

The Peak to Peak Alumni Magazine

Piqued

/ˈpēkt/ (verb) to excite interest or curiosity, to arouse an emotion or provoke to action



PURSUING EQUITY

Volume 4: Issue 1
November 2020

Peak to Peak understands that valuing scholarship, challenge, and community means we must, at our core, value inclusion, equity, and diversity, in authentic and ongoing ways. In support of the school's vision, mission and strategic plan, Peak to Peak must strive to be an anti-oppressive school where all students learn to see, respond to and redress inequity.

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Alumni On Staff

Message from Ms. Reeser

Executive Director of Education



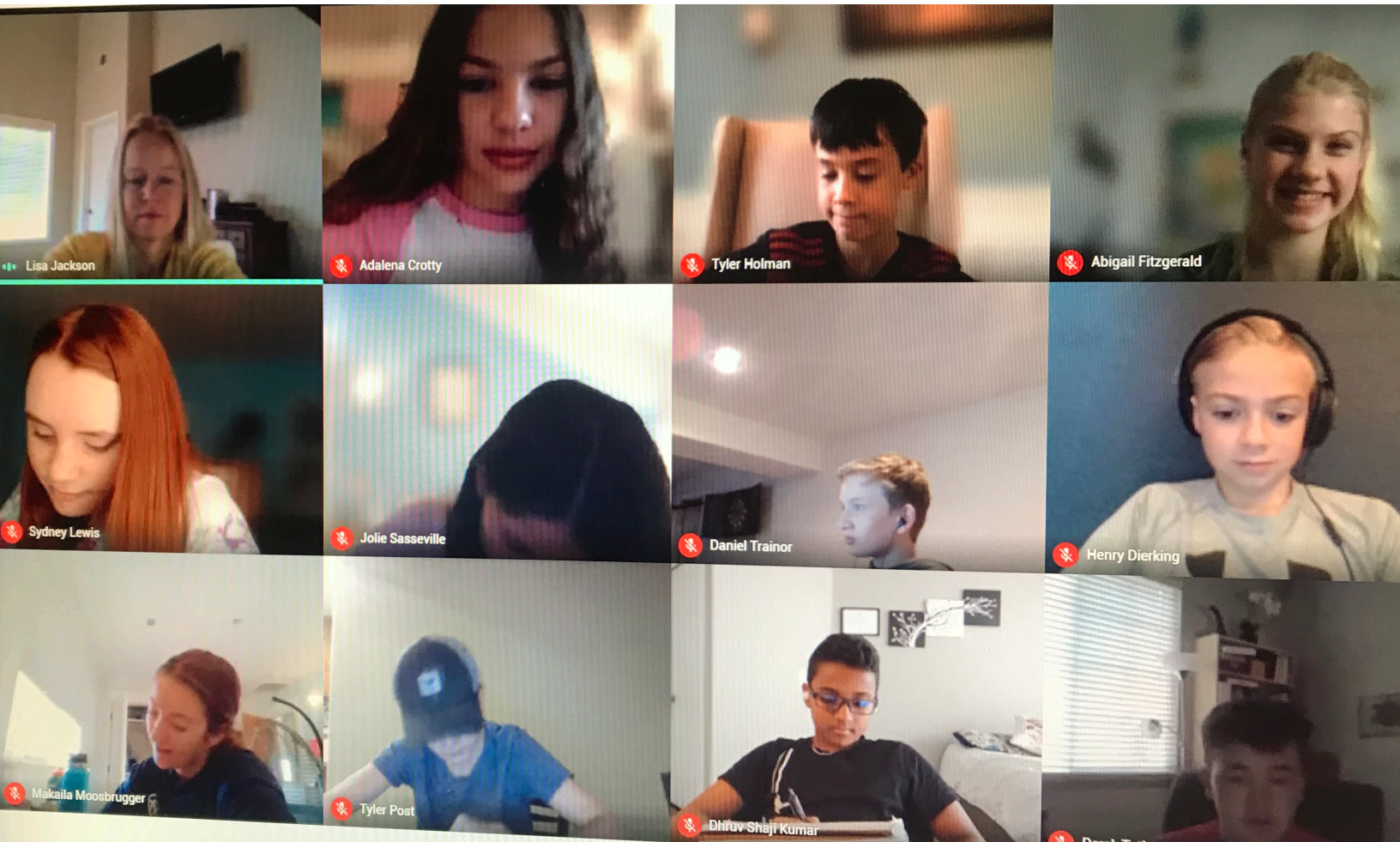
Dear Peak to Peak alumni,

As valued alumni of Peak to Peak, you know that we value academic excellence and strive to help each student achieve their scholarly potential. Hopefully it will not surprise you to hear that we are also committed to creating a responsive school culture and community where students feel known, valued, and safe. **Peak to Peak understands that valuing scholarship, challenge, and community means we must, at our core, also value inclusion, equity, and diversity, in authentic and ongoing ways.**

In keeping with these values, I'm pleased to let you know about the multi-faceted work we are doing in the area of equity at Peak to Peak. We are doing this work because, despite our best intentions, we realize that we have systemic blind spots that have caused some members of our school community to be marginalized, inadvertently excluded, and sometimes even feeling unsafe in our environment. In auditing our programs and curriculum through an equity lens, we have recognized that they lack the level of diverse representation that reflects the ideals expressed in our mission statement. We heard from you, our alumni, about what you wished you had learned

while you were a student at Peak to Peak ([see this video, produced by 2012 graduate Katie McMenamini](#)). We are listening. Equity is an important issue locally and nationally, and we know that we have a responsibility to be part of the conversation and the solutions.

To address this, we have brought in expert consultants to help us learn and grow. We are currently in the second year of a three-year focus on equity-focused professional development. Our school goal in year one was to provide training in [equity literacy](#) so that Peak to Peak staff would be able to identify systems that create injustice and oppression, know how to respond to them, and take concrete steps to create and sustain a bias-free environment. Last year's work included sessions with the Board, leadership team, K-12 staff, school levels, small groups (grade level teams, departments), individuals, and a working group comprised of 28 staff members who self-selected into the work of reading, researching, identifying topics for discussion and who led professional development sessions for the rest of the staff. Please see this [Peak to Peak staff video](#) for a snapshot of the initial impact of the equity work in year one.





Our staff have been excited and inspired by this work. This year, the working group is much larger than last year with 60 members. These staff members are working together in the large group, and have also divided themselves into subgroups to focus on specific areas, including level-specific topics, representation in STEM courses, and more. As a K-12 school, our goal this year is for every educator to have access to the tools, people, and skills they need to continuously analyze their units, distance learning instruction, and/or policies for bias and oppression. We want all educators, through professional community and education, to know what to continue doing, what to stop doing, and what to start doing to create an anti-oppressive school. In addition, all staff are required to set one equity-related goal for themselves this year. Please [see this video](#) of staff members in the working group providing their colleagues with examples of their goals.

We know that we have a long way to go, but we are making progress. We also know that if we strip away barriers and eliminate injustice in our systems, only then—through equity, diversity, respect, justice, and inclusion—will we fully manifest our mission for the benefit of every member of our Peak to Peak community. We are committed to this work, and welcome your feedback about it. Please drop me or any member of our staff a line to let us know what you think!

With kindest regards,
Kelly Reeser
Executive Director of Education
kelly.reeser@bvsd.org

On the cover: Fifth-grader Jillian Ingle embraces the first day of school.

At Left: Middle schoolers respond to a writing prompt during Advisory.

Above: The pandemic isn't holding back first-grader Reed Widman.

Our COVID-19 Pivot

Peak to Peak leaders prioritized health, safety, stability, and predictability in our school's response to the pandemic. We sought the input from teachers and public health officials as we devised a plan for returning to school. We reviewed data and feedback from students and families regarding the 2020 spring semester. In August, we welcomed our youngest learners, our kindergarten students, to campus for in-person learning, and the remainder of our student body began school remotely. Our families, our teachers, and most of all, our students have made previously unfathomable adjustments. Throughout the semester, we have gradually brought small groups of students at all grade levels on campus for individualized support. Due to recent increased community spread, we have fully returned to remote learning for all students. It is our intention, however, to return to in-person learning as soon as it is safely possible to do so.

News & Noteworthy

FOURTH GRADE EMBRACES THEIR VIRTUAL MEDIEVAL FESTIVAL

The fourth grade class and teachers celebrated a virtual Medieval Festival this year with all of the costumes, activities, and feasting that one would expect at such an event. There were even archers and castles!

VIRTUAL SCAVENGER HUNTS, MINUTE TO WIN IT, GOOSE CHASE, AND MORE

- Secondary students have led the charge to keep our community together through virtual events and opportunities. There have been scavenger hunts, Minute to Win It competitions, a "Goose Chase" photo and video hunt, watch parties, and an "Among Us" tournament over the Thanksgiving break. Meanwhile, parent/guardian interest groups have formed and there is even a parent/guardian book club reading *All American Boys*, which is in the Peak to Peak curriculum.



ADVISOR

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PUMA PETS

One benefit to learning online is that we are able to do so with our furry family members at our sides. We highlighted our “Puma Pets” as a part of our Character Day celebration this year. These lesser known members of our school community have been the unsung heroes and sometimes the star performers in our online classes this fall.

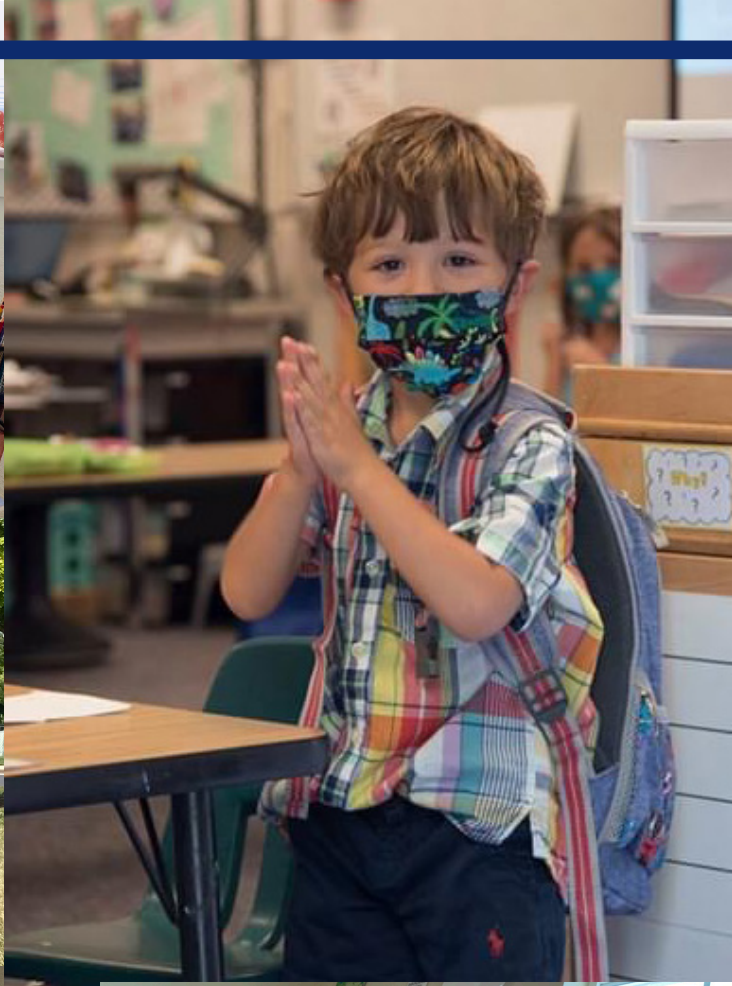


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ensure that we are addressing the social and emotional needs of students, for this academic year, students are participating in weekly, “advisory” groups. Advisory was created to establish relationships of support between staff, students, and families that boost authentic connections, school spirit, accountability, and student growth and success. At the grade level, the groups meet regularly for check-ins, games, surveys, and overall culture-building work.. This dedicated time and attention is provided by teachers, for students.

This is 2020



#ManyPumasOneCo



community

OUR 2020-21 HASHTAG

As we set out on a difficult path this year, we knew it would be important to stand as one community. We adopted the "Many Pumas One Community" hashtag as a way to embrace our differences while still moving forward together into this unique school year.



“Where each student is known, individual of great potential and

As Ms. Reeser writes in this edition’s letter to alumni, “We know that we have a long way to go, but we are making progress.” In the quest to ensure that Peak to Peak students are given every opportunity to stand confidently among their peers, we embrace and celebrate the diverse clubs and student unions that have flourished on our campus in recent years.

Middle School

Racial Student Allies

Inspired by the more established high school club, the middle school Racial Student Allies club is committed to improving the climate of Peak to Peak’s middle school. Driven by a desire to make Peak to Peak a safe place for all students, this club is led by a group of caring students and teachers with a drive to shape both the present and the future.

Japanese Language and Culture Club

The Japanese Language and Culture Club is a place for students to explore the culture and language of Japan. Whether it is Sumo, Anime, Karate, Cherry Blossoms, Sushi, Samurai, Ninja, Sub, or Dub that draws their interest, middle school students gather to expand their exposure to a country beyond the Pacific Ocean.

Queer Student Union

New to the Peak to Peak middle school, the Queer Student Union is just beginning to take shape. A motivated group of students with a desire to build a culture where their shared experience is the driving force behind a positive culture at Peak to Peak, have joined a half-dozen teachers, counselors, and staff members to launch this new club.

Top right: BSU students speak with staff during a professional development day focused on equity.

Right: Elementary students watch performances by the ASU and others at an assembly focused on learning about other cultures.

Center: Students in the Allies Club lead a high school assembly focused on understanding and acceptance. They were applauded and well-supported by their peers.

High School

Black Student Union

The Black Student Union (BSU) was formed to help foster an environment where students of all backgrounds can learn about the history of Black America, including important historic events & figures, as well as current issues. The founders of this group felt it was imperative to help young people in the community have more awareness of and accessibility to the opportunities and resources that will improve their futures.



Asian Student Union

The Asian Student Union (ASU) at Peak to Peak Charter School is a place for those who have Asian heritage or are interested in diversity and want to come together in order to help promote cross-cultural understanding in our community. The group holds events, learns about other cultures, and enjoys food while sharing about their own. The Asian Student Union is open to any student to join, regardless of demographic.

[Watch the ASU bring down the house at a pre-pandemic high school assembly in the spring of 2020.](#)



...respected, and valued as an ...and promise.”

Latino Student Union

The Latino Student Union (LSU) is a club that celebrates the heritage and culture of being Latino. The group creates a space that is enjoyable for our members to talk about important issues and be a part of a community that supports each other. They bring in cultural food and enjoy different types of Spanish-language music. The LSU seeks students with any form of Hispanic background to join, but any non-Latino students are also welcome.

Allies Club



Allies club is a club committed to improving the climate of Peak to Peak High School. Through education and advocacy, this group strives to make Peak to Peak a safe place for all students regardless of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, sex, or disability. Comprised of students working to support each other and combat bullying and harassment in our school, the Allies club is open to all high school students and staff.



Left: Mr. Barbour and LSU students proudly share cultural art representations during a high school assembly.

Below: Students in the Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica help welcome younger students to a new school year at the K-12 Back to school picnic.



Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica

The Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica (SHH) is a national honor society for high school students enrolled in Spanish and Portuguese and is sponsored by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. It was formally established in 1953 and at present there are over 2,000 national and international chapters. Here at Peak to Peak, we are the César Chávez Chapter, named after the Mexican American farm worker, labor leader and civil rights activist who was known for his effective community organizing and strong emphasis and promotion of education.

The purpose of the society is to recognize high achievement of high school students in the Spanish language, further develop students' outreach and leadership skills, and to promote a continuing interest in Hispanic studies. All meetings will be conducted exclusively in Spanish and our goal is to share our passion for mastering another language while serving both our school and greater community.

Staff Spotlight: Ileana Peterson

How long have you worked at Peak to Peak, and what roles have you held?

I have been working in Peak to Peak for almost 20 years. During these years I have had many great opportunities and jobs:

- Assistant to HS Principal Assistant, Kaneshia Baynard
- Assistant to the Middle School Principal, David Hazen
- Assistant to the High School Principal, Kyle Mathews
- Assisted with the Advanced Placement program and the Appropriate Learning Placement program

For the last 2 years, I have had the honor to be the school's primary Spanish translator and Latino Cohort Leader.

How is the school (and/or students) different from when you first started working here?

When I started at Peak to Peak, I was working in the portable trailers which were placed where the elementary soccer field is now. The second year, we moved to the new buildings. Since the beginning, my goal has been to help and support our students and families. Over the years, our Latino population has been growing and growing, and I have had the great opportunity to work side-by-side with teachers, counselors, students, and parents. I have been very lucky to see this amazing school become one of the top schools in the nation.

Tell us about your recent successes/adventures?

I am very proud to bring classes taught in Spanish for our Latino parents and guardians, including computer classes, parenting classes, and university presentations, as well as present Back-to-School Night in Spanish. My latest endeavor has been to offer a presentation on nutrition this November to our Spanish-speaking families.

Ileana keeps our community together. She should be called "Mamá Peterson" as she is so loved and appreciated by our Latino families, teachers, counselors, and administration. She works tirelessly across all grade levels to communicate with parents and students. She is our advocate, our heart, and our voice. She has been at Peak to Peak for many years, she has watched her own son graduate, and she knows our community both as a mom and a staff member. Ileana adapts to everyone's needs each year and is a gem which every school needs. We are SO lucky.

- Kimberly Gannett, HS Counselor

Ileana has a huge heart for our Puma community and we are so very grateful to have her on staff. We are unique, as a school, in having this role and Ileana is incredible in it. She inspires us each day in how she works tirelessly to help all students succeed and feel valued in our community. She radiates joy to all of us and is always looking for ways to make this world a better place. She is absolutely amazing!

-Traci Schoeneweis
Director of the Executive Office





Above: Community members in the Digital Divide computing course taught in Spanish and arranged by Ms. Peterson.

At right: Ms. Peterson in her office with two of the students in her cohort

Far right and below: Pictures from Ms. Peterson's recent trip to Morocco.



I am very proud of the strong partnership I have created with the Latino Community. I am in close contact with teachers, parents, counselors and students.

In my personal life, my most recent adventure was going to Morocco with my husband. We both love traveling. This year, we had planned to go to Asia, but we had to cancel due to the pandemic. Hopefully, we will be able to go someday. My mom always told me that the best education is to travel the world. I love learning about new cultures. My travels have enriched my formal education.

I have a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Universidad Autonoma de Centro America (UACA). I am from Costa Rica and I am married to the love of my life, John. We have a son who is 24 and an alumni from Peak to Peak. He is attending DU Law school. We love hiking, gardening, traveling, and helping people.

What message would you like to leave for our Alumni?

The things I would like to share with the Alumni are the principles and practices we learned from our parents and from Peak to Peak. Keep learning, work hard, keep being kind, share only love and compassion. Go and make the world a better place for all.

Graduation isn't the closing of a door, It's the opening of a thousand opportunities. Go Pumas!!

Photo note:

Morocco and their people were the most amazing place we have visited. As you know we love traveling every year but Morocco is a special place. We want to go back to do a camping trip with the Blue people of the Sahara. We met wonderful people and we will do it with our Moroccan friends. We were going to Asia this Summer but need to postpone the trip until safety is back for all. As I put in my bio my mom always told us the best way to expand your view of the world is traveling and meeting new cultures. A gift that mom gave me and my sister every year since we were babies, Very blessed.

Ms. Peterson has been of priceless value to our school and community over the past many years. She is always ready to help with anything, easily connects with our youth, and offers a stable rock that many individuals have needed through their time at our school. She leads with compassion and generosity, and encourages responsibility and engagement. We are so lucky to have her!

- Andy Matthews,
HS Spanish Teacher

Alumni Spotlight: Paloma Secunda

Where are you now and what are you up to?

I live in Manhattan now, in the West Village (which I love!). I am currently working as a Software Engineering Instructor at a coding bootcamp and coordinating their DEI efforts. I am also working as an ethics consultant, which often means diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice education, audits, and policy development. I had originally moved to NY to be a poet and lived next to the Chelsea Hotel. I realized being a poet doesn't pay enough money to live in Manhattan so I decided to keep writing, but find something I loved that also paid a few more of my bills. I worked at a private investigation firm and then ran PR and development for a creative agency finding my footing for what I really wanted to do. Eventually, I settled on graduate school and becoming a software engineer which brings me to where I am now.

I am currently working with Peak to Peak on their equity work. Right now I am working alongside staff and parents to look at the hiring process to see where it might be exclusionary to certain individuals that would be a great benefit to the Peak to Peak community. While using my education and consulting experience, a lot of my work and advice is informed by my own experience in the Peak to Peak community. The reality is that there is a lot of work that needs to be done. And the fact that the community is able and ready to invest their time and their efforts into making the space more inclusive for everyone and on taking an active "anti" stance (meaning anti-racism, anti-sexism, etc.) is the vital first step. The work that these equity groups and committees are doing is so important to further Peak to Peak's mission. Not every child or student can succeed if they are not in a system that supports them all justly and we want to graduate students that can fulfill their full potential, are agents of positive change, and that are as introspective as the community at large surrounding areas for personal growth and allyship. The first step when it comes to doing work like this is to listen. People rarely have negative intentions, only negative unintended consequences born of ignorance. My goal is to listen for what will be most helpful (at every level), work alongside the appropriate stakeholders to enact lasting change that the community is long-term invested in, and highlight opportunities for growth or areas where there are failings that disproportionately impact specific community members that are already disenfranchised. Active criticism and community engagement is integral to shifts in communities like Peak to Peak's - so please feel free to reach out if you have any opinions or experiences you would like to share.

Do you think your time at Peak to Peak helped you pursue this? If yes, how?

I think that high school years are formative no matter what and the time I went to Peak to Peak was a time of massive personal upheaval and growth. Mr. Schaefer, Mr. Benson, and the Speech and Debate team taught me some of the most valuable skills I have as an adult and as a teacher: the ability to speak confidently in front of crowds, to defend your point rationally, and to think quickly on your feet. I also think that my time as a cheerleader taught me how to stand up for myself, how to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations, and how to present. In a lot of the rooms that I work in these days there are uncomfortable conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, politics, outcomes, and bias. It is a skill to be able to sit in that discomfort and be comfortable, and often the "power" in those rooms and in those conversations lies with whoever is the most comfortable. I think that Speech and Debate and cheer both contributed to building that skill. Lastly, I came to high school young. I had skipped 8th grade and I was craving intellectual challenge. Peak to Peak was able to provide that for me. I think that being in a school that valued intellectual rigor and academic success was the best environment for me to foster my love of learning.

Did you ever imagine doing this while you were at Peak to Peak?

I went through a whole host of career ideas in high school: theoretical physicist, pediatric surgeon working with refugees in the middle east, novelist, spy, pilot, and politician. I still haven't really ruled any of them out (except for the pediatric surgeon as I decided not to go to medical school). If there is anything that I have learned, it is that you don't need to just be one thing or figure it out. I have studied or worked as an EMT, phlebotomist, jetski tour guide, white water kayak instructor, crepe chef, Director of PR and Development, consultant, software engineer, teacher, and bioethicist. Some of these I did not imagine. In high school I thought that I was terrible with technology and would never be able to do anything with software engineering, and I was terrified of needles so I never thought I would be a phlebotomist. But, many of these career paths, I did imagine at some point during my time at Peak to Peak. I think a lot about the Steve Jobs quote, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." I take this to mean you shouldn't cut yourself off from possibility in pursuit of a rigorous path - better to chase passions and be imaginative with the possibilities and trust that the dots will connect in the future.

What education have you pursued since high school?

I have a BA in Public Health from Elon University. I actually took a year off in the middle of college and spent some time in Argentina doing medical work and getting my wilderness EMT certification. After undergrad, I moved to NYC and was looking for Masters in Public Health programs or Masters of Fine Arts in creative writing programs. I ended up finding a Masters of Science in Bioethics program instead. This was perfect for me as it took critical scientific and medical knowledge but was focused on how we make decisions through a number of different ethical, moral, and legal lenses. I completed my MS at Columbia University in 2019.

Who was your favorite teacher and why?

That's hard... I loved a lot of teachers for different reasons. I think Mr. Schaefer and Mr. Benson were my most formative teachers between class time and Speech and Debate time. Ms. McKee was awesome and helped me to become independent when I was a student aide for her. Mr. Hankla spent countless time outside of class time with me and both took me seriously as an intellectual and encouraged me to pursue math and science - leading to my love and fascination with physics. Ms. Amidon had known me since elementary school and was always a comfort and a support. Finally, Mr. Lehr believed in me and pushed me to get the scores I was capable of in math class and gave me the confidence that I needed to know that I was good at math.

Are you still friends with anybody you met at Peak to Peak?

Yes! A number of my best friends are from Peak to Peak. Kayla and I were best friends in high school and remained close through college and now graduate school. I am still friends with a number of the girls that were cheerleaders. Lastly, one of my best friends is not someone I was friends with at Peak to Peak even though we were at school together. Mads and I became friends once she moved to New York and we connected over shared academic interests and also the fact that she is brilliant, driven, and inspiring.

What's the most influential class you took in college?

In college the most influential class was Poetry or Sexual Ethics. Poetry had such an impact that it inspired me to move to NYC to write full time. Also, my poetry and creative writing professors in college were such lovely and brilliant people. Sexual Ethics was an honors seminar taught by my favorite college

Peak to Peak Class of 2014

professor - Dr. Ann Cahill. The course itself was wildly challenging - a paper a week, with two 30+ page papers throughout the semester, and hundreds of pages of reading a week. At that point in time my academic writing was superfluous. This was partially a strategy - a 30+ page paper is only a 20-ish page paper if you can use longer synonyms and add in some fluff (turns out a lot of academia thinks this way as well). Dr. Cahill would redline entire paragraphs, saying that if you can say something in 10 words you should say it in just 10 words; clarity and being concise is more important than sounding smart. The class also focused on challenging or undermining certain assumptions - what framework are we using to make choices or form opinions and why? The long lasting impact of the class is immeasurable - it informed the backbone of my masters thesis, it changed the way that I structure arguments, and the way my academic writing has changed has enabled me to succeed on standardized tests and writing intensive classes in higher education.

What would you like to tell your fellow alumni?

It depends what stage of alumni. If you are in your early years of college (or are still a student) I would say don't pick a college or feel stuck at a college for the wrong reasons. When you pick a college, or a grad school, you are not just picking academics - you are picking peers and living environment for a number of years. I wish someone had told me to pick a college in a place I wanted to be, not just a college I wanted to go to. I also think I got (and get) really caught up on appearance or perception of what I should do. But, if you look at it, the people that are really cool now are those that followed their passions or did random things that they really enjoyed. If you are ever trying to make a decision and are weighing the pros and cons - go with what you really want to do. For me, those have been the most fruitful decisions and, on the flip side, when I have made decisions for a resume or because I thought it would make other people happy, I have always had regret. The last thing I would like to say is that I think that we have all lost the ability to admit when we are wrong. As my friend and colleague says, we are all at our own spot on the train to enlightenment, all that matters is that we are on the train and moving in the right direction. I have been working on talking about when I am wrong more often and taking wholehearted accountability. It is really hard and uncomfortable, but it is a huge step towards healing divides, helping not harming, and becoming a better person.



To Contact Paloma:

Visit paloma@oenaconsulting.com or you can find her on LinkedIn.

Non-Traditional Pathways

Peak to Peak is a liberal arts college preparatory school that focuses on providing students with the tools necessary to succeed in college and beyond. As a community, we want to honor and celebrate all of our graduates and the paths you take. The majority of our alumni immediately attend a four-year college. Those alumni attend colleges and universities all around the country and occasionally international institutions as well. You can see where Pumas have gone on the [matriculation page of the counseling website](#).

For some students and alumni, however, the idea of immediately attending four more years of school is unappealing or even terrifying. Our alumni have taught us that the path to college and beyond isn't always a straight line.

For some students and alumni, however, the idea of immediately attending four more years of school is unappealing or even terrifying. Our alumni have taught us that the path to college and beyond isn't always a straight line. Pumas have pursued a variety of paths following their walk across the graduation stage. During a recent counseling meeting, I asked my colleagues for stories of what Peak to Peak alumni had done outside of immediately attending a four year college or university. Faster than I could type, the counselors recalled gap year programs, pursuits of automotive technology, semi-professional athletic careers, and more.

One graduate, Georgia Dauzvardis '19, shared details of their gap year experience. Georgia is now a freshman at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg FL, where they are planning to major in marine science and minor in physics, and ready to take on the four-year journey ahead of them.

"While the craziness hit very suddenly for a lot of people, my thrill ride began before the calendar turned to 2020. After Graduation, I started a well-planned, gap year consisting of 3 different programs. It sounded amazing, but my experience was so much different than what I had imagined.

I started my year with Outward Bound, backpacking for 30 days in the Colorado wilderness. I had the expectation that I would vibe with mountain people, and learn how I would deal with being in a very physically and mentally demanding environment. I came to find that I was an outsider in a group of immature young adults who were there as an alternative to rehab. Unfortunately, they did not treat it as such, and they couldn't talk about anything other than drugs and alcohol. So, not only did I have to push myself up a mountain every day, but I also had to navigate difficult conversations with complete strangers. However, addressing the problem only disconnected me more and I eventually gave up trying to connect.

I then traveled to Costa Rica to get my Divemaster certification. It was pretty scary to be off on my own in a country where I didn't speak the language and to learn a skill I had never tried before. Unfortunately, I once again found myself among individuals in this program that I struggled to relate to. I was the only American surrounded by Europeans who've been drinking since they were 15. They smoked and hung out at the local clubs, they were unfaithful to their partners and were frequently unkind.

I, once again, was an outsider, choosing to spend much of my time both sober and alone. However, the universe sent a ray of sunshine in my storm of misery. Vicky was her name, she and I were instantly best friends. She became my safe space to vent, to laugh, to be myself. She was the spark that helped me find my gender identity and my sexuality. She was the light at the end of the tunnel, and even after 10 months she still is.

In February of 2020, I left Costa Rica behind and headed to Australia, the country on fire. I was hired by a family to care for their 6 horses and look after the 3 children. I thought I had found the perfect job, but I was sorely mistaken. I was misused by my employers who asked me to do things beyond my hired purpose and usually put more on my plate than I could handle. Most days ended in tears and I tried desperately to get out of the situation. However, the reason they asked so much of me was because I was all they had. I couldn't for the life of me find a way out of the situation because my employers were generous people and I couldn't bring myself to leave them with nothing. Fortunately, it was short-lived because miraculously COVID-19 gave me the excuse to get out. It seemed as though my gap year was turning out to be a gigantic lesson on how to manage under less than optimal conditions.

While my gap-year didn't exactly go as planned, if I had to do it again, I would. I learned so much about myself and the world. I did and saw things that many will never do in their lifetime. Even though I didn't make as many friends as I had hoped, the friendships I did make are forever."

Georgia's advice for any student considering a gap year is:

- Have a reason to take a year off, and not simply, "I don't like school. I need a year off." That's not a meaningful reason, that's an excuse to get out of school.
- Having that reason then leads you to have a plan. Having a plan set before your year starts is probably the most important part of your gap year. Not having a solid plan can lead to procrastination and missed opportunities.
- Have a reason to return from your gap year. Too many times I hear from people, "I could never go on a gap year because I would never come back." While it is tempting to never come back, it's not fair to yourself or those paying for your future.

A Stormy 2020 Graduation



Graduation was held on the Boulder High School campus in the shadow of The Flatirons and with district staff assistance in order to maintain the required social distance between family groups. The ceremony included many of the Peak to Peak traditions and concluded just as a thunderstorm moved in.



“Pete the Puma” Goes to Class

As a treat for students and to encourage everyone to have a little fun, the Puma has been joining online classes and answering student questions



Boomerang Pumas:

Megan (Ward) Hensen, Class of 2009

What brought you back to Peak to Peak, how long have you been here and what are you doing for the school?

After graduating college, I worked in Fort Collins and Costa Rica, searching for a school that held high expectations for students, while also trusting its teachers to use their creativity instead of simply teaching to a test. Unfortunately, although I found amazing colleagues and friends at other schools, the schools themselves were missing a piece of the magical education puzzle that I had taken for granted as a student at Peak to Peak. You see, as a student, I felt like I received a high quality education while being allowed to tap into my creativity, play sports, and have a social life. So after my third year of teaching, I looked at Peak to Peak's hiring page on a whim and found an elementary education opening. I applied that night from my room in Costa Rica and a week later I was on a plane back to give my mock lesson to a group of 4th graders. I fell in love again with the school, the pursuit of professional growth, and the amazing community that comes with being a Puma. Now, 4 years later, I am still teaching 4th grade and am finding that 9 year olds have the best sense of humor and are wise beyond their years.

How is the school different from when you were a student?

Peak to Peak is definitely always evolving and I appreciate that as a school. I think it always takes a look at how it can improve and one of the ways I'm noticing a difference is in the way we are being trained to look at lesson planning. These past two years, we have been challenged as a staff to look at our own innate biases as teachers and look at our curriculum with an equity lens, making sure that we are teaching multiple sides of a story, including a variety of characters in our units, and having hard conversations about the topics of racism, gender equality, and oppression. Even in my 4th grade classroom, I am challenging my students to talk about race, how to treat others who are different, how to celebrate differences and stand up against bullying of any kind.

What advantage(s) or disadvantage(s) have you found when working at the same school you graduated from?

It is definitely interesting teaching the children of my previous high school teachers, but I love it! It's nice to feel known and welcome into a community right off the bat, even though it took a while to get used to calling Andy Matthews, Andy, instead of Señor. I think that since Peak to Peak has such a high respect for their students, that coming back and teaching makes them proud instead of awkward. They don't look down on you for knowing less or being less experienced either. Instead, I think everyone values new ideas and is encouraged to have fresh eyes on a certain issue or topic.

Tell us about your recent successes/adventures?

My most exciting adventure is growing a human, which is due in March of 2021! My husband and I are excited to expand our family and welcome a new Puma to the world.

What message would you like to leave for our Alumni?

No matter what 2020 brings, just remember that you are amazing and that this too shall pass.

Molly Creek, Class of 2008

What brought you back to Peak to Peak, how long have you been here and what are you doing for the school?

This is my first year back at Peak and I am the newest member of the High School Counseling Team. I came back to Peak to Peak for a few reasons. The first, being able to give back to the school community which was instrumental for me, and my success after high school was an opportunity had always been hoping for. On top of this, the teachers, students, and staff at Peak to Peak are incredibly focused on relationships and developing the whole student, not just the student academically. As a counselor, I value mental health, empathy, and relationships, and these are all things Peak to Peak focuses on.

How is the school different from when you were a student?

The conversations and work we are doing as a staff on equity is extremely impressive and something I am so excited about. As a student, I do not recall being challenged in my thinking regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion. When it comes to representation in the curriculum, I think Peak to Peak is approaching this in an extremely mindful way to really break ground in an equity approach as a school. Also, I have noticed there are several more student advocate groups (Allies, Black Student Union, Asian Student Union). These were not in place when I was a student, and the work they are doing on educating the student body, as well as bringing important conversations to light is instrumental in celebrating diversity in our community and I am so glad to see the representation in student groups across our high school.

What advantage(s) or disadvantage(s) have you found when working at the same school you graduated from?

A huge advantage has been understanding the unique academic culture at Peak to Peak. I understand the rigor of the curriculum and the type of close-knit community it is. It is also lovely to have some familiar faces that were at Peak to Peak when I was a student. The fact that some of my favorite teachers are now my co-workers is super fun! I can't think of any disadvantages at all!

Tell us about your recent successes/adventures?

Getting married in the year of COVID has definitely been a highlight! Oh, and of course getting a pug puppy. Those have been my biggest successes and adventures in this weird time, but in a typical year I'd like to say by this point I would have tackled a big backpacking trip, snowboarded at several ski resorts, and mountain biked Moab and the Western Slope. It has been a year of slowing down and resetting, which has been a positive for me.

What message would you like to leave for our Alumni?

I think the most impressive thing since being back is how the school staff, administration, and teachers are still constantly growing in their practices. Peak to Peak has been a leader in education for as long as they have been open, but the work is still being done to take care of our students' needs, especially in this crazy academic year!



Alumni On Staff

Tracy (Wright) Durland, Class of 2009

What brought you back to Peak to Peak, how long have you been here and what are you doing for the school?

I started working at Peak to Peak as a para and substitute teacher during my undergrad at CU Boulder. I am now the K-12 Testing Coordinator for Peak to Peak and just celebrated my 10th year at the school. I have served in a variety of roles over the years, and last spring had the opportunity to teach a middle school English elective for the first time.



How is the school different from when you were a student?

The school (and campus!) have changed so much in the last ten-plus years. Over the past year and a half Peak to Peak has been working with an equity consultant who has been guiding the staff through equity literacy training sessions. This has given us the tools we needed to start to recognize blind spots in our school and work on taking concrete steps to improve our organizational practices and policies. I'm so impressed by the growth our staff is achieving, both individually and as a whole, to become a more equitable and inclusive space.

What advantage(s) or disadvantage(s) have you found when working at the same school you graduated from?

There were some initial obstacles to overcome when I was first hired and making the transition from student to staff, but in my years here I have come to consider it an advantage to have experienced both the student and staff perspectives. I feel lucky to be able to give back to the organization that gave me so much.

Tell us about your recent successes/adventures?

Just like everyone else, any travel plans for 2020 were put on hold. Nonetheless, my husband and I celebrated our 5th year of marriage at home with our two kids, Jackson (3) and Emmy (1).

What message would you like to leave for our Alumni?

Peak to Peak has changed in so many ways in the days since we roamed the halls as students; I would welcome any alum to come by for a visit to see for themselves! (post-COVID, of course!)

Katie (Schoeneweis) Domman, Class of 2010

What brought you back to Peak to Peak, how long have you been here and what are you doing for the school?

I started as a substitute teacher at Peak to Peak five years ago, taught Kindergarten through fifth grade music in Aurora for four years, and now I have the honor of being the new kindergarten through third grade music teacher! This is my first year as a staff member so it is a full circle moment. I loved attending Peak to Peak as a student so when the opportunity opened up to teach my passion, I jumped at the chance!

How is the school different from when you were a student?

The world we live in now we could say is much more different now than it was when I was a student. In some ways that is true. However, I think there are a lot of similarities we never realized. The difference between now and when I was a student is many of these equity issues are now being brought to light. At Peak to Peak, I am seeing an amazing movement from the students emphasizing the importance of equity not only in the local community, but in their school community. That is something we did not recognize when I was a student and it is truly incredible coming from students. Now as a staff member, I am excited to say Peak to Peak has been providing amazing training informing the staff on how to approach and encourage equity; and the students at Peak to Peak will experience an even more valuable education than ever before.

What advantage(s) or disadvantage(s) have you found when working at the same school you graduated from?

At first, it was strange calling my former teachers by their first names. Getting over the student mentality after attending Peak to Peak since the day it opened was difficult, but it has been amazing working with them as teammates. I am learning so much from them as mentors, but also as collaborators.

Tell us about your recent successes/adventures?

My husband and I bought our first house this summer! It has most definitely been an adventure!

What message would you like to leave for our Alumni?

"I will strive to achieve excellence in scholarship and character" is the school mission we repeated every day in elementary school. I never fully appreciated that message as a kid, but I fully embrace it now with nostalgia, gratefulness, and understanding; and I encourage my fellow pumas to do the same as we go out into this world and live kindly.



Athletics

Did You Know?

As a 3A school, we are limited with the sports that we can offer based on our enrollment and participation numbers while also staying aligned with Title IX. Title IX was a law passed in 1972 that requires schools to offer equal participation opportunities for both girls and boys. For Peak to Peak students that would like to participate in a sport that we do not offer as a school, students are given the opportunity to participate in any sport that CHSAA offers at their designated home school. This allows our students to have an equal opportunity to participate in all CHSAA sports regardless of where they attend school.

Athletics offered outside of Peak to Peak:

- Football
- Hockey
- Lacrosse
- Swimming
- Wrestling
- Gymnastics
- Skiing
- Field Hockey



Changes to CHSAA schedule for 2020-2021

With the unprecedented year we have experienced as a nation, CHSAA was forced to make big changes to the formatting of the annual sports calendar to accommodate the ever changing climate of youth sports. Limited sports were offered for the traditional fall season, with most sports getting moved to the spring seasons. In order to give an equal opportunity to all of the multi-sport athletes of the state, CHSAA has created unique shortened seasons that allow these athletes to still participate

in multiple sports without having to choose. Our students and coaching staff were met with new challenges this school year and are taking it one season at a time. Our fall athletes successfully completed their seasons with strong state contenders for boys tennis, cross country and boys golf. Next we look forward to beginning our basketball seasons in the newly appointed Season B that begins at the first of the year.

[2020-2021 CHSAA Calendar](#)

Celebrations:

- Allison Beasley (12th grade) won 3rd Place finish at the 2020 State Cross Country Championships and has signed to run at Western Colorado University next fall.
- Peak to Peak sent three athletes to the Boys 3A State Golf Tournament: William Mitchell (12th grade), Aditya Malhotra (12th grade), and Raseesh Bhandari (9th grade)
- Owen Hinrichs (12th grade) and Caleb Harris (10th grade) competed in the Boys 4A Tennis State Championships
- The Softball team finished winning season (10-6) and took second place in the league



Peak Scholarship Fund Celebrates 5 years!

For over 20 years, Peak to Peak has always made a priority to get every student into a college of their choice; however, the rising cost of education presents a significant barrier to continuing education for many of our students. The Peak Scholarship Fund, which kicked off in 2015, helps bridge the gap between college acceptance and college attendance for those

students who would not otherwise be able to afford a college education. Despite exceptional education and preparation, every year Peak to Peak has 6 to 12 graduates without the financial means to go to college. The Peak Scholarship Fund helps bridge the gap between college acceptance and college attendance for those students who would not otherwise be able to afford a college education.

We encourage you to learn more about a few of our recent scholarship recipients on our Peak Scholarship Fund website. If you are looking for an opportunity to support Peak to Peak in a meaningful way, we invite you to make a financial contribution to the Peak Scholarship Fund to support future recipients.

Visit the [Peak Scholarship Fund](#) website to learn more!



Alumni Updates

Class of 2006

Holly Grodsky

Current City: Westminster

Graduations: BS, Applied Statistics, University of Northern Colorado, 2010

Current Job: Self Employed - Piano Technician; Database Consultant, Mary Kay Consultant

Marriage: Akash Mudubagilu, 2020

Emily Wessels (Clark)

Current City: Lafayette, CO

Graduations: BS Business Administration- Finance, University of Colorado Boulder, 2010

Current Job: Assistant Vice President Regulatory and Control, SS&C ALPS

Marriage: Patrick Wessels

Children: Julia Wessels 2016, Henry Wessels 2019

Class of 2008

Caitlin Danielson

Current City: Brooklyn, NY

Graduations: BA, History, McGill University, 2012

Current Job: Strategic Partnerships - Media & Entertainment - Google

Marriage: Tim Fasano - 2018

Quinn McConnell, Class of 2019

has [returned to run in her home state](#) of Colorado.

Josh Chandler, Class of 2009, works for Peak to Peak's hired architectural consulting firm, TreanorHL. Chad Novak, principal at the firm, had this to say about him:

"I wanted to touch base with you all, and let you know how proud we are of one of your P2P Alumni. I'm not sure you all knew this, but Josh Chandler was hired by TreanorHL last summer as an intern architect and he is working in our Advanced Industries studio. Josh is currently working on projects for Ball Aerospace and Sierra Nevada Corp. He is a breath of fresh air and approaches his work with great passion and professionalism and is developing into a young architectural star. I'm sure you and your staff have had a great influence on his abilities, desire and dedication. Thank You!

Josh has been activated for duty with the Colorado National Guard to assist with the virus fight for the next three weeks to the next three months. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his service. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who are serving at this time, and a special prayer for all our family members who are healthcare workers fighting on the front lines. Josh makes us so proud!"

Angela Li, Class of 2020 is a University of Texas at Dallas [Eugene McDermott Scholar](#).

&

Ellie Gentry, Class of 2020, is a [Boettcher Scholar](#) attending CU Boulder.

Class of 2011

Jace Artichoker

Current City: San Mateo, CA

Graduations: BS, Photographic & Imaging Technologies, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2015

Current Job: Senior Camera Engineer, Light Labs Inc.

Marriage: Jordan Briscoe, 2020

Class of 2012

Chandan Thakur

Current City: Powder Springs, GA

Graduations: BS Biochemistry

Current Job: Software Engineer

Class of 2013

Isabella Casini

Current City: Tübingen, Germany

Graduations: BS Engineering Science

Current Job: Working towards PhD at University of Tübingen, in Environmental Biotechnology

Chase Robbins

Graduations: BS, Interior Architecture & Design, Colorado State University

Current Job: Designer, Interior Architects, San Francisco

Class of 2014

David VanderMeer

Graduations: BS, Mechanical Engineering, University of Rochester, 2018

Current Job: School Bus Driver, BVSD

Dear Class of 2020...
a video Message

Oliver Pollock and Peter Trainor, Class of 2020

were encouraged to enter "The Game Plan Challenge" in Mrs. Letter's Senior Literature Class during the spring 2020 semester. Six months later, Oliver and Peter received a letter from the President of the Hard Rock Cafe, congratulating them on their [1st place public service announcement](#), out of over 16,000 entries, on the effects of video games on teenagers - addiction. Congratulations on winning more than \$2500 in gifts including Hard Rock Cafe Electric guitars, case, strap, Fender bluetooth speakers, Skullcandy ear buds, hoodies and t-shirts!

Chloe Doubrava, Class of 2020,

completed the Cadet Basic Training program at the U.S. Military Academy. Chloe and her class were featured [in this article](#) where Chloe is quoted as saying, "At the very end, when you're able to throw the actual grenade, that's a deadly weapon in your hand, but you have enough self-control and enough knowledge to be able to handle this weapon carefully and well. I think that's a lot of growth. It changes people to have these rifles in your hand all the time. To have access to grenades. To have access to bayonets, just like chilling in your room."

Since completing training, Chloe has joined the Glee Club and can be seen [in this recent video](#) of the group singing the National Anthem prior to the Houston Texan game.



Class of 2016

Gabrielle Hernandez (Bell)

Current City: Georgetown, TX
Graduations: Kinesiology, Southwestern University, 2020
Current Job: Business owner
Marriage: Nickolas Hernandez, 2019

Class of 2018

Chris Mather

Graduations: BA, Political Science and Criminology with a Minor in Honors, University of New Mexico, 2021 and planned JD, Law, University of New Mexico Law School, 2024

Alumni:

The 2020-21 school year has called for creative solutions to challenging problems. In order to meet the needs of our students,

Peak to Peak is hiring Classroom Monitors

to support our in-person learning model. These are temporary, paid positions, working in Peak to Peak classrooms with both our teachers and students.

Please visit our [Current Openings](#) page on the website to read more about the Classroom Monitor position and to apply.

Will You Join Our Team?

Artists on the Back Cover:



Owen Hinrichs
12th grade



Ainsley Crist
11th grade



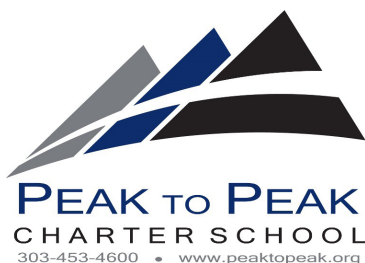
Allison Beasley
12th grade



Jessica Wilcox
10th grade



Nattanan Jaraschatrkaew
11th grade



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