



University of Denver
Center for Community
Engagement &
Service Learning

PUBLIC ACHIEVEMENT STORIES AT DU

North High School 2008-2009

At North High School Public Achievement took on a personal plea. North has never been the gem of Denver Public Schools, and students and coaches know this. Because the coaches were graduates of North High School themselves, this became personal to them early on. They know the cards are stacked against the kids at North High. They know parents aren't involved like they are in other schools, students aren't given the same opportunities as they are in other schools and the media does not portray North in a positive light.

With the help of Public Achievement coaches, who as graduates are more invested than your average team, Public Achievement partnered with the Ethics Club to combat parent and community involvement. Their action as a Public Achievement team was to host a Saturday workshop series, called "Tools to Succeed." The goal of this event was to bring North families and community stakeholders together to provide workshops to families and students on how to get to college and how to take advantage of opportunities within the North community. It was a tremendous success. Parents were able to see the resources there are available to them not only from North High, but also from the community. Community members were able to better understand the needs of the parents and students and see that despite the stereotypes, parents and students at North really do care. It's not an easy task, but in a school that struggles to find hope, Public Achievement provides a beacon of hope for the school and the community.

One of the coaches at North High this past year has an impressive story of his own. As a senior at North High School, Aran Palma participated in Public Achievement through his Student Council. At the end of a very successful year, he decided he would attend Colorado School of Mines and pursue a degree in engineering. During his first year of college, Aran maintained his involvement in the Public Achievement program at North and eventually decided that the University of Denver would be a much better fit for him. He contacted the people he had met through Public Achievement to find out what his options would be to get to DU and found out that it would not be difficult for him to transfer. Now Aran is at the University of Denver on a full tuition scholarship and continues to study engineering.



For two years Aran has been a Public Achievement coach at North High, working with other students to give them the same chances at college and academic success that he was shown as a student at North. Aran Palma is just one example of the many students that have used Public Achievement programs to launch themselves into college or onto college-bound pathways.

South High School 2008-2009

At one of our most unique PA sites, South High School, we have been working with the Future Center—a center focused on college access for the high school students. Several DU coaches have been volunteering there for 2 years and this year they took what they learned in other PA schools last year to create a hybrid. Using the PA model, the coaches built relationships with students who were coming into the Future Center and cared deeply about college access. They formed a group and started talking about challenges and obstacles they faced in the college application process.

Students began to wish they had more support when they freshmen and sophomores and wish they knew more about what they could have been doing *then* to prepare for college. With the help of the coaches and additional stakeholders in the school, the students developed and implemented their own peer mentoring structure to bridge the gap between upperclassmen and underclassmen. They recruited additional students to get involved, trained them in mentoring, and matched them up with younger students to mentor. The mentors formed strong relationships with the mentees and the mentors were able to have frank discussions with students about college potential and what to do to start getting ready for the application process.

Many of these students at South High School are immigrant refugees and never thought of college as even remotely possible before they set foot in the Future Center. PA has helped to turn that notion upside down. The peer mentoring program that this PA Team created will now be part of the Future Center and the school for years to come.

Bruce Randolph School 2007-2008



One of the highlights of this project was the process of getting the grant to fund our “End Discrimination” t-shirts. After applying for the grant, we wanted to be sure that we would receive enough money to buy the t-shirts so that our message would be as powerful as possible. I worked one-on-one with two Bruce Randolph students to coach them on how to talk to the people in charge of the grant. Then, they each individually called up the grant office and spoke to the person in charge about why we needed the money. I felt incredibly proud of how they were able to do something like this at their age, especially considering that they were not very confident with their English. This

step is probably what got us the \$1,000 for shirts, which we ordered through Youth Scribble Ink, in order to support another youth organization.

“The culmination of our project was a very rewarding experience. On the Wednesday after Public Achievement was over our entire group gathered in the cafeteria to hand out the new t-shirts and have each student sign the student-written pledge to end discrimination. This was a very neat aspect of the project because even once the t-shirts were gone kids were still coming up to sign the pledge and read the small handout that described the purpose of the shirts. Even though the point was for everyone to wear the shirts the next day, some kids put them on immediately. Many students came up and ask our group what was going on and to see my students explain to their peers what they felt, and what their goal was, either in English or their native language, made it all worth it. This was amazing because I could see how far the students had come from the beginning when they would not say a word when we asked them questions, to now where they were taking the initiative to talk about something they were proud of.” -Hannah Goedert and Eugene Rotenberg, Public Achievement Coaches