JUSTICE SCHOLARS INSTITUTE

An Equity-Focused College Preparatory Scale-Up for Pittsburgh

In partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools Milliones 6-12, Perry Traditional Academy, and Westinghouse Academy
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School of Education Mission-Vision Statement

We ignite learning. We strive for well-being for all. We teach. We commit to student, family, and community success. We commit to educational equity. We advocate. We work for justice. We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships. We collaborate. We learn with and from communities. We innovate and agitate. We pursue and produce knowledge. We research. We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream. We lead with integrity. We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.
A civil rights activist once said, “Dreams and reality are opposites. Action synthesizes them.”

When mothers and fathers in Pittsburgh dream about the lives their children might live, those dreams likely involve access to the best our city has to offer. Access to schools where the learning is deep and engaging. Experiences in arts, sports, and leadership that allow young people a chance to pursue their passions. Educational and career opportunities that enable emerging adults to live comfortably and enjoy Pittsburgh’s amenities: the housing, entertainment, sports, arts, parks, and types of experiences that once gave Pittsburgh the title of “America’s most livable city.” Sadly, for many Black and Brown caregivers in Pittsburgh, those dreams are in stark contrast to reality. Young people growing up in our city’s mostly segregated communities of color do not experience the educational opportunities that can set them up to transition from high school into college or desirable workforce opportunities. Students of Color are not always given a chance to see their aspirations become reality. In short, our children often lack opportunities to thrive.

The broad chasm between our young people’s aspirations and the reality we see should provoke us to action. The Justice Scholars Institute (JSI) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education is committed to that action. We are driven by sincere commitment to equity and justice for students furthest from opportunity. Our team of Pitt faculty and staff partner with teachers and leaders in our communities to support pathways to college for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). We engage students through teaching them college-level skills and inviting them to think about how they can impact our world. Our effort exists so that the young people in our most underserved schools can have a better chance at success in post-secondary education and professional careers. Though college is not the only viable path to adulthood, it is one that should be more accessible to young people in Pittsburgh, regardless of race or household income. The Justice Scholars Institute works to ensure that students at the margins of our schooling system are cared for, challenged, and celebrated in ways that help them see themselves as worthy, brilliant, and capable of success.

This report provides a snapshot of the reality of schooling for Black youth in Pittsburgh Public Schools. It begins by describing some significant challenges in our public school district. Next, the report paints a picture of JSI, which launched in 2016 at Westinghouse Academy to provide access to college courses for students who had not previously had the opportunity. As JSI prepares to enter its eighth year of partnering with public schools in the city, I am pleased with the progress that has been made. Our scale-up has expanded to Milliones 6-12 University Preparatory School and Perry Traditional Academy, and we have served 232 students across these three schools. We also have provided a community of practice for 12 PPS teachers through our JSI Teacher Collective. In the 2021-22 school year, students earned 282 credits through Pitt’s College in High School program. Forty-eight out of 70 students received a C+ or higher, translating into a Pitt transcript with a 2.5 GPA or better. We know there is more work to be done and we are engaged and committed to build the infrastructure for academic success in our underserved communities.

As an organization, our desire is to see a synthesis among our families’ dreams, our children’s aspirations, and the realities that our young people experience as they transition out of K-12. For many students, that can look like earning a college degree and enjoying a career as a UPMC nurse, a graphic designer for the mayor’s office, a professor at Pitt, a physician at Magee-Womens Hospital, or a PPS teacher. We were fortunate to have one of our JSI alumni serve as a teacher at her high school, and we hope she won’t be the last one to do so. We want to see Pittsburgh become a more equitable city that provides Black communities with the opportunities and resources needed to thrive. Equity looks like students knowing what opportunities exist in this world and gaining access to pursue their life aspirations with every necessary support. We want equity, so we continue to freedom dream. We will not stop until we see our dreams become reality.

Esohe R. Osai, PhD
Assistant Professor and Program Director
Justice Scholars Institute
University of Pittsburgh School of Education
The Justice Scholars Institute: An Equity-Focused College Preparatory Scale-Up for Pittsburgh

JSI scholars and JSI team during the College Ready Workshop, Pitt School of Education, November 2022
Pittsburgh’s Black community has produced some of the most profound thinkers, artists, journalists and musicians in American history. Martin Delany, abolitionist and physician, Tony award and Pulitzer prize-winning author August Wilson, jazz composer Billy Strayhorn, and Barbara Sizemore, educational researcher and superintendent, are but a few of the leaders who have had a profound impact on our country.

Yet, as August Wilson said, “Pittsburgh is a very hard city, especially if you’re Black.” This statement made more than 50 years ago, remains true today. Pittsburgh’s Black children grow up in a highly segregated city and face substantial developmental and community-based challenges rooted in historic underinvestment and ongoing systemic racism. Since 1970, the Black population of the City of Pittsburgh has declined from a peak of 107,837 to 69,683 in 2020 (a 35.3% decline). The overall population has shrunk from 520,117 to 302,971 residents (a 41.7% decline in 50 years).

Pittsburgh Population: Changes over last 50 years

(Source: US Census)
Over the past decades, what once was known as the steel city has developed into a city of innovation with the education, medicine and technology sectors driving much of this change. However, as the city of Pittsburgh grows its industry foci, what also must grow is the commitment to ensure that all students have the chance to fully participate in these career opportunities. While much change has occurred in the city, one that is slower in coming to fruition is ensuring that Black students are not locked out of these career opportunities because their educational experiences are not ones in which they can thrive.

Racial and economic segregation in Pittsburgh follows patterns like many northern cities, especially those in the industrial midwest, that reacted to the Great Migration of Black citizens from the south in the early 20th century. Cities created ghettos, constraining Black residents to certain neighborhoods by “local zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, and violence. State-sanctioned, racially restrictive covenants legally prohibited Black people from owning, leasing, or occupying homes in designated communities, providing a legal framework for the systematic segregation of people of color until the late 1940s. Long after the Supreme Court ruled that racial covenants were unenforceable, they continued to be used as powerful social signals to exclude people of color” (Austin, Turner & Greene, 2020). The state-sanctioned, racist policies have created a legacy of segregation in schools.

Across the city of Pittsburgh, virtually all of the urban neighborhoods with high poverty rates are predominantly occupied by people of color, specifically those that identify as Black. As stated above, restrictive covenants and home lending policies of the 1930s have created inequities that still persist today. The paradox of the city is that it is touted as one of the most livable cities yet is one of the worst places to live if you’re Black. The paradox is not only evident in the everyday life of residents, but it also rings true across our schools. Pittsburgh’s school assignment boundaries for the most part track the neighborhood segregation of the city, according to data from the Urban Institute. Moreover, the vast majority of Black Pittsburgh residents live in neighborhoods where children are more likely to be exposed to harmful levels of lead and other environmental issues that impact children’s health. These neighborhood-based realities impact the schooling experiences of Black children and negatively affect educational outcomes.

The City of Pittsburgh’s Gender Equity Commission found that on a variety of factors, “gender and racial inequality persist across health, income, employment and education in Pittsburgh.”

Notably, the authors found that:

- Pittsburgh’s Black maternal mortality rate is higher than Black mortality rates in 97 percent of similar cities.
- Black adult mortality rates are higher in Pittsburgh than in 98 percent of similar cities.
- Black women in Pittsburgh are five times more likely to live in poverty than white men.
- Black women in 90 percent of cities have higher median income than Black women in Pittsburgh.
- Compared to Black women in other cities, Pittsburgh’s Black women who finish high school are less likely to go to college.
- Pittsburgh’s high schools rank in the bottom 20% for students taking the ACT/SATs.
- Black girls in Pittsburgh are less likely to pass AP courses than Black girls in 98 percent of similar cities.
As the discussion below will illustrate, the economic and health advantages that children are born with in Pittsburgh become educational advantages as they grow up. A recent report from the Learning Policy Institute put it succinctly, saying:

“The impact of poverty on children’s ability to learn is profound and occurs at an early age. A recent study of the neurological effects of deep poverty on young children’s development found that “poverty is tied to structural differences in several areas of the brain associated with school readiness skills, with the largest influence observed among children from the poorest households .... As much as 20% of the gap in test scores could be explained by maturational lags in the frontal and temporal lobes.” These effects were found to be associated with the consequences of living in deep poverty at an early age, some of which include premature and low-birthweight babies; poor nutrition and living without sufficient food; exposure to toxins, such as lead paint or contaminated drinking water; and lack of access to early learning opportunities.”

Racial and economic segregation in Pittsburgh schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of students by race</th>
<th>0-29%</th>
<th>30-49%</th>
<th>50-59%</th>
<th>60-69%</th>
<th>70-79%</th>
<th>80-89%</th>
<th>90-100%</th>
<th>District overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pittsburgh's entrenched inequities require a holistic approach to remediation and schools should lead the way. The social determinants of health model links education to economics, the environment, social capital, nutrition, and health care. Children impacted by poverty, which is perpetuated through systemic and social inequities, have additional needs in their educational experiences. These needs must be met in order for young people to have the educational success that leads to realized post-secondary aspirations and desired adulthood outcomes.
The 2020 census reported that there were 44,234 children under the age of 18 in the City of Pittsburgh (of which 14,240, or 32.2%, were under the age of 5). Of the 29,994 K-12 children, 21,663 attended Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2020-21, 5,038 attended state authorized charter schools, and the remaining 3,293 attended private schools or were homeschooled.

In October of 2021, Pittsburgh Public Schools had 19,245 K-12 students enrolled. Of that, 53% identified as African American, 33% identified as white, and 14% identified as other.

Additionally, when looking at rates of students considered to be economically disadvantaged, we see that Black students are much more likely to be in schools with high concentrations of students in poverty than white students. The graphic on page 10 lists the schools with the highest concentration of poverty, all of which are neighborhood elementary schools and feeder schools for Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 University Preparatory School, Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy, and Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy 6-12.
A recent study out of Stanford University found that after looking at 10 years of student achievement data from nearly every school district in the country, “Segregation matters, therefore, because it concentrates Black and Hispanic students in high-poverty schools, not because of the racial composition of their schools.”

A variety of factors play into why schools with high concentrations of poverty struggle to help students meet high levels of student achievement. A study by Trying Together, a local Pittsburgh advocate for early childhood education (ECE) found that, “only 16.1% (n=33) of ECE programs in Pittsburgh are recognized as high quality STARS [a Pennsylvania rating system for quality of ECE programs] 3 and 4.” National studies also have found that as a “result of these early differences in educational experiences and opportunities in early childhood, racial achievement gaps are very large when children enter kindergarten (Bassok et al. 2016; Reardon and Portilla 2016).” The schools listed as having the highest concentration of poverty are also the elementary schools that feed into Milliones, Perry, and Westinghouse. These secondary schools have the highest populations of Black students in the district and are the schools served by the Justice Scholars Institute.
Exposure to a Black teacher during a child’s elementary education can have a profound impact on their long-term academic success. Black students who had a Black teacher by third grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college. If a Black student had two Black teachers by third grade, the likelihood they enrolled in college jumped to 32%. This impact has been dubbed as the “role model effect” by researchers.\(^8\)

In the state of Pennsylvania, only 6% of teachers are Teachers of Color. “Of Pennsylvania’s 499 school districts, 138 had zero Teachers of Color over any of the last seven school years. This includes three districts with 30% Students of Colors or more: Midland Borough, Northgate, and Wyoming Valley West.”\(^9\)

In Pittsburgh, the data for teacher racial diversity is a little better than the state overall. Black teachers made up 13% of the overall teaching force in PPS in 2020. For the most part, schools in which a large number of Black students attend are predominantly Black and had a higher number of Black teachers, with Pittsburgh Miller Pre-K-5 (50% Black teachers, 93% Black students) leading the way. Schools served by the Justice Scholars Institute all had more than the district average for Black teachers.

### PPS student and teacher demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>% BLACK TEACHERS</th>
<th>% BLACK STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WESTINGHOUSE ACADEMY 6–12</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILLIONES 6–12</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERRY TRADITIONAL ACADEMY</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Churn

Between 2019 and 2020, the only schools that had teacher churn 30% or higher (the number of teachers new to the school from the prior year) were schools where the student population was greater than 80% Black. Of the six schools with exceptionally high teacher churn, five out of the six were brick and mortar charter schools. Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 was the PPS school with the highest churn at 35%.

Years of Experience

In the 2020-21 school year, PPS had 1,912 classroom teachers that had an average of 14.5 years of service. Looking school by school, we see great variability in the number of years of teacher experience. An analysis done in 2017 found that the schools with the lowest average teacher experience were Westinghouse Academy 6-12 (three years), Allegheny 6-8 (three- and one-half years) and Milliones 6-12 (four years). These schools all have student populations that are greater than 80% Black.10 Lincoln PreK-5 was the only PPS school with a student population greater than 80% Black (91%) in which teacher experience exceeded the PPS average, with teachers at that school averaging 15 years of experience.

Overall, where Black students are concentrated in public schools in Pittsburgh, they are more likely to have less experienced teachers, more teacher churn year over year, and higher principal turnover rates. While Black students in some PPS schools are more likely to have a Black teacher, the constant churn of teachers in those buildings impacts the ability of students and families to build relationships with educators, one of many key factors that impact student success.11
Access to Rigorous Courses and Gifted Programming

Racial disparities in gifted identification also are persistent in PPS. White students were 6.4 times more likely to have a gifted individual education plan (IEP) than Black students, 5 times more likely than Hispanic students, and nearly 3.5 times more likely than Asian and Multi-ethnic students. Students with gifted IEPs are automatically enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Centers for Advanced Study (CAS) high school courses. Students not identified as gifted must receive a recommendation from a teacher and apply for the course. Taking these more rigorous courses is predictive of postsecondary success.

Taken together, all of the listed factors have a significant impact on school success for Black students in Pittsburgh’s public schools. Following is a discussion of what data is known of academic outcomes for Black students.
**Academic Outcomes**

In the six years before COVID-19 halted regular annual testing, Black student outcomes on state exams (PSSAs and Keystones) reflected the reality of the inequities on the ground. Since 2015, between one-half to two-thirds of Black students did not score proficient or advanced on state PSSA tests of third grade reading. Reading at grade level by third grade is a key indicator of future academic success. 17% of students that were not reading proficiently in third grade did not graduate from high school, a rate four times higher than for proficient readers (Hernandez, 2010). Additionally, lower levels of literacy lead to lower lifetime earnings (Kutner, et al 2007), and an increased likelihood of not graduating is highly correlated with an increase in the likelihood of incarceration (Harlow, 2003).

However, there are schools where significantly higher proportions of Black students were reading at grade level prior to the pandemic. Poverty is not destiny and schools like Dilworth PreK-5, Colfax K-8, and Allegheny 6-8 have shown the way to support Black children on the path to literacy.

At the high school level, there's a wide range of academic outcomes for schools with Black students demonstrating college readiness.
Graduation Rate

The disconnect between rates of college readiness for Black students and their graduation rates has an impact on post-secondary enrollment and completion. In 2021, 74.6% of Black students graduated from PPS within four years. School by school graduation rates varied with a low of 60% of Black students who graduated in 4 years from Pittsburgh's Carrick High School and a high of 100% at Pittsburgh's CAPA and Science and Technology High Schools. Graduation rates at Milliones 6-12, Perry Traditional Academy, and Westinghouse Academy are 64%, 83%, and 67%, respectively.

Post-secondary Enrollment and Achievement

- **Started high school in 2011**: 1,742
- **Graduated in 2015**: 1,227 (70.4% 4 year cohort graduation rate)
- **Enrolled in college or trade school in 2015**: 883 (72% post-secondary enrollment rate for those that graduated)
- **Completed college or trade school in 2021**: 393 (23% of 2011 freshmen completed college or trade school within 6 years)
- **Unsure of outcome**: 1,349 (77% of 2011 9th graders)

Westinghouse Class of 2020 students celebrating at graduation
Promoting Equity: The Justice Scholars Institute (JSI)

Deep systemic challenges face Black students in our city. These challenges impede pathways into and through post-secondary education. Of the Black students who enter Pittsburgh Public Schools as freshmen, very few will graduate high school and proceed to earn a college degree within six years post high school graduation. The Justice Scholars Institute began to provide additional supports that can enhance the likelihood of post-secondary success for students in our most underserved schools. We started at Westinghouse Academy during the 2016-17 school year. Our signature course, Introduction to Social Justice, was the first social work course offered for college credit in high school. Thirteen juniors and seniors completed the course and wrote a 15-page research paper on a social justice issue of their choosing. After the success of the first class, we expanded our courses at Westinghouse. After demonstrating that students at Westinghouse can succeed in rigorous college credit-bearing courses, we were invited to expand our partnership to include Pittsburgh Milliones and Pittsburgh Perry. Serving these schools, which are home to the highest proportions of Black students in the PPS high schools, is a direct effort to address endemic educational inequities. Since that first course was offered in 2016, JSI has grown to offer seven courses across the three schools. In total, 232 students have earned college credits through our partnership with Pitt’s College in High School (CHS) program. Our scale-up was supported through a Momentum Scaling award from the Office of the Chancellor. In addition to the expansion to new schools, the scale-up also included new program components, including a teacher professional development initiative that supports CHS instructors across all three schools. This section provides a window into the three schools currently served by JSI and highlights various data points relevant to the high schools and communities served. A+ Schools report data is used to deepen our understanding of the educational experiences in these three schools.

### CHS Course Offerings by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>STUDENTS SERVED</th>
<th>SCHOOLS SERVED</th>
<th>CLASSES OFFERED</th>
<th>JSI-CHS TEACHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Credits Earned 2021-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTALS</th>
<th>STUDENTS ENROLLED</th>
<th>CREDITS EARNED</th>
<th>COMMRC 0500</th>
<th>HIST 0601</th>
<th>HIST 0671</th>
<th>SOCWRK 1000</th>
<th>STAT 0200</th>
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<tr>
<td>Westinghouse Academy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Milliones</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Perry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across All Schools</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The University of Pittsburgh College in High School (CHS) program was founded in 1980, which makes it the oldest concurrent enrollment program in the commonwealth. As a concurrent enrollment program, it provides students with the opportunity to take college courses within their own high schools, taught by high school teachers who are certified to teach University of Pittsburgh courses. Students in CHS are not required to take high-stakes tests to determine their entire outcome as they do in AP courses. Instead, they receive formative assessments throughout the course as often as their teacher needs them to occur, making the learning process much more equitable.

Since 2016, College in High School has partnered with the Justice Scholars Institute to provide college course experiences to students in underserved Pittsburgh Public Schools. Our partnership started with one course, the inaugural Introduction to Social Work taught at Westinghouse Academy. In 2021, Perry Traditional Academy and University Preparatory Academy at Milliones were added to the Justice Scholars Institute and a memorandum of understanding with the school district was initiated. Through thoughtful and intentional collaboration, we have been able to expand our partnership to offer seven College in High School courses, including African American History and African American Literature. We also are expanding beyond humanities courses by offering a statistics and a biology course. The past 10 years have been a period of extensive and continuing growth in supporting equity. Beyond partnership with JSI, we have sought to expand our offerings in Pittsburgh Public Schools more broadly, increased scholarship support to families with financial need, and continued to advocate for legislation that expands access to college in high school as a more equitable opportunity for diverse students to experience a college preparatory experience.

Benefits of CHS include receiving widely transferrable and highly regarded University of Pittsburgh credits at a fraction of the normal cost. Also, some of the traditional barriers to access are mitigated by the opportunity for an entire high school class to earn credits simply by enrolling in a course they likely would have already taken in high school. The wide variety of courses offered provides flexibility to high schools in selecting which courses match their curricular needs as well as their teachers’ experience and skill sets. In addition, students who complete at least one CHS course are invited to apply for admission to the University of Pittsburgh free of charge. CHS has recently earned professional accreditation to become one of only two accredited programs in Pennsylvania. Accreditation demonstrates that the program follows the industry-standard best practices and, perhaps more importantly, has been shown to improve transferability of credits earned through CHS.

At the state level, the summer of 2022 saw some positive change in legislation for dual enrollment. As a result of the new legislation, dual enrollment credits are mandated to be weighted equally with AP courses, which helps CHS students in their college application process. Even with these changes, Pennsylvania has some distance to go in order to serve its students as well as many other states in the U.S. Pennsylvania should follow other states in providing tuition funding for underserved populations and in requiring some quality standards in dual enrollment so students can receive some assurance of their program’s authenticity and transferability.

The University of Pittsburgh College in High School program is one of only two programs in Pennsylvania accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). NACEP is the only national organization providing an accreditation for these programs, which recognizes high quality and standards in “faculty, course content, student outcomes, and support.”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headcount</td>
<td>3,635</td>
<td>4,237</td>
<td>4,276</td>
<td>4,309</td>
<td>4,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollments</td>
<td>4,317</td>
<td>5,116</td>
<td>5,146</td>
<td>5,373</td>
<td>5,373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 on page 19 provides a high-level numerical snapshot of the schools JSI serves to provide context of the students we serve and the schooling conditions they experienced for the 2021-22 school year. While the majority of the students across Milliones, Perry, and Westinghouse racially identify as Black, 87.84%, 77.61%, and 92.34%, respectively, they are taught by a relatively small proportion of Black teachers 21%, 16%, and 28%, respectively. Between 84-85% of the students also indicate economic hardship, which was previously mentioned to be linked to the ways systemic racism operates through segregation in Pittsburgh. In terms of preparation and transition into college, broadly defined, students across the JSI-serving schools were enrolled in advanced placement courses at a lower rate than the district average (26%); and only 3% received a score of three or higher. Through JSI, students in the 11th and 12th grades have the opportunity to enroll in and earn up to nine college credits, which do not require taking a high-stakes standardized exam. About one third of the 2021-22 graduating class went on to attend post-secondary education.
### Table 1: School and Student Characteristics of JSI-Serving Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level Characteristics</th>
<th>Pittsburgh Milliones</th>
<th>Pittsburgh Perry</th>
<th>Pittsburgh Westinghouse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Levels Served</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>6-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>329 Students</td>
<td>335 Students</td>
<td>679 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Stability</td>
<td>4 principals in the last 4 years</td>
<td>3 principals in the last 4 years</td>
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<td><strong>Course Offerings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement Courses Offered*</td>
<td>6 Courses</td>
<td>8 Courses</td>
<td>3 Courses</td>
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<td>College in High School/JSI Courses Offered</td>
<td>3 Courses</td>
<td>2 Courses</td>
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<td>Career &amp; Technical Education Courses Offered*</td>
<td>2 Courses</td>
<td>2 Courses</td>
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<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
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<td>Inexperienced Teachers**</td>
<td>40.48%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>29.03%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out-of-field Teaching**</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
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<td>Black Teachers</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>White Teachers</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latinx Teachers</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Teachers</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiracial Teachers</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of JSI Teachers</td>
<td>2 Teachers</td>
<td>3 Teachers</td>
<td>3 Teachers</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Student Level Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>87.84%</td>
<td>77.61%</td>
<td>92.34%</td>
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<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>5.17%</td>
<td>13.73%</td>
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<td>Latinx</td>
<td>1.82%</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native (Native American/Alaska Native)</td>
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<td>0.40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>Sex Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43.77%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>46.10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56.23%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>53.90%</td>
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<td>Out of school Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economically Underserved</td>
<td>84.50%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>84.83%</td>
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<td>Unhoused</td>
<td>9.12%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
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<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>2.43%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
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<td>Academic Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Education Plan</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>32.22%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>30.78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted Learners</td>
<td>1.82%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Learners</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
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<td>College and Career Readiness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Advanced Studies Course Enrollment</td>
<td>19.00%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement Course Enrollment</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scored 3 or higher on Advanced Placement Exam</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and Technical Education Course Enrollment</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>17.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate (4-year cohort)</td>
<td>63.60%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
<td>67.20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-secondary Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Education</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Completion within 6 years (Class of 2015)</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Enlistment</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania Workforce</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: JSI: Justice Scholars Institute; *data related to 2022-23; **data related to 2019-20
Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 University Preparatory School

Neighborhood school with a magnet entrance option, post-secondary focus; and Early Childhood Education and Entertainment Technology Career and Technical Education programs

Enrollment 329 students
District 6-12 average: 660

Percentage of neighborhood children who attend the school rate 17%
District 6-12 average: 21%

Low-income: 84%
IEP*: 30%
Student stability rate: 83%

292 Current enrollment (October 2022): 292 students
6 Advanced course offerings 2022: 6 (AP Calculus, AP English 3, AP English 4, AP Environmental Science, AP Human Geography, and AP World History)
2 Career and Technical Education Courses Offered: Entertainment Technology, Early Childhood Education

Graduation Rate 2021: 64%
10% Attending college or trade school immediately after graduation 2021: 10%
7% Completion of degree within 6 years: Class of 2015: 7%
21% Percentage of Black Teachers (2021-22): 21%
0% Percentage of Teachers new to school (2021-22): 0%

Postsecondary Enrollment Post Graduation

Graduation Rates Over Time

2018 75%
2019 71%
2020 63%
2021 64%

District Rate 79% (2018), 80% (2019), 78% (2020), 82% (2021)
Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy

9-12 neighborhood school with a Junior ROTC program; Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math Magnet programs; and Health Careers Technology and Cosmetology Career and Technical Education programs

Enrollment 335 students
District 9–12 average: 871

- Low-income: 84%
- IEP*: 29%
- Student stability rate: 78%

Percentage of neighborhood children who attend the school rate 19%
District 6–12 average: 39%

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Multi-ethnic
- American Indian
- Pacific Islander

* Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education, excluding students identified as “gifted”

Current enrollment (October 2022): 355 students

Advanced course offerings 2022: 8 (Art/Design, Calculus AB, Biology, Chemistry, English Language, English Literature, Statistics, United States History)

Career and Technical Education Courses Offered: Health Careers Technology and Cosmetology

Graduation Rate 2021: 83%

Attending college or trade school immediately after graduation 2021: 19%

Completion of degree within six years: Class of 2015: 14%

Percentage of Black Teachers (2021-22): 16%

Percentage of Teachers new to school (2021-22): 4%

Postsecondary Enrollment

- 2018: 27%
- 2019: 25%
- 2020: 23%
- 2021: 19%

Graduation Rates Over Time

- 2018: 76%
- 2019: 78%
- 2020: 72%
- 2021: 83%

District Rate
- 79% (2018), 80% (2019), 78% (2020), 82% (2021)
Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy 6–12

Neighborhood school with Emergency Response Technology; Health Careers Technology; Culinary Arts; Cosmetology; Carpentry; Business Administration, Sports, and Entertainment Career and Technical Education programs

**Enrollment** 679 students
District 6–12 average: 660

- **6%** Low-income: 86%
- **30%** IEP*
- **80%** Student stability rate

*Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education, excluding students identified as “gifted”*

**22%** Percentage of neighborhood children who attend the school

**2%** District 6–12 average: 21%

**93%**

**661** Current enrollment (October 2022): 661 students

**3** Advanced course offerings 2022: 3 (AP Biology, AP English 3, AP English 4)

**8** Career and Technical Education Courses Offered: 8 (Emergency Response Technology; Health Careers Technology; Culinary Arts; Cosmetology; Carpentry; Business Administration, Sports, and Entertainment)

**67%** Graduation Rate 2021: 67%

**27%** Attending college or trade school immediately after graduation 2021: 27%

**9%** Completion of degree within six years: Class of 2015: 9%

**28%** Percentage of Black Teachers (2021-22): 28%

**0%** Percentage of Teachers new to school (2021-22): 0%

**Postsecondary Enrollment after Graduation**

- **20%** 2018
- **31%** 2019
- **28%** 2020
- **27%** 2021

**Graduation Rates Over Time**

- **67%** 2018
- **75%** 2019
- **61%** 2020
- **67%** 2021

District Rate 79% (2018), 80% (2019), 78% (2020), 82% (2021)
Westinghouse partner teacher Sean Means with Westinghouse student Sean Russell visiting Harvard University
Research demonstrates that schools with high levels of community support from both community partnership programs have led to increased student attendance, improved grades, and higher achievements (Officer, et al., 2013). Partnerships with universities can be particularly important when the goal of programming is focused on the post-secondary transition (Vargas & Venezia, 2015). School support is imperative for the continued success of our program in partnership with College in High School. School support at all three of our schools includes the following:

- Assistance with course enrollment and payments
- Provision of academic support for course success
- Attainment of needed resources for class
- Coordination with school contacts to address challenges and pursue opportunities

Each partner school has a school-based coordinator who is in the school on a weekly basis to support the success of the courses. The coordinator provides academic support within the classroom on an as-needed basis.

Each month, the JSI school support team meets with the CHS instructors at the partner schools to address any concerns related to classes and present opportunities for deeper engagement with the University or other community partners. Since our work is student focused, we specifically set aside time to address any student issues and think through potential ways to assist when necessary. School level infrastructural capacity is important to the success of CHS courses. The JSI team meets with school administrators and counselors at least two times per year to ensure effective partnership related to school level decisions. Though course enrollment is the sole responsibility of the school-based staff, JSI provides direction on how to ensure successful course enrollment that is equitable and can maintain fidelity to the expectations of college level courses. Students in CHS courses sponsored by JSI do not pay any tuition for the courses, as an equity-based practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE NAME</th>
<th>PITT DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>COURSE NUMBER</th>
<th>SCHOOL WHERE COURSE HAS BEEN OFFERED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American History</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>HIST 0671</td>
<td>Milliones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>COMM 0500</td>
<td>Milliones and Westinghouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Century African American Literature</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>ENGLIT 1230</td>
<td>Perry</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States 1865 - Present</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>HIST 0601</td>
<td>Westinghouse and Perry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Applied Statistics</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 0200</td>
<td>Westinghouse and Perry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Biology</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>BIOSCI 0100</td>
<td>Perry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Chemistry</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>CHEM 0110</td>
<td>Perry (new 2023-24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Social Work (Social Justice)</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>SOCWRK1000</td>
<td>Milliones, Westinghouse and Perry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Collective

During the 2021-22 school year, JSI established the Teacher Collective as an additional programmatic strand. The Teacher Collective includes educators teaching JSI-CHS courses, educators, and the JSI team. In the first year of programming, five teachers across the three JSI-serving schools participated. All members of the collective were selected for their deep commitment to educational equity and transformation for students marginalized by the schooling system.

Sessions were codeveloped with educators allowing for meetings to be tailored to their needs. During the first year we focused on collaboration in community, care for each other and our students, and maintaining a justice lens in our work. In building collaboration as a collective, the monthly meetings served as a place akin to bell hooks' notions of “the homeplace” for educators where there was safety, acceptance, and freedom to simply lay down our burdens. This was key in developing meaningful authentic relationships.

Care was expressed in our intentional humanization of the space by centering joy through use of poetry, popular media, and mindfulness. We emphasize self- and community care as a way to mitigate the effects of teacher burnout due to the stresses of working in spaces of crisis. Teachers' experiences of burnout were given space, through intentional listening and empathizing. In response to those expressions, we implemented a self-care challenge that supported teachers in prioritizing their own needs despite the cacophony of crisis reflected in our schools, communities, and the broader society. Care also is reflected in the relationality that represents our interactions within the collective.

The Teacher Collective experience emphasized justice as a thread that tied together our experiences. Ideas and conversations on justice resonated from the initial meeting in which we began to develop an initial definition of justice in education. Each subsequent meeting reinforced our justice-centered dispositions as educators as we continued to dream about what it might look like for our students to experience more humanizing learning and development spaces that centered their potentiality and ideal futures.

According to one JSI partner teacher:

“There is very rarely time to collaborate with teachers within our own building, let alone with teachers outside of our building. This space has provided dedicated time to share thoughts, concerns and ideas around challenges and situations that we experience.”

Another JSI partner teacher mentioned:

“When I’m able to hear the different perspectives of my colleagues both in and out of my building, it helps to expand my thinking and understanding around social justice and equity. It also raises more questions and concerns that while I might not have the answer to them, I think they are important questions to be asking and exploring.”
**Bilal Abbey**
How many years have you worked at the school? Eight
What made you enter the field of education? I wanted to make an impact similar to the one a teacher made for me.
What is your favorite book? “The Four Agreements” because it challenges you to work on self.
What do you enjoy most about working with JSI? I enjoy watching students overcome challenges.

**Vicky Ammer**
How many years have you worked at the school? Seven
What made you enter the field of education? I felt like it was something I needed to do.
What is your favorite book? I don't know if I have a favorite. I read usually to learn but mostly to escape. The ones that can capture my interest and take me into the story are my favorite.
What do you enjoy most about working with JSI? The work groups with staff. I find them uplifting and informative.

**Jason Boll**
How many years have you worked at the school? Nine
What made you enter the field of education? At the time, I was working in the after-school environment in the non-profit world. In that capacity, I just felt like so much more could happen in the classroom. It felt like the after-school world was limited, and I wanted an opportunity to spend more time in education and work to help students grow and learn within the school.
What is your favorite book? Oh man, there are so many. I would say that I think about James Baldwin's collection of essays and “The Fire Next Time” is the book I think about the most often.
What do you enjoy most about working with JSI? I love that this team is interested in providing excellence and quality experience that centers the students in our neighborhood high schools, which are often forgotten in the choice and magnet model currently favored by the school district.
**Sharon Brentley**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** 18

**What made you enter the field of education?**
I have several family members who were professors at HBCUs, teachers, and guidance counselors in various high schools in the south. I wanted to become an educator to make a difference in the lives of ALL children, but especially children that look like me.

**What is your favorite book?**
"The Warmth of Other Suns" by Isabel Wilkerson and anything written by J. California Cooper. I am a history nerd, and I love reading about what happened centuries ago. I love when a writer can bring history to life and make it interesting. Wilkerson and Cooper have done that in their timeless pieces of work.

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
I love the curriculum, Social Justice, that I taught in 2021-22. I would have continued teaching the course if I did not retire. I am an admirer of humble, intelligent, young Black women such as Dr. Osai and JSI staff and professors that are making a difference in Pittsburgh and around the country.

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**Angelo Flango**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** Six

**What made you enter the field of education?**
Is it too cliché to say, “to make a difference”? I entered education to actively work with students each day to grow academically, socially, and emotionally and hopefully foster a curiosity and love of learning to carry throughout their lives.

**What is your favorite book?**
I have two! "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" by Betty Smith. Both beautifully written stories of young women coming-of-age and their joys, challenges, and triumphs. Both books opened my eyes at a young age to different perspectives and every time I reread them, I find new wisdom, grace, and inspiration in their words and stories.

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
The hard work and commitment of the students and the positive, supportive culture we all build together. Helping to facilitate the students' growth and see their pride and confidence grow as they persevere to achieve their goals and set newer and bigger goals for themselves never gets old. JSI is all about teamwork and what can be achieved when we have common priorities and goals and share the belief in our students.

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**Kenneth Smith**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** Eight (30 years with Pittsburgh Public Schools)

**What made you enter the field of education?**
Teaching and training skills in other fields (such as youth employment, and drug and alcohol counseling and intervention) appealed to me the most among the other required work-related skills. As a result, I pursued a master's degree in education from the University of Pittsburgh to devote the above skills in social studies working with high school students, parents, and adults in the field.

**What is your favorite book?**
"Homegoing" by Yaa Gyassi. It is a captivating work of historical fiction that masterfully brings to light the legacy of slavery and institutional racism by giving voice to the lives of “ordinary, everyday people” through several generations.

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
The monthly colleague collaboration, and the visionary support and planning for JSI students.
Partner Teacher Spotlight continued

**Sean Means**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** 11

**What made you enter the field of education?**
I wanted to help children, who look like myself, create a better life for themselves and their families.

**What is your favorite book?**
“Speeches that Changed the World”

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
I love that I loop with the students. By following them for multiple years I feel like I’m able to build stronger relationships and the students are more willing to buy-in to the level of rigor the course provides. They want to be pushed and they appreciate the challenge. That said, we also have a lot of fun as a collective, my students are so funny, and we try to keep things light when we can. Lastly, the looping model helps us create relationships that will last for years. Everyone cares about each other, and that collective empathy and investment helps push us all through various challenges that arise within their junior and senior year.

**Shaquaya Gilbert**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** Six

**What made you enter the field of education?**
It was always my dream to be a teacher. I was the little girl who always wanted to play school growing up. My favorite English teacher further fostered this dream for me.

**What is your favorite book?**
My favorite book is probably the first Harry Potter book because my favorite English teacher gifted me that book when it first came out.

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
The connections and partnerships are what I enjoy most. The space allows me to reflect and build on my knowledge as an educator. I feel empowered and inspired by simply being connected to JSI.

**Vincent Werling**

**How many years have you worked at the school?** Five

**What made you enter the field of education?**
I hope to provide a deep understanding of the mathematical principles which make up our daily lives.

**What is your favorite book?**
“The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.” The heroine is unexpected and comes from a difficult background.

**What do you enjoy most about working with JSI?**
Creating the change that is necessary to update our educational system.
Pictured from left to right are JSI team members Kelcey Bailey, Esohe Osai, and Erica Roberts.
Scholar Support

Scholar Support is a new and developing branch of programming offered to JSI students during their high school years. As juniors and seniors begin their college search and application process, JSI coordinators come alongside students through one-on-one check-ins and visits to their CHS courses. Through relationship building with students, coordinators can share resources relevant to each students’ particular strengths, interests, and sense of purpose. Materials like college preparation checklists, scholarship resources, and FAFSA completion support are shared regularly as well. Our mission is to ensure that our students not only have the academic tools and financial resources they need to succeed in college, but that they also have the mindset and belief that they are college material. More than anything, our scholar support efforts aim to encourage students that they are capable and worthy of the pursuit for a college degree. In our schools, there are often other partners who work to support college access for students. The coordinators aim to work in collaboration with providers, when possible, as our aim is to avoid overlapping services. We recognize that the needs in our schools often outweigh the capacity of any individual provider. Our program specifically addresses navigational support of needs of juniors and seniors enrolled in CHS courses; however we also aim to have a broader presence in the schools as part of a cadre of providers in the post-secondary transition space.

The second tier of Scholar Support is the support needed for alumni of our program who are enrolled in their first year of college. Supporting these students will include text message nudges and communications for students after graduation from high school as they transition into their collegiate studies, with the goal being to make sure students know they have ongoing support through JSI as they navigate their first semesters of college. Studies show that students who have adequate support in the first year of college are more likely to successfully complete a degree. Oftentimes, students are more comfortable receiving support from a familiar point of contact, so our aim is to scaffold them into the types of assistance available at their post-secondary institutions. Ensuring that contact information is shared is essential to our ability to continue support for students after they graduate high school, whether a student is on a college campus or is still making their plan to attend school after a gap year. Communication with our students in their first year out of high school can provide the supportive environment needed to navigate the often-murky terrain of the post-secondary transition.

During the 2021-22 school year, Catapult Greater Pittsburgh partnered with the Justice Scholar Studio to teach students about financial literacy. The emphasis on financial literacy was a direct result of the student selected research project from 2019-20, which was halted by the pandemic. Catapult serves the greater Pittsburgh area. Its focus is on achieving economic justice for those who are disenfranchised and offers many programs in homeownership, entrepreneurship, and advocacy. Its youth curriculum program is known as C.O.I.N.S. (Cash flow. Opportunities. Investments. Net worth. Savings.) Cofacilitators spoke with scholars during seven sessions and spoke about various financial literacy topics ranging from the history of money to borrowing and investing, among other topics. Pre- and post-assessments showed that students generally improved their knowledge of financial literacy. The biggest improvement was in the number of students who had a budget at the start vs. the end of the seven-week program.
Out-of-School Time

The Justice Scholar Studio is the out-of-school branch of the Justice Scholars Institute. The Justice Scholar Studio initially began in 2018 with Westinghouse High School students who met in the Homewood community. This year, the Justice Scholar Studio has expanded, now serving the following three schools: Perry, Westinghouse and Milliones. This year marks the first year of the studio meeting on the University of Pittsburgh campus and hosting all three schools together. The Justice Scholar Studio curriculum is broken into 5 units: Our Stories, Our Schools, Our Community, Our City, and Our World. The program focuses on social justice topics related to each unit. There also is a focus on college readiness that covers topics including personal finance, learning preferences, and career exploration. The Justice Scholar Studio invites industry leading professionals in to speak to students about college readiness and social justice concerns.

The Justice Scholar Studio uses a Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach and students are provided the opportunity to discuss social justice issues. This gives the students a chance to go deeper in topics of their own choosing that might be overlooked in traditional learning environments. Students are able to evaluate themselves in the beginning by reviewing their strengths and interests as well as by setting goals. The Justice Scholar Studio believes that for students to reflect on social justice issues in culture, it also is important for them to be self-aware and increase critical consciousness.

The format during out-of-school time meetings is as follows. Upon students’ arrival they have a writing prompt, snack, and a debrief. The focus is to make sure the students feel that they can be change agents merging the gaps between students and communities. On a weekly basis there is a new topic that the group gets to discuss as a whole, but the students also pick one topic that they will focus their YPAR project around.
Workshops

The Justice Scholars Institute College Bound Workshop Series provides tailored opportunities for students in College in High School courses at our partner schools. The series aims to help students develop specific skill sets supporting the post-secondary transition. In a typical year, Justice Scholars Institute (JSI) hosts four workshops as part of this series. Two of the four workshops typically occur at a University of Pittsburgh space, whether in Oakland or at one of Pitt’s community-based locations. The other workshops may occur at the partner school sites. The workshops in our scale-up have been codesigned and supported by University of Pittsburgh faculty members Omid Fotuhi, research associate, Learning Research and Development Center; Lou Maraj, assistant professor, Department of English, Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences; and Khirsten Scott, assistant professor, School of Education. Each workshop is culturally relevant and considers the learning needs of students in our partner schools.

College Ready Mindset Workshop

Students’ beliefs about themselves, their ability, sense of belonging, and the purpose and relevance of course work all affect learning. These psychosocial toolkits position students to approach these more rigorous college courses with intentionality. This workshop aims to help students enact and own their full potential as learners. This workshop uses an adaptive mindset approach to prepare students for success in college courses. The workshop provides access to information that uncovers the hidden curriculum of learning in a college environment and shows students how to use their brilliant minds to build habits that can lead to an understanding of academic material. Topics explored include fostering resilience, the secrets of self-control, the value of self-management, the importance of goal setting, and finding purpose. The information provided in this workshop is essential, considering the differences between the learning expectations students experience in urban public schools and what they will experience in a college environment. Understanding the psychology of learning can support students’ ability to adapt to the rigor of college learning and emphasize the relevance of their own genius, regardless of the type of learning environment they may experience after high school.

Engaged Scholar Research Workshop

Our students are researchers, whether or not they know it. This workshop aims to explore the ways the students already engage and enact research and enhance students’ comprehension and application of research. This workshop demystifies research and helps students understand that it is accessible and more relevant to them than they know. A significant part of the student’s scholarly process is understanding how to use research tools. We work with librarians to expose students to tools that will aid them in adopting the scholarly identity. Students learn to use Google Scholar, read academic literature, write annotated bibliographies, use citations, and use qualitative interviews to obtain information from community-based and professional sources. This workshop also incorporates “play” to connect the students to the topic in a way that feels engaging, supportive, and culturally relevant. This workshop’s format highlights that research should be a fun and interactive process. At the workshop’s conclusion, students are prepared to embark upon an independent research paper process, guided by their interests and related to social justice.
On Purpose and On Point Workshop

The transition to adulthood can be a challenging process for any adolescent. Students with a firm grasp on their purpose and what they want to do in life have greater success navigating the post-secondary transition. This workshop has two aims: 1) it invites students to think about purpose, and 2) it prepares students to gain the skills needed to present confidently as they share about themselves and their research. The workshop focuses on communicating one's purpose and giving an elevator speech on the capstone research project. Students engage in an exercise allowing them to think about their identity, experiences, and passions and imagine what kind of purpose statement they might create. Students then receive instruction to do an elevator speech on the research project or capstone assignment. The workshop culminates with students practicing their communication skills and receiving feedback from an audience of supporters and peers. An element of knowing oneself is being able to communicate who you are in a clear and compelling statement. Students practice how to speak confidently about themselves and their interests. The workshop should support students’ views of their future selves, aligned with cultural perspectives and values that they can leverage to make our communities, and ultimately our world, a better place.

Personal Statement Workshop

Our students each have a story. Their stories are part of their journey into and through post-secondary education. The personal statement workshop helps students understand how their stories and experiences are significant. The workshop also leverages students’ multiliteracies as a resource for personal growth. Informed by autoethnographies of Black writers and thinkers, the workshop’s design brings into focus the voices and experiences of academics who have stories that will resonate with the students. Additionally, this workshop allows students to speak about their life goals and aspirations as they imagine a pathway from where they have been to where they want to go in the future. An essential part of authoring their story is the actual writing process, using various literary elements to compose compelling and memorable essays. Students in this workshop receive feedback on their writing as they develop the essays for submission with college applications. For students in the 11th grade, we provide direction on the college personal statement along with a viewing of the film “Personal Statement,” which tracks the stories of three urban public school students as they journey through their senior year and prepare for college. Finally, this workshop allows students to get exposure to the #webelongincollege media campaign, which supports underrepresented students on their pathways to college.
Examples of Justice Scholars Institute hosted events:
- JSI Symposium and Senior Celebration
- College Night and Holiday Party
- 9th and 10th Grade JSI Information Session
- College Application Night
- Scholarship Support Night

JSI Symposium and Senior Celebration

On May 12, 2022, the JSI hosted its annual Symposium and Senior Celebration at the University of Pittsburgh Community Engagement Center (CEC) in Homewood. If you’ve never been there, the CEC is a crisply designed, artful space often buzzing with folks from various communities engaged with Pitt at this community-based outpost of the University.

Upon walking through the front door of CEC, you enter a warm gallery space full of color, the sounds of laughter, and the smell of delicious food. Light pours in from the windows to shine on student research posters displayed on easels throughout the gallery space. JSI students, who have spent months on capstone research projects, stand in front of posters relishing the chance to talk about their hard work. A few students seem nervous, but they all have a sense of pride in what they’ve done. The first poster on the right-hand side was a comparison of the foster care systems in Maryland and Pennsylvania from a Perry student who had experienced both and analyzed the policies that shaped her experience. Across from that poster, a Westinghouse student exhibited her research on addressing health challenges among pregnant mothers. Turning the corner, you see a young man presenting his work on racial inequity in the NFL. The array of topics and insights into student interests intrigue you, as you linger in the gallery space. You realize the music volume is decreased and folks are gathered in the main space. The program is beginning!

At the start of the program, two graduating seniors from JSI greet guests, prompting smiles from the audience as they express relief that this research process has come to an end. A slide show starts and you see photos of the JSI team, faculty, staff, and students from Pitt who are invested in seeing equitable educational opportunities for students in the city. No one works harder than the teacher, the next group of partners introduced in the slideshow. JSI teachers are in the building and a few share their experiences of this school year. Sharon Brentley, a Perry teacher who was weeks away from retirement, shares how much she loved teaching the Introduction to Social Justice course. She acknowledges her pre-service teacher, a Pitt graduate student, who worked closely with the students on the research paper process. He is seated in the front row next to a few students. Other teachers share words about their experiences teaching courses like the African American History course at Milliones (Bilal Abbey) and the Basic Applied Statistics course at Westinghouse (Vincent Werling). You notice Sean Means and Angela Flango in the crowd. Both have been engaged with JSI from the early days and are enjoying this event, the first one that includes two additional schools. It’s amazing how much our partnership has grown!

The palpable energy in the room invigorated the students, their families, and guests from the University and the community. The slideshow highlights a few events that took place that year, such as the college application night, led by a grad student intern with JSI. Westinghouse students who were in the out-of-school time program highlight their experience engaging in a youth-participatory action research project about homelessness. Photos from the slideshow depict students at JSI gatherings throughout the school year. Students smile seeing themselves in the photos and remembering the visits to Pitt’s campus and other community spaces throughout the year. The slideshow has ended, and you hear that this is the official release of the recently completed JSI film. Featuring the voices of students, teachers, and the program founder, the film gives a glimpse into what JSI is building and why it is so important for the communities we serve.

youtube.com/watch?v=8zqqaDR1_wk
The Justice Scholars Institute: An Equity-Focused College Preparatory Scale-Up for Pittsburgh
The Justice Scholars Institute Team (from left to right)

Sean Means, partner teacher (Westinghouse)
Kelcey Bailey, program coordinator
Sharon Brentley, partner teacher (retired)
Shanyce Campbell, assistant professor
Vicki Ammer, partner teacher (Perry)
Kenneth Smith, partner teacher (Perry)
Kaleah Malloy, program coordinator
Mary Trujillo, community partner

Bilal Abbey, partner teacher (Milliones)
Erica Roberts, program manager
Shaqueya Gilbert, partner teacher (Milliones)
Jason Boll, partner teacher (Perry)
Vincent Werling, partner teacher (Westinghouse)
Angela Flango, partner teacher (Westinghouse)
Jackie Spiezia, program coordinator
Esohe Osai, assistant professor
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- School of Social Work
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School and Community Partners

- A+ Schools
- Catapult Pittsburgh
- Pittsburgh Milliones
- Pittsburgh Perry
- The Pittsburgh Promise
- Pittsburgh Public School District Leaders
- Pittsburgh Westinghouse

Philanthropic Supporters

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