



Pinellas County Schools College Cohort

Contact: Dr. Lewis Brinson
Minority Achievement Officer
brinsonle@pcsb.org or 727-588-6436

Overview

Pinellas County Schools has partnered with The Foundation for Ensuring Access and Equity, a Marietta, Georgia community-based organization, since 2018. In 2020, our partnership with Guilford County Schools was the recipient of the [MAGNA Award](#) by the National School Boards Association for our expanding college access for first generation, lower income, and refugee students. Our foundation has used our partnerships with colleges and universities; published materials; essay writing guidance; and expansive knowledge of college admissions and financial aid policies to unlock amazing opportunities Pinellas County Schools students.

As a result of the personalized guidance, essay writing assistance, and interview preparation provided by the program, participating PCS students have received thousands of dollars in scholarships each year and over \$5 million in scholarships since the inception of the program. Students and parents participating in the program have been profiled in such video segments as, "[2019 PCS High School Boot Camp](#)," "[2019 PCS Middle School Boot Camp](#)," "[Jocelyne and Briana Explain the Process](#)," "[Sydney Soskin - Why I Owned the Process](#)."

The Cohort is open to any PCS student, but students who most benefit from their involvement are students who are vested in their own futures and who genuinely desire to maximize their college and scholarship opportunities. Such students are profiled in Mr. Wynn's recent book, "[Their Stories: Volume I - Inspiring Essays of Students from Challenging Backgrounds](#)." Copies are available in the Career Centers, from the counseling office, or through Dr. Brinson in the District Office. You are encouraged to check out a copy of the book to read what students have said about their participation in the program and how they identified full scholarship pathways allowing their families to avoid borrowing thousands of dollars in student loans.

The PCS students profiled in this document joined the program in middle school and are currently attending high school. The college and scholarship opportunities reflect notifications received by students as of May 15, 2024.



Boca Ciega High School

Josiah, Boca Ciega High School

"I honestly do not know where I would be without the cohort. I could not have found out about the amazing opportunities that I have been exposed to anywhere else and I would not have received the 1-on-1 personalized guidance in preparing my applications, writing essays, and negotiating the financial aid and scholarship awards. Not to mention that I am only a competitive applicant for these programs because the cohort has guided me in building my résumé, selecting my high school classes, identifying my gifts, and submitting high quality applications to all of these programs. To date, I have been accepted to the Northeastern University Accelerate Pre-College Program, 'Experiential Entrepreneurship.' Where I have also received a full scholarship; the Brown Pre-College Program, and another full scholarship; and I have been selected as a QuestBridge College Prep Scholar. I am still awaiting decisions from fly-in programs at Carleton, Swarthmore, Bowdoin"



St. Petersburg High School IB

Jocelyne, St. Petersburg High School IB Program

"I have been a part of the cohort program since attending the college planning boot camp as a rising 6th grader. Mr. and Mrs. Wynn have been a part of my journey ever since and they have provided me with many unique leadership opportunities, which have definitely distinguished me in the pool of college applicants. I have served as the president of the youth leadership board since the 9th grade; I have served as a discussion group leader; I have served as a high school adviser for the Emerging Middle School Leaders Program; I have contributed to both the online curriculum and several books; I have served on a panelists on several college planning panels; as a high school sophomore, I co-founder the college cohort club at my high school and we have presented workshops for over 300 students. I am currently serving as the Project Leader on an ACT Prep and Study Skills Project designed to not only assist students with increasing their ACT scores, but helping students to implement learning strategies and study skills that will help them to become better students to increase their grades and allow them access to higher level AP, IB, and dual enrollment classes. I am also collaborating with another student from my high school to create college planning workshops and a college fair for low income, undocumented, and first generation students in the greater St. Petersburg area as our IB CAS Project. It is not a cliché when I say that the college cohort club has been life changing!"



Palm Harbor University High School

Arshia, Palm Harbor University and St. Petersburg College Early College Program

"I attended a college planning boot camp for rising 9th graders and have been participating in the cohort ever since. By applying what I have learned about pursuing leadership, I have developed a strong résumé so that when I apply to colleges I have more than just grades and test scores. I am contributing to the math content area of the ACT Prep and Study Skills Project. As a result of Mr. and Mrs. Wynn's guidance, I applied to the very competitive MIT MITES Program and was selected! I have received a full scholarship to participate in the semester-long program. This is an amazing opportunity and one that I would not have learned about or been supported in applying anywhere else."



St. Petersburg High School IB

Anna, St. Petersburg High School IB Program

"I joined the cohort as an 8th grader attended Thurgood Marshall Fundamental Middle School. Based on what I have learned in the cohort program, I have been intentional in pursuing leadership and engaging in meaningful community service throughout high school. I serve as an officer in several clubs and organizations in my high school; I have served on the cohort youth leadership board; I am a co-founded of the college cohort club at my high school; and I have contributed to the online curriculum and several books used in the cohort program. While I have not achieved every goal that I have set, participating in the cohort helped me to set clear goals during each semester throughout high school and I believe that I am a competitive college applicant. I have been admitted to several programs at the University of Florida."

Each of the students profiled were first introduced to the PCS College Planning Cohort Program as middle school students. Students have had uninterrupted involvement in our program pre- and post-COVID through their participation in in-person meetings pre-COVID, and online meetings during COVID through May, 2024. Through their participation, each student has engaged in intentional efforts to build their résumés throughout high school. The college planning process taught in our program is that by engaging in setting goals within each of the 3 pillars of scholarship, leadership, and service, students make themselves competitive college and scholarship applicants through their efforts in becoming good academic students, pursuing leadership roles, and engaging in meaningful community service within their schools and communities.

As each of these students have engaged in this process, they have contributed to our print and online curriculum, serving as examples and role models for other students. Anna, a current junior in the St. Petersburg High School IB Program, set a goal of applying to the IB Program during middle school, and through her involvement in our program, has engaged in setting goals at the beginning of each school year; engaged in a mid-year assessment; and revisited her goals at the end of each school year.

My academic goals are:

- **AP English Composition:** *Keep doing what I am doing and try to manage reading assigned books better.*
- **Philosophy:** *Always be thoughtful and open-minded when answering journal prompts.*
- **Pre-calculus Honors:** *Study at least 2 days before a test and read the chapter before the lesson for further understanding.*
- **AP World History:** *Continue to take notes on the units missed while not having a teacher in the class.*
- **Chemistry:** *Ask more questions in class when confused and study ahead of time.*
- **Spanish:** *Attend tutoring more often and study 25 minutes a day.*
- **AP 3-D Art and Design:** *Create my inquiry statement and start working on my portfolio in the second semester.*

The academic honors I am pursuing are honor roll and honor societies, such as the Science National Honor Society and National Honor Society. My school does have a class rank, but my goal is to continue to be in the top ten percent, which I am currently.

For the PSAT, I hope to be in the 80th percentile so that later on there will be a good trajectory for the SAT and ACT. For my AP classes, I hope to get higher than a 3 on all of my AP exams. My plan for achieving these goals will be to make sure I am aware of the testing dates in order to sufficiently prepare and regularly touch bases with my teachers to make sure I am on track.

Activities I plan on becoming involved in include:

- *Student Government Association, because it is something I am interested in as it helps with improving student life on campus.*
- *Key Club since it is a club that has a variety of things to offer and will also help with service hours.*
- *Asian Student Association, because it is a way to inform others and the community on Asian culture.*
- *I plan on continuing with track and cross country to further develop my bodily/kinesthetic intelligence.*

– Anna, [Attended Thurgood Marshall Fundamental School]

As Anna, Jocelyne, Josiah, and Arshia were inspired by students profiled in our curriculum, they are now reflected in our curriculum and they are inspiring current middle school students to engage in a similar level of intentionality as they set goals at the beginning of each school year. During a presentation at the James B. Sanderlin Neighborhood Center, Josiah and Jocelyne were part of a student panel who shared their experiences and provided invaluable insight for students and parents as to the importance of setting goals, pursuing rigorous course taking, assuming leadership roles, and engaging in meaningful community service. Each of the panelists have already achieving amazing outcomes with their selection as a:

- Brown University Pre-College Program
- Caltech Fly-in Program
- Dartmouth Fly-in Program
- Jack Kent Cooke Scholar
- Northeastern University Accelerate Program
- QuestBridge College Prep Scholar
- QuestBridge College Match Scholar
- UPenn Fly-in Program



Serving as role models and mentors, our high school students have inspired our middle school students in setting goals to make themselves competitive college and scholarship applicants.

Academic Goals:

- **Chorus:** *I would like to get better at singing higher pitches*
- **Science:** *I would like to get better at using my knowledge of science and use it in the world around me*
- **Art:** *I would like to try and express myself more through my art*
- **History:** *I would like to learn more deeply about history and apply what I learn in the real world*
- **Math:** *I would like to apply my knowledge from elementary school and use it to develop a deeper understand of math*
- **PE:** *I would like to get better at running longer distances in shorter amounts of time*
- **ELA:** *I would like to get better at elaborating and communicating my thoughts through my writing*

I would like to continue earning all A's and qualifying for the Principal's List. Extracurricular activities that I would like to be involved in during this school year are STEM-related activities, play basketball, and maybe join the Art Club, because all of these activities apply to my gifts, talents, personality, and interests.

– Chizara, 6th Grade [Carwise Middle School]

- **Science:** From now on, my goal in this class is to ace every vocab quiz
- **Algebra 1 Honors:** I will study before each lesson check
- **US History:** I will never need to use my homework pass
- **Royal Cadet Band:** I will make the All-County Band
- **English 1:** I will not wait until the last minute to get my AR points

I am currently in the National Junior Honor Society and on the Principal's List. The testing requirements for an 8th grader in Florida are two 85-minute tests, one with language and reading, and one with math and science. My test scores will determine whether I go to the advanced version of that class or stay in the regular class. For example, this year, if students want to advance to AP Biology in the 9th grade, they will need an overall grade of 85% or higher on the math and science test. I will start preparing to take the ACT and PSAT. I will also earn all A's this school year so that I can be ready for my first year of high school.

My extracurricular activity goals include:

- Continuing in the Royal Ambassador Marching Band where I play the clarinet. Our marching band has been to the State Championships for 9 years.
- Continuing on the middle school soccer team.
- Joining the varsity tennis team. I enjoy playing tennis and have been a part of my current team since the 6th grade.
- Performing in the All-County Band, where I auditioned in early November and was selected for the First Chair Clarinet.

– Layla, 8th Grade [Northside Christian School]

Summary

By helping students set goals across our 3 pillars of scholarship, leadership, and service, students navigate the 7-year middle school through high school experience with a level of intentionality. However, this intentionality is not prescriptive, but based on each student's personality, temperament, mindset, and grit. Students are not trying to be the perfect college or scholarship applicant, but are inspired to become the best version of themselves in an environment of other students with similar aspirations. As Josiah is a gifted orator, Arshia is a gifted math student. As Jocelyne is a gifted leader, Layla is a gifted musician. Becoming the best version of themselves without being adversely influenced by social media and negative peer pressure to conform to someone else's standards is important for the mental health and well being of young people. Through our program, we work to inspire young people to discover the postsecondary pathway that is best for them and to conceptualize a plan that will get them there.

