Learning Untangled

Peak Scholars prepare for a team-building activity at a monthly meeting in March 2021.
The Peak Education Newsletter

Dear Peak Education Community,

We are almost to the finish line of the 2020-2021 school year! We are so proud of our Peak Education Scholars and their families for demonstrating persistence and determination through the year.

There is a lot to celebrate and discuss as a Peak Education community this year. Throughout this unconventional year, our Peak Education team has sought out new ways of doing things that would not just enable us to continue our programming but to have an even greater impact on students. Perhaps nothing demonstrates this more than the inaugural Impact Service Project, which is featured in this edition of the newsletter. Utilizing themes of teamwork, resiliency, innovation, and community engagement, Peak Education Scholars are actively working to address and solve key problems for businesses and nonprofit organizations within their community.

In March, the Peak Education team attended the steel topping ceremony at Carmel Middle School. The new Carmel will be one of the most innovative educational spaces in our community. While the building will be incredible, it will be up to the educators in that building to create a successful academic environment. Given that Carmel was our first partner school, we thought it would be worthwhile to take a look back with Rick Price. Rick was the principal at Carmel when Peak Education was founded and is currently the immediate past president of the Peak Education board. We are excited to share more about his experience as an educator.

I’m also very excited for you to take a look at Jasmine Rainey’s College Counseling Update. Our seniors have navigated a college admissions and scholarship process unlike any other. Despite seeing dramatic decreases in college enrollment, attendance, and financial aid application completion nationwide, we are excited to share that our seniors will be headed to great new places and opportunities after they walk across the graduation stage in May.

Peak Education continues to evolve and grow as an organization. We have confirmed two new partner schools for the ’21-’22 school year—Mann Middle School in District 11 and Sandcreek International School in Harrison District 2. We are also adding a partnership with Palmer High School. In total, Peak Education will have partnerships across eight middle schools and four high schools next year!

Given the growth and trajectory of Peak Education, we are looking at refreshing our logo to coincide with the expanded impact of our organization. The current logo is being retired and I look forward to engaging in a process with the Peak Education community in developing and creating an updated representation for our organization. We are aiming to have a new logo in place sometime early in the new academic year. For now, you will see an interim, print-based logo as a placeholder.

Finally, we are beginning a new annual spring fundraising campaign focused on scholarships. Dedicated to Peak Education’s founders, the “Dr. Dalton Conner & Steve Mullens Legacy Campaign for Scholarships” is a chance for alumni and new friends of Peak Education to make college more affordable for Peak Education Scholars. The campaign will run from early April through June 12, culminating with a community gathering near the Peak Education office.

Thank you for your engagement and for taking the time to learn more about the exciting things happening in the Peak Education community.

Sincerely,

L. Carlos Jimenez
CEO, Peak Education
Recognizing Rick Price

Peak Education would not be the organization it is today without Rick Price. When serving as principal of Carmel Middle School, Rick was instrumental in establishing Carmel as Peak Education’s first partner school, and today Rick sits on Peak Education’s board. This winter, Rick sat down with Peak Education to discuss his journey in education and what he’s learned along the way.

An educator his whole career, Rick has learned more than a thing or two about working with young people, yet his fundamental insight can be captured in a word: relationships. It was relationships that drew Rick to education in the first place and relationships that characterized his success as a teacher, principal, and school board member.

If you ask Rick why he decided to become an educator, he’ll tell you about the teachers, mentors, and coaches who believed in him and inspired him. He cites adults in his life who had high expectations of him, respected him, and believed in his potential. Particularly, he recalls a coach, Mr. Fisher, who drove him from his small Iowa hometown to the University of Northern Iowa to visit the school and meet the football coach. Rick ended up going to that school—a teacher’s college—and since then has been working to cultivate the kinds of relationships that meant so much to him growing up.

Over his career, Rick taught many grade levels and subjects—social studies and physical education being his favorites. He worked as a teacher and administrator at multiple schools in the Midwest before arriving at Carmel Middle School in Colorado Springs.

According to Rick, success as an educator is often less about what you teach than how you teach and who you are as a teacher. “Building relationships takes time,” he says, adding that it is important to get to know the students, families, teachers, and neighbors in and around a school. Rick mentions the influence of child psychiatrist Dr. James Comer on his own philosophy as an educator. Dr. Comer’s work articulated the importance of meeting individuals where they are at in their social and emotional development.

As a principal, Rick made sure he was visible and known by the school community. “Doing lunch duty every day,” Rick says, “I could see everybody... the students doing well and the ones who weren’t.”

Rick also reflects on the powerful impact being a Black teacher and principal had. He recalls one of his first days as principal of Carmel Middle School. As Rick tells it, it was summer, and he was walking the grounds of the school:

This young Black student came by, and I said, "Hey how’re you doing?"
She looked at me kind of funny and said, "What are you doing here?"
I said, "I'm the new principal."
"What? We got a Black principal!"

Rick remembers with a with a laugh and continues,

I said, "Yeah you got a Black principal."
She said, "Oh man!" So she went home and got her mom, and she and her mom came back. And she said, "Mom, I want you to meet Mr. Price. I told you, Mom, we got a Black principal!"

Rick sums up the meaning of the encounter plainly and powerfully: “They were able to see someone who looked just like them.”

Rick continues to believe in the power of education and relationships to change lives. He sees relationship building as central to the mission and success of Peak Education and organizations like it. As an organization, it is inspiring to be led by a man so dedicated and kind. Thank you, Rick Price.
In a year when schools, businesses, and nonprofits have been forced to fundamentally change how they operate and provide services, Peak Education has launched the Impact Service Project to connect the insights and talents of young people in the Peak Education program with local organizations affected by the pandemic.

Comprised of five student teams each paired with a community partner and supported by a coach, the project set out at the beginning of 2021 to effect positive change in Colorado Springs. With funding from a grant from L3Harris Technologies, each team has about $2,000 to implement a solution to a problem their partner organization is facing.

Serving a variety of community needs, the partner organizations are Carmel Middle School, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Career Center, start-up bakery Saratonin Sweets, a community resource hub titled the Fountain-Chelton Partnership, and a thrift store run by the nonprofit Silver Key Senior Services.

"I know that I am making an impact," says Bailey Baskin, a seventh-grade student at North Middle School and a member of the Silver Key student team. With input from the Silver Key staff, Baily's team has been researching and planning ways to drive more customers to the thrift store.

From tracking store traffic to developing shopper incentives to crafting social media posts, these Peak Education students are bringing a new viewpoint to a long-standing organization with a mission to support and empower seniors.

"We’re trying to bring a younger perspective onto Silver Key’s social media" says Etelin Tapia, a junior at Harrison High School and project team member. She explains that thrifting has become trendy amongst her generation, adding that the environmental friendliness of second-hand shopping is becoming more important as well.

The service project is designed not only to give students hands-on service experience but also to support organizations impacted by COVID-19.

Silver Key's Friends Thrift Store, like many brick and mortar busi-
nesses, was hit hard by the pandemic. During the peak of the mandated business closures, “retail sales at Silver Key’s Friends Thrift Store were reduced nearly in half. Where we normally generate $100,000 to $120,000 in annual sales, we were just over $50,000 last year due to COVID,” according to an email from Roxanne Eflin, senior manager of grants and innovation at Silver Key.

With the support of their Impact Service Project team, Silver Key is hoping for “long-lasting improvements in our thrift store operations and generated sales,” says Eflin.

And Silver Key is not alone. Each partner organization has been in communication with their respective team and is hoping to benefit from the work and perspective that young people bring to the table. The five teams have submitted proposals to their partner organizations and are now beginning to implement solutions and track outcomes.

Teams will execute their plans by the end of May and present their results over the summer.

“I’m seeing students excited about having this impact and being involved in a project that’s really changing the community” says Lauren Taylor, Project Organizer and Assistant Program Director at Peak Education. She is confident that students will come away from the project with new skills in communication and project management as well as an experience that will make them more competitive college applicants.

While still too early to quantify all the results of the Impact Service Project, participants and partners are excited by what has been done and are hopeful about the future.

“We are optimistic and hopeful that this student-led project will meet the goals they have articulated—plus more!” says Roxanne Eflin.
“We’ve made a lot of progress over the last several months,” says Kayleigh Hudson, the Silver Key team’s volunteer coach. “It’s been exciting to see the students rise up to the challenge of helping a real business that’s been impacted by COVID.”

If all goes well, the Impact Service Project could become a lasting part of the Peak Education program and a model for projects of its kind.

“I think this project is going to really help set a new standard for high school students and middle school students,” says Etelin Tapia. “I know a lot of adults sometimes think, ‘They’re still kids; what are they going to do?’ But if we’re given the right resources and the right support from the adults and other people in the community, I know a lot of us have the potential to accomplish great things.”

College Counseling Update

By Jasmine Rainey, Director of College Counselling

Despite the continued challenges of COVID-19, Peak Education has delivered robust and innovative college counseling programming for students and their families. The spring semester kicked off with a presentation from Colorado College’s Stroud Scholars Program for ninth grade students and their families. Students admitted into this program will receive a no-cost-three-year summer program and additional college preparation ending in admission to Colorado College during their 12th grade year of high school.

In February, 10th and 11th graders experienced a virtual summer programs fair that featured out-of-state colleges like Carleton College and national programs like the Foundation for Teaching Economics. Local summer programs included Colorado State University, the University of Denver, and the STEM academy at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS). A current Peak Education student also spoke about her experience in the Leading Edge summer program and the experiential learning she gained while exploring topics on civic engagement.

Throughout the semester, we have also hosted eight colleges, having a college represented at every monthly high school program meeting. These visits provided underclassmen with early exposure to various colleges while helping them evaluate academic, social, and financial fit. This exposure will continue on April 8 when we host a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) panel. Professionals will discuss their experiences at HBCUs and how they impacted their lives and careers.

Twelfth graders continued to receive one-on-one support with the college admissions and financial aid
process. In early February, seniors and their parents also engaged in a presentation in which they learned about the important next steps for after being admitted into a college. They completed a workshop that helped them understand how to break down and read a financial aid award letter. On April 20, Peak Education is partnering with graduate students from UCCS’s student affairs in higher education position, Peak Education met the challenges of this year and provided additional and improved services and programming for students, families and community members.

While nationally, many schools struggled to engage students in the college admissions and financial aid process, Peak Education students not only took advantage of the opportunities that we provided, but they excelled. Thank you to everyone who continues to support Peak Education’s initiatives and the success of our students!

One hundred percent of our college-bound seniors have been accepted at a college or university and have earned $538,264 in scholarships. Peak Ed 12th graders set a precedent by having finalists for multiple competitive and national scholarships, including the Boettcher Foundation, QuestBridge, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Greenhouse Scholars, the Gates Foundation, and the Daniels Fund! While most results are still pending, one Peak Education student, Joselyne Cimpaye, did become a Daniels Fund scholar!

program to deliver a transition to college workshop for 12th graders. Most excitingly, the spring semester has brought a plethora of college acceptances and scholarship opportunities. One hundred percent of our college-bound seniors have been accepted at a college or university and have earned $538,264 in scholarships. In a challenging academic year, Peak Ed 12th graders set a precedent by having finalists for multiple competitive and national scholarships, including the Boettcher Foundation, QuestBridge, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Greenhouse Scholars, the Gates Foundation and the Daniels Fund! While most results are still pending, one Peak Education student, Joselyne Cimpaye, did become a Daniels Fund scholar!

With the new director of college counseling Joselyne Cimpaye, Harrison HS class of ’21, received the Daniels Fund Scholarship.
Peak Education raised over $58,000 from 450 individual donors during the 2020 Indy Give Campaign! We also won the young donor competition with 354 young donors! Thank to everyone who gave to Peak Education and supported the young people of Colorado Springs.

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Give! 2020

![Give! 2020 image]

Upcoming Events
College Summer Bootcamp, June 7-11: Sessions for rising juniors and seniors to set themselves up for college and scholarship success

Community Ride/Walk, June 12: Outdoor event starting at the Peak Education office and featuring bike riding and fun! The event also culminates our campaign for scholarships. Stay tuned for more details!

Full Steam Ahead, July 12-24: Summer program for incoming Peak Education Scholars.

9th Grade Student and Family Orientation, July 31

Senior Celebration, Late May Date TBD

Impact Service Project Celebration, Date TBD

Mentoring Program Celebrations, Dates TBD

Recent Events
Carlos Jimenez Named Rising Star: Peak Education’s CEO Carlos was recognized as a 2021 Rising Star by the Colorado Springs Business Journal.

Virtual Keynotes: So far this spring, we’ve held two virtual keynote presentations for students and families. In February, we heard from Danielle Summerville, the Diversity and Community Outreach Programs Manager for the city of Colorado Springs. Danielle joined us to share her story and speak about her experience accessing higher education and making change in her community. In March, we were joined by Dr. Rosenna Bakari whose motivational and interactive presentation covered her own journey and ideas of safety in modern culture.

Youth Documentary Academy Presentation: In late March, Peak Education students got information from the Youth Documentary Academy about their program and mission to empower diverse youth voices in filmmaking.

Stroud Scholars Presentation: In January, Peak Education 9th graders heard from Colorado College’s Stroud Scholars program which aims to support historically underrepresented students in the Pikes Peak region access higher education.