportunity.

I hope you enjoy this update from Peak Education, and I hope you and your family stay safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Carlos Jimenez
CEO
Peak Education



What Peak Education Means to Me

By Alejandra Pedraza

The following is a letter sent from Alejandra, a Peak Education alumna, to CEO Carlos Jimenez in September 2020. It has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Hi Carlos, I met you last week when I visited Vennita. She mentioned that you were fairly new to Peak Education, and I wanted to share a little bit of my experience to really express how much Peak Education and the work you do means to me.

You heard the gist of my college move-in story in your office, but I wanted to provide some more detail. Yes, Vennita moved me into my dorm my freshman year, and we had a memorable day getting me started on a future that I had tirelessly worked for. However, what's to note is that Vennita went above and beyond for me to have an experience typical to any college freshman. Something, that quite honestly, I had never had. I never had the chance to be a teen. From the time I turned 14 I've been working. I have always been focused on my academics, because I knew from when I was very young that the only way I could get out of the life I was predestined to live was to get good grades and a full-ride scholarship.

That move-in day, apart from physically driving me and moving my stuff (in one case we put our heads together to construct furniture with instructions that seemed to be written in another language), Vennita talked to

me, gave me advice, and listened to the uncertainty I was feeling. Above all, what I remember the most about that day is her excitement. It was loud, it was powerful, and it gave me so much strength to deal with my emotions. The entire time, from when she picked me up, she was beaming! I heard and saw the pride she had in me with everything she did and to everyone she talked to. She literally took pictures of me with everyone we met. Some of the people in those pictures, I no longer remember, but I do remember Vennita's excitement as she asked people to pose for those pictures. For the first time in a very long time, I felt like I had someone in my corner. I have never really had someone like that. And to this day, I have never in my life felt as supported as I did that day.

My relationship with my family has never been easy. I come from a single parent household, and my mother has always been looking for a partner to make life easier for her. She was raised with the idea that without a man, a woman cannot stand on her own. During my senior year, my mother decided to move away with her new boyfriend. I couldn't go with her since I had too much to lose with my job, my scholarships, and being valedictorian. So I decided to crash with different friends for almost a year. This was the hardest time of my life trying to figure out everything on my own. When it came to the

logistics of moving me to college, my mother had no interest in any of it. And even if she had wanted to move me in, she would have only driven me and dropped me off. Nothing compared to the experience made possible by Vennita.

Until I mentioned my situation to Vennita, I was planning to make the move myself. This would have made a nerve-racking situation even scarier for me. I cannot even begin to express how much it meant to me when she offered to help me—immediately and without hesitation—not even knowing she would receive support from Peak Education.

During my years in Harrison District 2, there was constant teacher turnover. This made it hard to connect with teachers. I met Vennita and joined Peak Education when I was eleven years old—way before college was even on my radar. My time with Peak Education started with little talks about good habits and finances, and it eventually morphed into college how-tos and steps I could take to get to where I wanted to go. Our monthly meetings exposed me to things I had no chance of being taught at home. Through the years Vennita was a constant. She always went above and beyond. When my family could not go to a parent meeting because of transportation issues, she made sure to come to us, even if it meant our tiny overcrowded apartment. I remember a couple times Vennita bringing us donations of clothes and knick-knacks that she thought we could use. Whenever I needed something, she was there for me.

These things might not seem like much to a person of a typical household, but for me it meant everything, and for that I will always be thankful to Vennita and thus Peak Education for bringing her into my life. They gave me hope for a better future—a future that I am currently living. I wanted to share this because I feel like sometimes it is not obvious how much the work done by Peak Education changes and influences lives, but I am here standing letting you know that to me having this organization in my corner made all the difference in the world.

Best,

Alejandra Pedraza

Program Update With Lauren Taylor

This fall, despite the challenges of COVID-19, we at Peak Education have been privileged to maintain and grow our relationships with students, families, and school partners in a variety of ways.



Each month, we have strived to deliver our in-person programming in the safest way possible at each of our nine school partners across three districts. We have invited our students who are e-learning to join us virtually, adapting our materials to meet the needs of online learners. Our programming for October, November, and December has focused on promoting students' self-awareness and understanding of their personal strengths, challenges, and positive qualities. In keeping with our mission of setting students up for educational success, our goal in these meetings has been to provide participants a space for self-reflection and to give them resources to grow as individuals in the challenging climate of 2020.

In addition to hosting monthly meetings with students, we have partnered with leaders in our community and beyond for virtual keynote sessions after school. Each month, all students and families have been invited to join Peak Education for a special virtual presentation. We have hosted talks by Harvard graduate and entrepreneur, Kunle Oladehin and two-time Emmy nominated filmmaker Mike Shum. We have an upcoming presentation from nationally renowned trauma and resiliency specialist, Johnny Reed. Each speaker has a unique perspective on how to be successful and offers Peak Education scholars valuable lessons on owning their personal brand, practicing leadership, setting goals, and developing a resiliency framework.

Along with the longstanding hallmarks of our curriculum, we are excited to announce a new program beginning in January of 2021. Titled the Impact Service Project, this initiative will provide Peak Education scholars with resources to solve pressing problems in their communities. Students accepted into the program will work in teams led by a coach from the community to collaborate with a local business, nonprofit, or educational institution to solve a problem arising from the pandemic. To be considered, Peak Edu-

cation students must apply by November 30, 2020. We are so thrilled to see how this program develops, and we anticipate our students' creativity with excitement.

All of this and more is made possible by the hard work of our students and families, the dedication of our staff, the tireless work of our school partners, and the generous support of our benefactors. Thank you to everyone in the Peak Education community for a great—if challenging—semester, and we look forward to another productive year to come. 🏡



Join Peak Education's Impact Service Project! Participants will have the chance to take on some of our community's biggest challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. There's also a chance for students to win cash prizes!

Accepting coach, partner, and student applications now through November 30th!

Details at peakedu.org/impact-service-project

Announcing Basecamp

Peak Ed has launched a new for-profit college counseling service. This is an exciting new way to reach more students across the city.

Details at basecampcollegecounseling.org

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Support Peak Education



The annual Indy Give! campaign runs through December 31st, 2020. If you can, please consider making a donation to Peak Ed through Indy Give!



You can **give online** at www.indygive.com/nonprofit/peak-education

or scan **this QR code.**



If you prefer to give with **cash or check**, please reach out to Ms. Vennita Browning [vennita@peakedu.org; (719) 389-1249] or look for instructions on the Give! website.

Thank you so much for your generosity!

Recent and Upcoming Events

Fall 2020 Family Meeting: We recently held our



fall family meeting at the new U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Museum in downtown Colorado Springs. The museum safely hosted about 170 Peak Education students and family members. Thanks to everyone who joined us!

Fall Fundraiser: This November, we hosted a virtual fundraiser featuring drinks from local brewery Nano108. Thank you to those friends, new and familiar, who came to chat and hear about what Peak Education has been doing to support the students of the Pikes Peak region.

Virtual Keynotes: Earlier this month, we held our monthly virtual keynote presentation for students and families. This month's presentation featured journalist and Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker Mike Shum. The next presentation will be on December 16th with resiliency specialist Johnny Reed.