THE JUSTICE SCHOLARS INSTITUTE
An Equity–Focused, College Preparatory Initiative
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Preparing Future Advocates for Justice

At the Pitt School of Education, our mission-vision is to ignite learning, strive for well-being for all, and disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We prepare our students to be educators, researchers, and community leaders who will contribute positive change in the world.

The Justice Scholars Institute is a vital partner in these efforts. The program ensures that high school students within Pittsburgh Public Schools, particularly Students of Color, are receiving the necessary resources, opportunities, and support to achieve their full academic and professional potential. This includes our commitment to do what we can to ensure that they are able to undertake journeys of personal and professional growth and fulfillment. The program is guided by four overriding goals: to enrich students’ educational prospects, to enhance their literacy skills, to foster their social justice dispositions, and to provide them with the tools needed to impact local, regional, and national communities, hence, the broader world.

With its grounding in justice-oriented, anti-racist principles, the Justice Scholars Institute has an impact that goes far beyond the traditional college preparation program. In fact, the Institute prepares young people to continue to think critically about social problems and to always advocate on behalf of members in their communities who are marginalized by systems of inequities and inequalities. I cannot say it enough: I am extremely proud of the work of our Justice Scholars Institute, its founder, Dr. Esohe Osai, our school-district partners, and, most of all, the students who participate in the Institute for their extraordinary engagement and commitment.

I am honored to recognize and celebrate the Justice Scholars Institute. It has been truly inspiring to see the many ways the program is impacting lives.

Valerie Kinloch, PhD
Renée and Richard Goldman Dean
University of Pittsburgh School of Education

Pitt Education

Mission/Vision

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.
The Need for Educational Equity in Pittsburgh

In Pittsburgh, we need sustainable, justice-focused education initiatives that effectively serve Black families and communities. The need for increased equity in Pittsburgh is not a new storyline.

For years, this “Tale of Two Cities,” attributed to racial inequalities in Pittsburgh, has played out in both local and national news outlets. However, we are in a historical moment of the dual pandemics represented by COVID-19 and the continued, adverse effects of systemic racism in our nation. This moment invites us to look closely and decide what we must do to combat the ill effects of societal inequities in our communities. Most of the inequities are, in some way, connected to education disparities. This report tells the story of one very purposeful education intervention making Pittsburgh more just and more responsive to the needs of Black families and communities.

Education is an important social determinant of health with broad implications for physical health, economic stability, and well-being (Telfair & Shelton, 2012; Newton, 2017). Yet, Black communities are often subject to inadequate and even oppressive schooling experiences that hinder future opportunities (Davis, 2003; Love 2019). Inequitable access to post-secondary education is a significant challenge in our nation; a challenge that ultimately deepens societal fractures and further marginalizes people who are from under-resourced communities. Nationally, 80% of high school students expect to earn a college degree (Cahalan et al., 2006). Seventy-eight percent of high-income students will earn a degree, compared to only 13% of students from low-income families (Cahalan et al., 2019). Though the national data reveal gross inequities by socioeconomic status, the picture in Pittsburgh is more disturbing. Only 16% of Black students from Pittsburgh earn a college degree, regardless of income; meanwhile, 42% of White students in Pittsburgh attain that credential.

The numbers are even more ominous when we consider the experiences of students in Pittsburgh’s Black, economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Between the three high schools with the highest Black population, based on the Class of 2012, only between one and five percent of graduates earn a college degree by six years post high school graduation. Although low educational outcomes for children from Black families and communities is common across our nation, the disparities in Pittsburgh are particularly entrenched. Yet, research has demonstrated numerous strategies that can adequately address the miseducation and enhance learning for all children, regardless of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoka & Holsapple, 2017). It seems our city is behind in considering and/or effectively implementing such interventions.

The educational disparities in Pittsburgh are cyclical and have extensive reach that harms Black communities. The effects are most evident when we consider quality of life indicators for Black Pittsburghers. For example, a recent report indicates that White residents in Pittsburgh are three times more likely to have a college degree than Black residents. Low educational outcomes, coupled with high unemployment/underemployment, result in neighborhoods where adults are socially and economically isolated. The further disadvantage of this reality is that young people in these communities are under-exposed to the variety of career avenues that exist in Pittsburgh, a city becoming known as a post-


The Need for Educational Equity in Pittsburgh (continued)

industrial, revitalized metropolis\(^4\). Even when young people in marginalized communities are aware of attractive careers in healthcare, tech or education, they are often clueless about what it takes to pursue such opportunities. The pathways are obscured and obstructed due to realities of economic and education structures that systemically disadvantage Black families in under-resourced communities.

Racial disparities in access to quality education lead to the inequalities in opportunities for educational advancement. The educational opportunity gap translates to gross inequities in employment, housing, and health and well-being for Black people in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh region is grappling with a noticeable gap between the number of skilled labor job opportunities and the labor market available to fill skilled positions. Yet, young people in our schools are not adequately prepared to assume roles in the emerging labor market. The Allegheny Conference on Community Development published a report that highlights such inequities in the region. It states, “Our region’s workforce is one of the least diverse of benchmark regions...African Americans have persistently lower education levels, median yearly earnings, and higher levels of unemployment.” The report recommends that stakeholders invest in the region’s talent pipeline by working with educators to develop innovative curricula for students in K-12. Furthermore, in 2017, the state of Pennsylvania released an education plan that emphasizes the importance of career and post-graduation preparation for students in K-12\(^v\).

The systemic miseducation of Black children and youth in Pittsburgh represents an inequity that requires direct, purposeful action. Due to entrenched segregation in Pittsburgh, the public school district in our city appears to be two parallel systems — one serving families with the advantage of privileged race and/or economic status, while the second system disserves those from Black, low-income families and communities. A 2017 PENCAN report entitled Opportunities Lost\(^4\) found that Pittsburgh’s educational failures disproportionately affect Black students. The inequities manifest in a number of scenarios — from discipline practices that disproportionately penalize Black students to incomprehensible racial disparities in learning and achievement. According to the report, “In PPS, black students have substantially less access to and participation in rigorous coursework.” Across schools within the same district, some students are being prepared to transition to post-secondary education opportunities, while other students, usually Black and from under-resourced communities, are not getting the same preparation. The pervasiveness and magnitude of the disparities speak to systemic issues that oppress Black communities and limit opportunities for children.

Since 2016, the Justice Scholars Institute (JSI) has engaged students at Westinghouse Academy in a college preparatory experience that spans in-school and out-of-school time (OST) spaces. Although the metrics indicate that Westinghouse is the lowest performing secondary school in the district, the school serves some of the brightest young minds in our city. JSI was designed to build bridges between those students and a college degree. Our school-university partnership centers on a concurrent enrollment experience, offered through the University of Pittsburgh’s College in High School program. Although College in High School has served high school students in Pennsylvania for over 40 years, the Justice Scholars partnership represents the only dual enrollment opportunity that serves students from a Black, economically under-resourced community. What follows in this report, is the story of the Justice Scholars Institute and relevant findings from our developmental evaluation.

This report provides:

- a description of the Justice Scholars Institute, including the theoretical and practical implications that drive our approach
- a highlight of key program components and relevant outcomes from our process evaluation
- a view of our purposeful collaboration and engagement framework, which uses an improvement science lens to invite partners from public schools, the community, and the university to work together to enhance schooling experiences for Black youth

Additionally, at the conclusion of the report, we include spotlights on students and partners who are connected to this effort to provide a rigorous, college preparatory experience through the Justice Scholars Institute.
The Justice Scholars Institute

Description of the Partnership Model

Justice Scholars is a school–university partnership focused on enhancing educational opportunities for high school students in Pittsburgh.

In partnership with the University of Pittsburgh’s College in High School (CHS) program, Justice Scholars provides a rigorous college preparation program for students in underserved Pittsburgh Public Schools. The program provides scaffolded supports that acclimate students to the expectations of a college environment, even before they make the transition to college. Since 2016, the Justice Scholars Institute provides Westinghouse students with college credits through an enhanced college preparation experience, while also emphasizing youth development and community development. The theme of social justice unifies the program model, as it trains youth to understand and address societal inequities, including the opportunity gap that results in educational underachievement in low-income, predominately Black neighborhoods. The program targets this inequity in two ways: 1) it prepares students to become advocates for change, and 2) it ensures students they have the requisite knowledge and skillsets to be successful in post-secondary education.

All young people, perhaps especially those in low-income communities of color, deserve a quality education. Quality education opportunities can support life-long, life-wide learning and facilitate a successful college transition. Abolitionist methods of teaching look to reverse the dehumanizing schooling practices that funnel young people through a school-to-prison pipeline, instead of considering the inherent value and worth of youth from marginalized communities. As individuals who care deeply for the Black youth and who recognize their inherent brilliance, our work is aimed at creating space for students to explore a scholarly identity. Engaging in this work allows us to support the educational potentiality of students in our city schools through facilitating targeted and enhanced educational experiences for students.

Collaboration is a key feature of the Justice Scholars experience, as we intentionally collaborate with the school, within the community, and across the university to support the students in the program. Our partnership model centers on the vital role that highly committed, social justice focused teachers can play in building pathways to success in college for students, even in the most under-resourced communities. JSI works in deep collaboration with teachers, counselors, and other school-based personnel to create an environment of rigorous college-level expectations that will best prepare the students for a transition to a four-year college or university.

The aims of Justice Scholars include:

- **Educate** students about the concept of educational opportunity as a **social justice** priority.
- **Enhance** students’ **writing skills** through a cross-content literacy focus.
- **Enrich** students’ educational prospects by providing a framework for academic achievement and skills for **college success**.
- **Equip** students with tools to become change agents in their school, community, and the broader world through **relevant, engaged research projects**.

In addition to the in-class learning that takes place during school, we offer an out-of-school time (OST) program to continue engagement in the work expected for this program. The Justice Scholars Studio, as the OST component is called, takes place through the University of Pittsburgh Community Engagement Center. The studio provides a space for students to discuss and respond to social justice issues in our schools and communities. Each year, students are able to apply for this paid, weekly after-school experience where we engage in relevant, equity-focused discussions and participate in student-driven participatory action research projects.
The Justice Scholars Institute is guided by a transformative, identity-based motivation theoretical lens that lives at the intersection of social justice youth development and education practice. Within the social justice framework, we recognize that school systems have systemically neglected to prepare students of color with the requisite skills for a successful transition to post-secondary education (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2011). From a youth developmental lens, it is important to engage youth in a critical consciousness framework, both intellectually and at the level of action (Seider et al., 2017). Outcomes associated with social justice youth development include: self-awareness, social-awareness, and global awareness; all identity-connected constructs (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). From an education practice, students should experience educational strategies that can best position them to achieve desired educational outcomes, like obtaining a college degree. Educational experiences also should support opportunities to learn how identities are connected to critical analyses of local and global realities. In light of this, the goal becomes to adopt an identity of a “critical learner” or a Justice Scholar, engaged in the work of social justice. This identity, scaffolded with intentional supports, can facilitate the transition to post-secondary education, as students pursue the concept of education as an aspect of liberation for the oppressed (Sanga, 2017).

As it relates to education practice, there are a host of educational strategies that can facilitate academic achievement and segue young people into desired post-secondary education opportunities, yet the most marginalized youth, including Black students from economically under-resourced communities, have been systematically excluded from access. For example, research has demonstrated that dual enrollment is an evidence-based practice for preparing students for academic success, even for low and middle achieving students. However, a report by the Education Trust notes that, “While it is clear Black and Latino students are often successful in advanced coursework opportunities, they are still not fairly represented in advanced courses”. The provision of college-level courses through the University of Pittsburgh is a significant college preparatory adaptation that can increase college access for students from our under-resourced communities.

In addition to the role of advanced coursework as a facilitator of higher education, a number of other strategies can enhance students’ academic achievement and increase the likelihood of attaining access to higher education. For example, a host of psychosocial intervention studies demonstrate that teaching psychosocial and developmental tools such as mindset, purpose, and goal-setting support higher academic outcomes (Yeager & Walton, 2011). These non-cognitive skills serve as a scaffold that can increase likelihood of success in higher education. For example, interventions that support students in the development of a purpose linked to learning show increased academic achievement (Yeager et al., 2014); however, programs that teach students how to use such skills have not been systemically implemented in schools that serve our most marginalized youth. Education practice must prioritize promising practices such as dual enrollment, “capstone” writing experiences, and exposure to college, community, and cultural resources (Vargas & Venezia, 2015). The provision of college courses, along with non-cognitive skills-training represent solid education practice that can enhance college preparation for young people who have a desire to succeed in a post-secondary environment.

The unique effect of a social justice anchored, targeted educational intervention for youth of color is that: 1) it is identify-affirming and debunks narratives that blame oppressed people for undesirable educational outcomes, and 2) it enhances young people’s identities as learners in urban contexts where they are naturally interested in learning, but often disillusioned with oppressive schooling. By fusing education practice centered interventions within a social justice framework, we can facilitate youth’s preparation to transition to post-secondary education opportunities.
Program History Timeline

2016
- **April**: Westinghouse involvement in the CHS Orientation
- **August**: CHS Social Justice course launched at Westinghouse Academy

2017
- **May**: Program inaugural research symposium
- **August**: CHS Argument course initiated at Westinghouse Academy

2018
- **August**: CHS U.S. History course initiated at Westinghouse Academy
- **October**: Launch of out-of-school time youth development program component

2019
- **November**: Conversations begin about expanding the program to additional schools
In existence since 1980, CHS serves over 4,000 Pennsylvania students each year, at over 140 high schools. Through this program, qualified high school students are able to earn college credit from their teachers within the supportive high school environment — at a fraction of the normal tuition rate. To date, over 63,000 Pennsylvania students have earned these top-quality University credits.

CHS provides high school students the same courses that are offered to undergraduate students on campus. University faculty approve, train, and support the high school teachers who deliver the courses. Over 250 high school teachers are certified to teach CHS courses in a variety of subject areas, including Communication, Computer Science, Social Sciences, and Statistics, among others.

Since CHS course credit is delivered concurrently within a high school course, individual high schools set their own standards for who can register for a particular course. Students should be prepared for the rigor, challenge, and outcome of taking a college course.

Students must have the approval of the high school and the CHS teacher to take a CHS course, meeting any high school and CHS course prerequisites.

In addition to the opportunity to earn college credits, CHS students may receive additional benefits. Academic research and state data suggest that high school students in concurrent enrollment programs receive many college-related advantages. These students:

- are more likely to meet college-readiness benchmarks
- have a lower likelihood of college placement into remedial English or math
- attain higher four- and six-year college completion rates
- accomplish a shorter average time to bachelor's degree completion for those completing in six years or less

At the national level, dual enrollment opportunities are seen as a more equitable approach to college preparatory learning, compared to Advanced Placement courses. College in High School students are more successful than Advanced Placement (AP) students at obtaining college credit. One reason for this is that CHS grades are generated from assessments throughout the course, unlike AP credits that come from one final assessment.

Previous data has shown that over 87% of CHS grades were a C or better, the grade needed to transfer credits between colleges; in comparison, only 34% of AP exam scores were a 4 or 5.

The concurrent enrollment approach presents a more equitable pathway to academic success without the reliance of a single test to determine students' learning and achievement.

All CHS students are invited to apply to the University of Pittsburgh for free. At the University of Pittsburgh, former CHS students have a 94% retention rate, several points higher than the average student. Any grade of C or better in a CHS class will transfer to most college and universities, often reducing the financial burden on students who are able to enter college with significant progress towards a degree. The partnership with College in High School is the signature component of the Justice Scholars Institute, as it supports the aim to decrease inequities in college access for Black students in Pittsburgh.
Table 1. Justice Scholars Institute Collaboration Program Components. Based on the Co-Designed, Co-Delivered, Co-Validated framework*. A delineation of school, university, and community roles in the Justice Scholars Institute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM ACTIVITY</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Schedules students into courses and selects teachers to serve as course instructors for college-credit bearing courses</td>
<td>Provides faculty to oversee teacher and course syllabus, and provides full tuition for students to take courses</td>
<td>Attends community schools meetings to learn about program and can recommend students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation of Courses</strong></td>
<td>High school teachers serve as instructors for the courses, which occur during the regular school day. Teachers ensure course is aligned with district standards</td>
<td>Coordinates with school to plan for course implementation, and faculty meets with high school instructor</td>
<td>Participates as course guest speakers and also supports course-related projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Seminar Series</strong></td>
<td>Coordinates with university partners and with school administration to include students in the seminar series</td>
<td>Plans and facilitates workshops, coordinating with partners across campus to create a college-prep experience</td>
<td>Participates in workshop components and provides connections to alumni and additional partners to develop opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out-of-School-Time Activities</strong></td>
<td>Supports application process for students interested in the OST opportunity and participates in relevant events</td>
<td>Designs and executes the OST opportunity, recruits college student volunteers, and provides payment to participating students</td>
<td>Participates in relevant activities and events, including service learning projects and speakers series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Research Projects</strong></td>
<td>Guides students with research projects and facilitates submission of research papers for district-level scholarship opportunities</td>
<td>Provides training for the research process and provides necessary materials for completion and presentation of research</td>
<td>Involved in relevant components of research projects (e.g. interviewees) and participates in the research exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broadening Capacity and Reach</strong></td>
<td>Guidance counselor and administration support development of new course and assist in promoting program to students and families</td>
<td>College students support group mentoring experiences for potential students and program staff involved in partnership development</td>
<td>Community groups support expanded reach and promotion of the program to potential stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Students

Any student who expresses a desire to engage in college-level courses can potentially have an opportunity to participate in the Justice Scholars Institute, through enrollment in the College in High School courses at Westinghouse.

When students are in the ninth and 10th grades, they are invited to a group mentoring session to learn more about college and about the possibility of pursuing college credits in high school through our partnership. This event is the start of the JSI intervention in support of a college identity for young people at Westinghouse. The mentoring groups help students to understand that the path to college starts in ninth grade and includes intentional school engagement and involvement in the community. Although preparation starts early, college courses are available only to upperclassmen. For the enrollment process, partner teachers work with a counselor to determine which 11th-graders will participate in the CHS courses, based on expressed interest and academic record. Ideally, participating students will be on track for the Pittsburgh Promise. The Pittsburgh Promise presents a unique facilitator to post-secondary opportunities for young people in Pittsburgh. The base requirements of a 2.5 GPA and 90% attendance allow us to confidently assume the students will have access to scholarship resources that will further offset the cost of college. Scholarships, along with the investment made in earned college credits in high school, create a compelling case that college can be accessible regardless of the socioeconomic status of the students. The enrollment process is intentional in both being interest-driven at the student level, while also being somewhat informed by the students’ academic track record and opportunity to pursue college at a low-cost or no-cost.

All of our students secured some amount of scholarship money for school, many attending with college costs completely covered.
### Justice Scholars College in High School Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE TITLE</th>
<th>SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>COURSE DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Social Justice</td>
<td>School of Social Work</td>
<td>This course provides an overview of professional social work. It examines the historical development of the profession of social work; introduces the profession's values, ethics, and practice principles; examines the major interventive methods of social work practice; identifies the generalist base of social work practice; and explores the social service delivery networks which comprise the social welfare system in urban environments. Social work's historic commitment to social justice and to the elimination of poverty is integrated throughout the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to U.S. History</td>
<td>History Department — Dietrich School of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>This introductory level course traces and analyzes the central developments in U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present. It will provide an overview for those seeking to fulfill &quot;General Education&quot; requirements. This period in U.S. History is characterized by dramatic and sweeping political, economic, social, and cultural change, as well as expanding global engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Communications Department — Dietrich School of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>This course teaches students to recognize, explain, research, construct, present, and critique arguments. Assignments invite students to create their own research-based arguments, express them capably to peers and instructors, eloquently refute competing arguments, and judge the soundness of arguments made by others. A survey of key concepts in argumentation theory will provide background for students to develop their argument skills in a variety of both oral and written activities that feature lively intellectual interchange.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pursuing College Credits

Students enrolled in college courses at Westinghouse has expanded from 13 students enrolled in a single course in the 2016-17 school year to 49 juniors and seniors enrolled in three separate courses in 2019-2020. These numbers include students enrolled in courses at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), which has come to also offer courses through the Homewood-Brushton Center. In the years prior to the Justice Scholars Institute at Westinghouse, college courses were not offered to students at Westinghouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>53*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes Westinghouse students in CCAC courses

Passed courses

Course passage has varied over the duration of the program. In the first year, 84.6% of students passed the course to earn credit. In 2017-2018, 62.5% of students passed; in 2018-2019, 89.7% of students passed. For 2019-2020, 92% percent of students passed the CHS courses.

Credits earned (school aggregate)

Students who pass College in High School courses earn University of Pittsburgh credits, which are transferrable to most colleges and universities. Because CHS tuition is paid for by the program, this can mean real financial savings for Westinghouse scholars. Students earned 33 Pitt credits in the 2016-2017 school year, 15 credits in 2017-2018, and 105 credits in 2018-2019. In 2019-2020, students earned 183 University of Pittsburgh credits. Currently, part-time tuition at Pitt starts at $776 per credit hour, meaning for the 183 credits earned so far, students have saved at least $260,736.00.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pitt Credits Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What We’ve Seen So Far

June 2020 marked the end of a two-year developmental evaluation, which allowed us to gain insights into the program experience for students and program partners. From our initial year of the developmental evaluation, in 2018-2019, students completed pre-surveys (n=35) and post-surveys (n=26) in their college courses. Justice Scholars students’ self-reported average grades increased over the course of the year, with 34% reporting mostly A or A- grades on the pre-survey, and 41% reporting the same on the post-survey. Students also showed increases in a number of college-readiness skills, especially research skills, as shown below. The charts that follow represent improvements in mean level outcomes of interest for various components of the program. Statistical significance was not computed due to the small sample size of the surveys.

All responses are on a 1-5 OR 1-6 scale — higher scores representing a higher agreement with item.

TEACHER QUOTE:
Morris: They put in the time, they put in the work, and you’re seeing the great outcomes for it and I think it’s preparing them for when college actually starts. As far as time management, as far as quality of work, as far as reaching out for help, as far as meeting with their teachers to give feedback and things of that nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Post-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do extra research to learn more about the things we do in school.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JUSTICE ORIENTATION:
Student responses showed a 27% increase in agreement with the statement, “I have an obligation to ‘give back’ to the community.” Post-surveys also showed a 26% increase agreement that, “Even though it is hard to bring about social change, I still believe I can have an impact.” On the post-survey, 78% of students agreed with their ability to make change in their communities.
The 2019-2020 surveys likewise showed continued growth for students in areas including communal orientation values and academic/research skills. Mean changes from pre- to post-surveys demonstrate how Justice Scholars learned about their role as citizens of their community and of the world. Response means increased more than 25 percent on items like, “I feel like a part of my community/neighborhood,” and, “I love to volunteer.” In learning about social justice, Scholars also learned that others are as invested in community change as they are. Student response means increased by 10% or more on questions asking about others around them: “Other people around me are engaged in activities that address social injustices,” and, “Other people around me are supportive of efforts that promote social justice.”

**Communal Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Post-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like a part of my community/neighborhood.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>33.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love helping people.</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>8.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love to volunteer.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>24.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, 2019-2020 surveys showed continued tremendous growth in academic, study, and research skills and positive view of school by students in the program, as shown below. This is an exciting finding, given the intended outcome of increasing college enrollment and retention among Justice Scholars students.

**School Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Post-Survey Average Response</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like being at school.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>32.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School is a fun place to be.</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in what I do at school.</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>12.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happy in school.</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>28.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to watch TV shows about the things we do in school.</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>27.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about.</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do extra research to learn more about the things we do in school.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>9.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk with people outside of school about what I am learning in class.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>27.41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College Bound Workshop Series

The Justice Scholars College Bound Seminar Series is a sequence of workshops that occur throughout the year for all students enrolled in the College in High School courses.

These engagements, which typically occur at a University of Pittsburgh location, provide opportunities for students to develop skillsets that will prove useful in post-secondary experiences. The workshop topics were selected based on (a) evidence-based practices to support students’ success in the post-secondary transition and (b) usefulness for supporting students with completion of key milestones in our college preparation program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th>WORKSHOP</th>
<th>GRADE LEVEL</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Summer/</td>
<td>The College Ready Mindset</td>
<td>11th and 12th Grades</td>
<td>Students engage with topics such as study skills, note-taking, and psychosocial skills that facilitate academic success <em>(Partner: Pitt TRIO Student Support Services)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Fall</td>
<td>Your Story &amp; the College Essay</td>
<td>11th and 12th Grades</td>
<td>Students learn about how their own story is central to their college identity and the college transition <em>(Partner: Pitt English Department)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Fall</td>
<td>College Tour Invitation</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>Select students travel with teachers to tour a handful of colleges, including HBCUs, on the East Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Fall</td>
<td>Pitt Bradford Experience</td>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>Students experience the University of Pittsburgh Bradford campus and meet with college students of color on that campus <em>(Partner: Homewood Children’s Village)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>College Research</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>Students learn about how to design community-focused research projects and interrogate scholarly sources <em>(Partner: University Library Services and Pitt English Department)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Scholar Identity Experience</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>Students participate in a symposium where they present research and engage with Pitt students, staff, and faculty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Justice Scholars Institute: An Equity-Focused, College Preparatory Initiative
For this visit to campus, students are welcomed to campus with a continental breakfast spread and greetings from various Pitt faculty, staff, and students. The location for this morning workshop was the University of Pittsburgh Hillman Library. The library staff has been a core partner for our Westinghouse-Pitt partnership over the years, providing use of computers on campus, meetings space, and research support to facilitate students’ research experiences. Pitt School of Social Work Librarian Mr. Arif Jamal starts the workshop with an engaging presentation about primary and secondary resources and the use of Google Scholar. Mr. Jamal is a former urban middle school teacher who employs warmth and humor in his engagement with the students. He uses examples to provide insights about various types of evidence and the value of multiple perspectives and diverse sources. Mr. Jamal then provides an introduction to the campus library, as a useful space through which to support research explorations. After experiencing an interactive demonstration on the use of Google Scholar to locate scholarly sources, students are able to use provided laptops to begin to identify sources to inform their research on community-based topics of interest.

When the morning workshop ends, students excitedly bound across campus to Market Central for lunch, enjoying the Pitt dining experience alongside college student mentors who join them for lunch conversations. A consistent highlight of the visit to the Pitt Dining Hall is the love the high school students receive from the employees. Every time the Westinghouse students show up, the dining staff take notice and make the students feel welcomed. The Pitt food service personnel, many of whom are from the same communities as the students and some of whom also are proud Westinghouse alumni, always are excited to see the brown faces of the Westinghouse students in the dining hall mix. Brown faces that, to them, exude the promise of future college graduates hailing from the communities that they share in common.

After lunch, the students, teachers, and Justice Scholars Institute team all head to the clean, inviting space in the Center for Urban Education, better known as CUE. The afternoon workshop is facilitated by the dynamically engaging Dr. Khirsten Scott, an HBCU graduate and a faculty member in the English Department. Part of Khirsten’s discourse is about her experience attending an HBCU and the unique opportunities afforded in that specific learning community. This message echoes a consistent theme in our program: There are thousands of universities to choose from and Pitt is one of many solid options. Choose the school that works for you. Students plug in with Dr. Scott, as her presence has the almost poetic flow of a Black female scholar who, in some ways, reflects the students’ own lived experiences. Dr. Scott curates an exploration of the scholar identity by introducing students to the fact that they are already researchers. Using a dynamic approach of engagement, Dr. Scott invites the students into a cypher where they use a popcorn method to submit topics and offer a short rap or poem. After this experience, students connect their experience in the cypher with topics they might explore for the individual research papers. As we end, students complete a post-workshop survey where they indicate what they’ve learned and where they find space to ask questions about the college transition. Most of these students were high school seniors, just months away from graduating from school. They indicate being nervous about college and still having questions about what it will really be like. We see a trend across all of the post-visit surveys, though; the more time students spend in Justice Scholars, the more likely they are to agree with the statement: I feel like I belong on a college campus.

During all of our campus excursions with the high school students, the story thread that runs through the day is a simple one: You belong in college. In curating campus experiences for students, our aim is not to make anyone believe that the Pitt campus (or any other campus) will be a perfect place. Adjusting to a college or university campus can be hard for any young adult, but especially for students entering a new world that starkly contrasts the communities from whence they come. Yet, the message of “you belong” sends an affirming validation to students that they can find spaces to thrive in their post-secondary learning pursuits. With the right community of advocates in place, from librarians, to cafeteria workers, to Black faculty, to the friends you make along the way, a campus can become a transformative space that will shape and mold scholars, leaders, and advocates for change. Belonging is a core psychological need and one of the greatest predictors of a student’s success in college, and it is a key ingredient in the college preparatory experience that is provided for students as part of the Justice Scholars Institute.
Engaged Scholar Development — Cultivating Urban Scholars on Purpose

Justice Scholars students have a unique opportunity through this partnership to learn research skills and develop individualized research projects based on interest and grounded in their own community realities.

Within the context of the College in High School courses, students identify social problems in their communities or in the broader world. They then employ social science research skills to understand the context of the problem, analyze people’s perspectives of the problem, and consider possible solutions to the problem. This engaged research experience occurs during the students’ final semester in high school and serves as a rigorous rite of passage to the academic expectations of a university environment. Students go through the engaged scholar process with the support of faculty, staff, students from the university, and with the perspectives of invested community members. The result of this process is a 15-page research paper that provides a springboard of a sense of self-efficacy as students make the transition onto a university campus. The engaged scholar development component of the Justice Scholars program is a key feature of the partnership that addresses both community perspectives on social problems and creates a viable pathway for students to learn the writing skills that are necessary for success in a university setting.

Westinghouse Scholarship

Funding for college is another substantial support provided to the Justice Scholars students who complete the research paper. The Westinghouse Scholarship, administered by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, awards $4,000 to students who complete a 15-page research paper and $2,000 to students who complete a literature review. In 2018-2019, 13 students completed research papers, earning $52,000 in scholarship funds. Despite the COVID-19 induced disruption to the 2019-2020 research papers, ten students completed the research paper and/or literature review for a total of $30,000 in scholarship money.
The Justice Scholars Studio is an out-of-school (OST) space that offers an opportunity for additional engagement related to social justice, equity, and community development.

This youth-adult partnership experience uses a youth participatory action research (YPAR) methodology to invite youth to interrogate their experiences in school and in the community. Prioritizing a strengths approach, students are encouraged to think about making their world better and more equitable. BETTER is a resonant theme, as students use critical consciousness to interrogate societal injustices, both locally and globally. This interrogation becomes an invitation to think about the agency we have to be part of the changes in our world, whether through activism, service, or professional pursuits.

In addition to thinking about how to make the world better, students are involved in self-exploration through the writing of their own story. Participants are encouraged to examine their own development of identity through an exploration of “purpose.” Purpose is defined as a life commitment that is meaningful to self and of benefit to the world beyond-the-self. Through using story to think and write about purpose, students are enhancing self-identity and imagining how they can impact the world with their power and their ideas. In addition to providing space for critical thinking and exploration of self and the world, the OST program offers an occasion for young people to get homework support. Students interact with a variety of community and university-affiliated individuals who tutor, support students with college applications, and create additional opportunities for engaged learning.

An important element of the Justice Scholars Studio experience happens as the youth have opportunities to participate in social justice actions in communities. This looks like students identifying ways to address inequities that they identify in our society. In the past, this has included tutoring younger students, volunteering at community events, and engaging in various community-based, service-learning experiences. The future thriving of Black communities in Pittsburgh hinges on the contributions of home grown talent who will come back and contribute to the health and well-being of their own home spaces. By including opportunities for students to contribute in their own communities, we are able to cultivate the mindset of, “we are the one’s we’ve been waiting for.”
**Youth Participatory Action Research**

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a social justice-oriented research approach that allows youth to take initiative in positive community development.

This approach, where youth drive research initiatives, embodies the notion and reality that youth can be agents of social change in their schools, programs, and communities. YPAR promotes the development of youth by teaching research skills and providing space to implement planned change. To promote the development of these skills, YPAR plans to dynamically construct and implement systematic research that impacts their lives, communities, and the institutions which are integral to their continued growth.

The YPAR approach is especially significant in populations that have been historically marginalized and whose experiences, identities, and literacies are commonly overlooked in educational environments. The overarching benefits of YPAR include but are not limited to a continued commitment to expand and create initiatives all while taking action in communities. All of the aforementioned ideas promote YPAR’s goal to promote curiosity and hope and to demonstrate that young people have the requisite skills to improve both their community now and in their future lives.

Caraballo and colleagues (2017) outline the origins and support for YPAR and its role in education research. The authors start by seeking to understand the origin of how inequality has contributed to the need for YPAR. The article then highlights how this youth-centered methodology emphasizes skill development, apprenticeship, mentoring, and ways of healing that build intrapersonal strength and confidence. The article locates a common denominator of these factors in the desire of youth and adult co-researchers to transform the status quo.

Her study indicates that listening to young people’s stories, by giving them the opportunity to speak about their lives and collaborating with them in designing plans of action that address their concerns, can help frame research questions effectively and teaching pedagogies around their experiences and understandings of urban life. The article expresses that, “this type of school-community research contributes to reform movements aimed at preparing prospective teachers, universities, and urban communities to work together to develop ways of teaching and learning from a perspective that takes into account the experiences of urban youth.” Beyond findings related to the benefit of the YPAR approach for students and their communities, it is also possible to use YPAR to effectively engage teachers and other service professionals who might engage youth in urban communities.

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[YPAR] emphasizes skill development, apprenticeship, mentoring, and ways of healing that build intrapersonal strength and confidence.

An article by McIntyre (2006) claims that YPAR assists youth in constructing meaning through social justice, out-of-school time learning opportunities.
Justice Scholars Studio Feedback

Yearly feedback from Justice Scholars Lab students shows that students find the program to be both interesting and useful. In qualitative responses, students named some of the benefits of the program as gaining college credits, forming a community within the Lab, and gaining research skills. One student from the class of 2018 responded, “The most important benefit of this class was learning how to help make my community a safer place.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt my voice was important here.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very interested in social justice.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can make the world a better place.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people have the power to make the school better.</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not learn much during our program.</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I appreciated the opportunity to get homework done.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the college student mentors were helpful.</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the CEC is great for the community.</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have had a lot of exposure to the University of Pittsburgh.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STUDENT QUOTE:**
Favorite part: discussions. We're allowed to express ourselves and we're allowed to get work done which is good, being productive. Least favorite thing: I don't have one. I don't have one that's “least favorite” about my experience as a whole.

**PARTNER QUOTE:**
Because I think that what our students are lacking sometimes is a visual, an actual living, breathing example of someone who looks like them, somebody who has come from where they come from, who has been through what they've been through, and has been successful in this field and this field and this field. And so if we can help bring that alive, I think that it can help change the narratives in their minds of saying, “I really can’t do this.” And I do think that our students, lots of times they do believe in that.

**STUDENT QUOTE:**
I would recommend a lot of people to take this class because, like I mentioned, its opinion based. It's like we're having a discussion about things that are going on, whether we think it's right or it's wrong ... You get to really get in depth with certain subjects and topics that's going on in the world.
One of the core pillars of the Justice Scholars Program is the established engagement effort with Westinghouse Academy, University of Pittsburgh students, staff, and faculty members, and the Homewood community.

As a university-based program, we have an obligation to use our strength of resources to positively impact surrounding communities. More than half of all U.S. postsecondary institutions are located within the country’s urban cores (Axelroth, Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Harkavy & Zuckerman, 1999). As an anchor institution in the region, the University of Pittsburgh has chosen to focus on building community strength as one of its strategic priorities (Dostillio, 2017). With the recent investment in establishing the Homewood Community Engagement Center (CEC), the University has an active hyperlocal hub in Homewood. The center is uniquely well-positioned to facilitate strategic, comprehensive, and sustained support for community schools (e.g., academic and instructional resources, health and human services, college access programs, and evaluation) that effectively engage students, parents/guardians, school leaders — indeed all individuals living and working in the neighborhood (Benson et al., 2007). Although the Justice Scholars Institute predates the existence of the CEC, the space has become a key facilitator of our efforts. Space has been utilized for everything from using the computer lab to write research papers to hosting family engagement events to celebrate students.

The inclusion of a university partner in college preparation programming for public school students is an effective approach to addressing inequities in college access. Exposure to the college campus helps facilitate a sense of familiarity with a campus environment, which can then foster a sense of belonging that can help ease transition to a four-year university. Our program workshops and field trips intentionally equip the students for the expectations of a college environment. Students engage in a number of different departments and centers on campus. The cross-content exposure is built into the pipeline, and its reciprocal nature not only assists schools and the children and communities they serve, but it also promotes powerful advances in learning and knowledge for students in the university (Glasgow & Lovett, 2016). Universities, as institutions, are imperfect and have a history of misuse of power. However, with the right partners at the table, there is real potential for effective collaboration in support of our schools and communities. Fortunately, the University of Pittsburgh has many faculty and staff who bring such assets to bear.
Beyond the utility of university resources, the opportunity to collaborate is a key 21st century skillset that is built through intentional engagement. At all levels of learning (K-12 and post-secondary), collaborative, community-based, action-oriented service-learning projects allow and encourage both teachers and students to participate democratically in school and classroom governance and functioning (Harkavy, 2013). Such projects, by their nature, innovatively depart from customary, teacher-dominated school routines, allowing space for engaged learning experiences. A key outcome of Justice Scholars is to equip students with tools to become change agents in their school, community, and the broader world through relevant, engaged research projects. Engaging with the community happens intentionally in and outside of the classroom. Within the classroom, students explore interests in their research writing process and have an opportunity to share their work with the community.

In Justice Scholars Studio sessions, students discuss justice topics and the implications on their school and the local community. Students also have regular opportunities to engage in service-oriented action that connect to the justice topics discussed. These service-learning engagements have included partnering with non-profit organizations to tutor elementary-aged students and meeting with Westinghouse Alumni to build their civic capacities. Studies have shown that students involved in civic learning opportunities have greater persistence through and completion of their baccalaureate degrees, graduate with skills necessary for future employment, and develop habits of social responsibility and civic participation (Musil & Hampshire, 2012; Dostillio, 2017).

**How We Engage Across Spaces**

**Deep Partnership at the School Level**

A primary reason for this success is the dedicated commitment of our partner teachers. Education research is clear about the role of teacher support in aiding student academic success (Milner, 2007). Studies have shown that urban teachers, even in challenging environments, can succeed when equipped with a social justice lens and relevant tools for developing engaged, critically conscious learners (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Our partner teachers commit invaluable efforts that help facilitate the success of the program. They are responsible for adapting and preparing rigorous college-level material to students, while also providing support to meet students where they are academically. This includes extensive preparation and consultation with the University of Pittsburgh College in High School Faculty Liaison of each individual course. The purpose of this intentional collaboration is to ensure that students receive the necessary rigor to justify the college credits, but also have the course be accessible for students. In addition to the teachers, school counselor support has been an invaluable component of program growth, as they advocate for the college courses and provide college access information. Although principal leadership has seen turnover, we’ve been fortunate that each school leader has provided necessary supports to see the program thrive. The consistency of teacher and counselor collaboration has anchored the program.
A Host of University of Pittsburgh Support

Our program started in 2016 with a generous gift from the School of Social Work and with support from its Pitt-Assisted Communities (PACS) and Schools program, and we are building upon years of engagement by Dr. John Wallace through his role as a professor engaged in the Homewood community. PACS, financially supported by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, has been an essential support for the Justice Scholars Institute, assisting in the out-of-school time program and providing advising and physical space resources. A host of faculty, staff, and students contribute to the success of the Justice Scholars Institute. We have received support from the Chancellor’s Office that led to the creation of a Pitt advisory team. Justice Scholars Institute advisors attend events to engage with the high school students, support programs, and advocate for the work in the university and broader community. Additional key faculty collaborate to develop programs and engagement opportunities for students. Staff and faculty also help facilitate engagement between college students and Justice Scholars. College students provide support as mentors, tutors, and helping hands during program events. Various units on campus support our college visits. These collaborations have included the University Library Services, the Center for Urban Education, the Center on Race and Social Problems, and the Pittsburgh Admissions Collaboration program in the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid.

Working in and with Community

The Westinghouse Alumni group has been a noteworthy community-based support for the Justice Scholars Institute. Each year, a group of alumni visit students to talk with them about the history of their school and their community. This event highlights the strength of the Black community in Pittsburgh and the ways in which we can continue to improve our schools. The Maker’s Clubhouse is another community collaboration, providing opportunities for high school students to tutor elementary students and build opportunities for youth to give back. Additionally, JSI has partnered with the Homewood Children’s Village for a college visit to the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford campus every year, since 2016. Students in our out-of-school program participate in service-learning opportunities throughout the community and in Pittsburgh more broadly. Lastly, community collaborators are involved in YPAR and individual student research projects throughout the year.

Key Approach

A Framework for Effective Engagement

1. **Consistent Communication**
   Partners agree to regularly scheduled times to touch base about the work. Operating with transparency, partners communicate information that would be helpful to each other’s efforts.

2. **Reciprocal Respect**
   Partners have a mutual respect that regards each party as equally valued and critical to effective work.

3. **Intentional Inclusion**
   Partners include one another in opportunities that can facilitate progress toward shared aims and inform one another when intending to engage in each other’s primary domain.

4. **Staying Steady**
   Partners agree to stay steady through changes and to overcome the challenges that will undoubtedly arise in any collaboration.

5. **Persistent Productivity**
   Partners agree to follow through on commitments and persistently pursue productivity in order that the partnership can achieve specified objectives.
Future Directions for the Justice Scholars Institute

1. Expand our partnership model to support additional schools in Pittsburgh.

2. Develop an equity-focused teacher collective to foster program sustainability and to enhance opportunities to effectively support post-secondary pathways for Black youth in Pittsburgh.

3. Develop a pipeline that extends to middle school and scaffolds academic support to ensure preparation for more students to take advantage of the program, through having the academic track record required for college courses in high school.

4. Develop a model for college preparatory parent/guardian engagement strategies that leverage cultural wealth in families in order to facilitate successful navigation of the pathway to college.

5. Create program components that build the infrastructure to effectively support program alumni in their post-secondary pursuits.
Justice Scholars Institute
Spotlights

Colleges attended
List of schools attended by program participants from Westinghouse Class of 2017 to Class of 2020

- LaSalle University
- West Chester University
- Penn State University (Happy Valley)
- Penn State University (Abington)
- La Roche University
- Duquesne University
- Hampton University
- Morehouse College
- Penn State University (New Kensington)
- Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC)
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Robert Morris University
- Allegheny College
- Point Park University
- University of Pittsburgh (Bradford)
- Slippery Rock University
- Clarion University
- Benedict College
Alex Bryant / Justice Scholars Institute Alumni

Westinghouse Class of ’17
West Chester University ’21 Major: Business and Accounting

“This program helped me prepare for college. It was good for me to do the research project that explored the experiences of Black men in this country. I would tell students in my community to give this class your all, no matter what. Most people won’t be given the opportunity to get ahead of college [while in high school]. This is really the start to bettering yourself and your future.”

Jasmine Dorsey / Justice Scholars Institute Alumna

Westinghouse Class of ’17
Pitt Bradford ’21 Major: Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing

“The Social Justice class taught me how to interact with people and why certain disparities exists in certain neighborhoods. My advice would be, if someone offers you an opportunity to take a free college course, go ahead and take it. I guarantee it's not going to be like, “oh, I didn't really like this class but I learned a lot,” it's going to be like, “hey I took this class and I learned a lot of stuff... how about I go to college and learn a bit more”. Or you can take those credits and transfer somewhere else. That's what I did towards my nursing degree.”

Mae Knight / Justice Scholars Institute Alumna

Westinghouse Class of ’17
La Salle University ’21, Double Major: Early Elementary & Special Education, Minor: Digital Art & Multimedia Design

“Little did I know that all the learning I did about social work would actually be the same to what I learned in my introduction to education classes at La Salle. That was really helpful because I had some familiarity with the content because I had already done it. The [CHS] course helped me because that was the only place we had to sit down and actually read a college textbook. The course will give you tangible skills that you can use across your life, even if you don't think you want to do research. At some point you're going to want to read and think critically.”
Shaun Murray / Justice Scholars Institute Alumni

Westinghouse Class of ‘19
Duquesne University ‘23 Major: Undecided

“In the [Argument] course we got to share our thoughts and our opinions on each topic. It was really good because we had the chance to express ourselves, say how we felt and listen to our peers and really get to understand where people were coming from around some of these tense topics that were happening in the world at the time. Compared to the other classes I was taking at Westinghouse, debating different topics was surprisingly fun. The best part was when we had to brainstorm our own topic, do the research on different challenges in the world and show up to class ready to compete. Something that Justice Scholars taught us that you’re really going to need going into undergrad is time management. Be fearless in the pursuit of what sets your soul on fire.”

Jeremiah Nash / Justice Scholars Institute Alumni

Westinghouse Class of ‘18
Morehouse College ‘22 Major: Sociology, Pre-Law

“I took the Intro to Social Justice my junior year. I didn’t really find my footing [in high school] until around that time, and that was one of the classes that helped me find my footing because was my first college class. We were in a different environment than my other high school classes because it was actually a class from Pitt. The work was different. The research was different. The projects were different. It really prepared me for college. I gained research skills and basic skills, like MLA format, that I still use today.”

Isis Philibert / Justice Scholars Institute Alumna

Westinghouse Class of ‘19
Duquesne University ‘23 Major: Biology

“Prior to enrolling in this CHS program, I had never been on a real college campus. Because how connected PPS is to the University, it was a good experience being able to talk to different students and see all aspects of the campus during our field trips. It was a lot of good exposure. Being involved in the CHS program definitely solidified my decision to go to college. I've always knew I wanted to go to college and what I wanted to be I just never had the push to do it. I never had that level of support. I want to encourage all students to take advantage of all the opportunities and take them seriously, because the work will replicate (I guarantee it) and you'll be more comfortable the second time around.”
Angela Flango / Westinghouse CHS Teacher (Argument)

Penn State University, BA Double Major English and International Studies
University of Pittsburgh, MEd Secondary English Education

While what we do in the classroom is fun, engaging, and rigorous, beyond the classroom is where the program has really shined. We've been able to provide additional supports that go way beyond the 43 mins [in the classroom] to help students prepare for college. And, most importantly feel like they are ready for college. When they get to that point when they've accomplished their goal, when they've really start to believe in themselves and see themselves as college students, see themselves as successful learners that is what keeps me going. I always tell them; I'll believe in you until you start believing in yourself. I would love to see a CHS class in every content in the school."

Charles Morris / Westinghouse Counselor

Edinboro University, BA Health and Physical Education
Duquesne University, MA School Counseling

Our kids seemed to be more prepared and excited to go to college. [With the help of this program], some of our students are even a semester ahead of some of their freshman counterparts. We've created a program that has had a lot of success and now that has become the expectation and the standard [at our school]. We are creating confidence within our students and we are changing the culture and mindset. There are great things happening."

Sean Means / Westinghouse CHS Teacher (Social Justice & US History)

Morehouse College, BA English & Minor Sports Journalism
Duquesne University, Masters in Social Studies Education

We have a strong team of people that are trying to build something that hasn't been built in a school like ours before. One of the things I hope to see as the program grows is greater financial literacy and self-advocacy for themselves and their success. We invest a lot of time outside of the classroom but the amount of energy/support really pays off when you see how much the kids grow. We are building that community that I hope spreads to the entire school. I feel good when I see them walk across the stage and know they have a solid plan in place. The kids expect more from us, from our program but they understand they are in a special place when they are enrolled in the CHS program. When students like Mae Knight went to the district and advocated on the behalf of our school to get these classes, that inspired me. CHS been reinvigorating. For years we had struggled to create an in-house college prep pathway that was both organized and intentional in its design. I look forward to seeing it grow to include foreign language and STEM courses. We just want our students to have every opportunity possible to succeed."
The Justice Scholars Institute: An Equity-Focused, College Preparatory Initiative

Lou Maraj, PhD / Assistant Professor of English at The University of Pittsburgh

Ramapo College of New Jersey, BA in Communications Literature and Social Science
Texas Tech University, MA Creative Writing
Ohio State University, PhD English

The most profound thing about why I wanted to be and continue to be involved with Justice Scholars is really seeing students who are in the same position that I was in growing up and knowing that they have more of a support system than I did. The scholars have that support system as a place where they can tell their own stories and create their own narratives. They can use those narratives as a way to springboard to greater things and change the kind of narratives that are mapped on to them in different ways. Telling their own stories can help them to see that there are multiple paths they can be on, places that they can go, and things they can engage that will change how they shape themselves and how they see themselves. The personal statement workshops [we facilitated] are incredibly important as a means of empowering youth of color, especially Black youth. I think it is incredibly important that they see [their personal statement] as a space to do that.

Khirsten Scott, PhD / Assistant Professor of English at The University of Pittsburgh

Tougaloo College, BA in Language and Literature
University of Alabama, MA Composition, Rhetoric, and English Studies
University of Louisville, PhD Rhetoric and Composition

When I was a high school student, I participated in out of school programs like Justice Scholars and know how impactful they are for students who complete them. As a member of the Pittsburgh community and someone who immediately found energies of “home” in Homewood, it has been an absolute joy working with the Justice Scholars. When we learn about research and writing through digital skills, hip-hop ciphers, and playing games, it’s rewarding to see the scholars using communication skills that they use everyday in meaningful ways. I’m grateful for the opportunity to be connected with such a vibrant learning community.

Arif Jamal / Liaison Librarian of Africana Studies & Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh Library System

Cleveland State University, BA in History
Cleveland State University, MA in History
University of Pittsburgh, Master of Library and Information Science

Being involved with the Justice Scholars has been one of the most rewarding experiences during my time here at the University of Pittsburgh. The students’ library visits are always a highlight for me. Engaging Justice Scholars in how to access, identify, and incorporate information to formulate new questions or answer old ones is crucial in today’s information based global community. The library skills introduced through the program allow students to demarcate between real and fake, scholarly, and popular, and primary or secondary sources. Introduction to open access resources that can be shared by the wider community is another benefit that students receive upon participation. The ability to navigate information is critical to success in both education and informed citizenry. The students are always eager to learn and can use the time here as a foundation for looking at information in any setting. Whenever I encounter former students, they always reflect on the positive impact the program had on them.

The Justice Scholars Institute: An Equity-Focused, College Preparatory Initiative
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Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough.
— Mary McLeod Bethune

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Disparities in Pittsburgh in post-secondary educational attainment in this paragraph provided by analysis of National Student Clearinghouse data


Source: [ecrs.org/clearinghouse/01/10/91/11091.pdf](http://ecrs.org/clearinghouse/01/10/91/11091.pdf)


*Inequities in Advanced Coursework* report can be found here: [https://edtrust.org/resource/inequities-in-advanced-coursework/](https://edtrust.org/resource/inequities-in-advanced-coursework/)


Passing a course is indicated by earning a D grade or better, just like in college. However, a C or better is needed for the credit to transfer to most universities.

https://ir.pitt.edu/historicalRates-Fees/20192020_pgh_undergrad.pdf


Quote attributed to poet, June Jordan

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