



The Partnership to Educate & Advance Kids

### **Mission Statement:**

PEAK provides opportunities for at-risk youth to achieve academic and personal success through a quality, values-based education and the guidance of caring adult mentors.

### **Background**

The Partnership to Educate & Advance Kids (PEAK) was founded in 1997. Using the Student/Sponsor Partnership, a scholarship and mentoring program for inner-city students in New York City as its model, PEAK began with 10 freshman in the fall of 1998. Today, we provide full scholarships and mentors to 51 high school students.

PEAK targets academically average kids that are at-risk both financially and by personal circumstance. During the application process, we look for students who are deserving of this opportunity and demonstrate a clear desire to put forth the effort required to earn diplomas.

PEAK serves the needs of students who aren't typically sought after for high school scholarships – graduating eighth graders whose grades are average to below average. While these students are not at the top of their class, PEAK believes that they are capable of achieving academic success given an environment of support and encouragement.

### **Program Overview**

PEAK is the only high school scholarship program in Chicago that pays 100% tuition and focuses on academically average students. Given average grade school results and challenging home lives, these students have few, if any options outside of their local public high schools. PEAK offers them an opportunity for something better.

The PEAK partnership involves four essential elements: the student, the parent/guardian, the sponsor (financial and time), and our partner school, Holy Trinity High School.  
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Each element is actively involved in fostering the encouragement and the support required for each student to have the best possible chance of realizing both personal and academic success.

A PEAK financial sponsor commits to funding a particular student's tuition for each of their four years. Should the sponsor choose not to engage in the mentoring relationship, PEAK will match their student with an adult mentor to be a consistent guide and role model through the high school years. Both the financial sponsors and mentors will receive periodic updates of their student's progress.

Our partner school, Holy Trinity High School, provides five onsite Student Life Directors to oversee academic progress, guidance counselors who are actively involved with each student and licensed social workers. Each of these surround our students with the tools that offer them the best possible chance to experience success.

The parent or guardian pays \$500 per year towards the cost of books, uniforms, and registration fees. Because Families must demonstrate significant financial need in order to apply for a PEAK scholarship, this represents a significant financial commitment for the families.

Every PEAK student is held accountable for meeting the program's expectations in order to keep their scholarship. These expectations include completion of their assigned daily job at school, maintaining at least an overall C average, and fully participating in a relationship with their PEAK Mentor.

Currently, 57 PEAK students attend Holy Trinity High School in Chicago. Holy Trinity's student body is diverse: 47 percent Hispanic, 51 percent African-American, and two percent Caucasian.



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## **PEAK Program Objectives**

- To provide at-risk, inner-city students with an alternative to the Chicago public school system.
- To serve academically average students – those who are typically overlooked in the scholarship process – who demonstrate a clear desire to put forth the effort required to achieve a diploma.
- To develop a four-year partnership between each PEAK student and a caring, adult mentor.
- To support our partner school, Holy Trinity High School, and faculty in providing an environment of support and encouragement – tools that will give the students the best possible chance to attain both personal and academic achievements.

## **Student Recruitment**

All prospective students must be nominated by their respective grade school or after-school program, complete a 15-page application, including a written essay, and pass the Holy Trinity entrance exam. Prospective students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) are then interviewed by PEAK's Student Recruitment Committee.

PEAK is committed to providing scholarship opportunities to both public and parochial grade school children. Currently, 33% of our students hail from public grade schools.

## **Evaluation of Results**

PEAK's success in achieving its mission is determined by the following factors: student retention rate, graduation rate, academic averages, and sponsor default rate. To date, 90% of the students who entered the PEAK program have earned their high school diplomas. This result is remarkable when compared with the less than 60% graduation rate from Chicago Public Schools.

PEAK's growth will be managed carefully. The primary goal is to ensure a successful experience for both students and sponsors. Growth will be benchmarked against the number of students served and graduated, as well as fundraising results.

## **Sponsor and Mentor Recruitment**

Sponsors and Mentors are recruited by PEAK's Sponsor Development committee and Board of Directors through contacts in the Chicago business and social communities.

Sponsors are typically working men and women from the Chicago area. They currently represent a diverse base of professional fields, including banking and finance, law, advertising, consulting, sales, construction, insurance, retail, and education.

## **Contacting PEAK**

For more information about Sponsoring a PEAK student or other volunteer opportunities, please contact us:

**Walter Bledsoe, Executive Director**  
**559 W. Diversey Parkway, #353**  
**Chicago, Illinois 60614**  
**Phone: 773.975.6540**

**[www.peakchicago.org](http://www.peakchicago.org)**



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## Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

### Summary

Through The Partnership to Educate & Advance Kids (PEAK), your child has an opportunity to pursue a quality, values-based education. Your involvement and support are critical to your child's success in the program.

### Your Role

While your child is in high school, he or she will be matched with a sponsor who works in the Chicago area. Male students are matched with male sponsors, and female students are matched with female sponsors. Couples interested in sponsoring a student can be matched with either a boy or a girl.

Your child's sponsor will pay for four years of tuition at Holy Trinity High School and will develop a mentoring relationship with your child. Although the sponsor's relationship is primarily with your child, you should also get to know the sponsor.

The sponsor's role is not meant to take the place of any of your parenting responsibilities, but rather to help your child succeed in high school.

Encourage your child to contact his or her sponsor and return their phone calls. The sponsor cannot help if he or she cannot reach your child.

As the parent or guardian of a PEAK student, you are expected to attend the school's parent/teacher conferences and your child's other school events. The sponsor may also attend these conferences and events. Your attendance is critical.

### Financial Responsibilities

While the sponsor will pay your child's tuition, you are responsible for paying \$500 each year to cover registration fees, graduation, your child's books and uniforms, etc.

The \$500 payment may be made in one of two ways:

- 1) \$500 due on August 15 of the upcoming school year **or**
- 2) \$250 due August 15 and \$250 due October 15.

Note: Payments should be made directly to Holy Trinity's business office. Please make your check payable to Holy Trinity High School, and indicate on your check and envelope that your child participates in PEAK.

These payments *must* be made on time. Late payments or non-payment can result in your child losing their scholarship. If you have any questions about these payments, contact Holy Trinity's business office at 773.278.4212.

When it comes time to purchase books and uniforms for the upcoming year, your child must go first to the business office and request a voucher from the business manager. This voucher will allow them to purchase the books and uniforms they need from the bookstore.

You (or your child) are also responsible for any fund-raising costs (i.e. chocolate drive) and paying disciplinary fines.



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## Interested in sponsoring a student?

Each PEAK student needs a sponsor to provide both financial support and serve as a mentor.

As a PEAK sponsor, you provide a priceless gift to an at-risk, inner-city high school student. Your four-year financial and mentoring support allows one student to attend a challenging, supportive school that cares about his or her success.

Sponsors build relationships with their students through regular contact – quarterly PEAK-sponsored events for all students and sponsors, and quarterly one-on-one excursions. Additionally, sponsors are to call their student at least once per month. In addition, most sponsors attend parent/teacher conferences with the parent(s)/guardian(s).

PEAK provides two additional opportunities for sponsors to prepare them for their roles and responsibilities.

The first is an orientation workshop for new sponsors. The goal of this is to help create realistic expectations for the sponsorship experience.

The second is a roundtable discussion for current sponsors. Meeting in small groups enables sponsors to ask questions and address issues that arise. This event is optional for sponsors, but most attend and find the discussion extremely helpful. This event is held each November at the home of one of PEAK's directors.

## Mentoring

It is your responsibility to see your student once each academic quarter and to attend the quarterly PEAK-sponsored student/sponsor events. This interaction will help you monitor your student's progress and enable you to develop your mentoring relationship.

Contacting your student on a consistent basis is the key to developing a meaningful relationship and will help you provide ongoing support. Pace yourself, and stick to a schedule that you can maintain for four years.

PEAK will host five student/sponsor events during the school year including a kick-off dinner, where new sponsors meet their student for the first time, a fall teambuilding exercise, a November education workshop series, a February cultural outing and an April community service project.

## Sponsorship

If you can pay for four years of a student's tuition (\$6,100 for the 2006/2007 school year) but cannot fulfill the time commitment, PEAK will recruit a time sponsor to serve as your student's mentor for four years.

If you have the time to mentor student but cannot cover the tuition expense, we will find a financial sponsor to support your student.

## Contacting PEAK

For more information about becoming a PEAK sponsor, contact the PEAK office at 773.975.6540 or you can write to us at:

PEAK  
559 West Diversey Parkway, #353  
Chicago, Illinois 60614  
[walterbledsoe@msn.com](mailto:walterbledsoe@msn.com)  
[www.peakchicago.org](http://www.peakchicago.org)



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## Board of Directors & Staff

### Board Chair

**Craig S. Dean** is a Managing Director with AEG Partners, LLC a financial advisory and management services firm. He specializes in corporate turnarounds, including complex financial restructurings and interim management positions. Craig has experience with inner-city education through his extensive involvement with various Chicago area secondary education programs. His professional associations include The Young Presidents Organization. Craig earned his undergraduate degree from St. Olaf College, near his hometown of Duluth, Minnesota and his MBA from Northwestern University. He currently sponsors a PEAK junior.

### Governing Board Members

**Nancy Bufalino (Treasurer; Finance Chair)** is a Chicago native who became involved with PEAK as sponsor and mentor of a 2003 graduate. She earned her BBA in accounting from The University of Notre Dame and her MBA from The University of Illinois-Chicago. Nancy has worked for Allstate Insurance Company for 20 years, most recently as a Vice President of Corporate Finance and Planning. Nancy currently sponsors a PEAK sophomore.

**Mary Cahillane (Grants Chair)** is currently Chief Financial and Administrative Officer of the Chicago-based Spencer Foundation, an organization that focuses on educational research. Prior to joining Spencer, Mary served in several senior management positions at Bank of America. She received her Bachelor's degree from Emmanuel College with Masters degrees from Boston College and Dartmouth. Mary sponsors a PEAK sophomore while serving on the boards of Shore Bank and Catholic Charities.

**Loreen Strasser (Events Chair)** joined the PEAK Board in December 2003. She is the Midwest Advertising Sales Director for *People Magazine*, a Time Inc. publication. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Marketing from Miami University near her hometown of Canfield, Ohio. In addition to sponsoring a PEAK junior, Loreen is a volunteer with Chicago Cares.

**Rev. Thomas P. Walsh (Student Recruitment Chair)** Reverend Walsh's extensive work with youth in Chicago's most impoverished neighborhoods gives PEAK valuable knowledge of the issues facing at-risk kids. He serves on the board of Jamal Place, a group home for boys on the West Side and is a part-time instructor at Holy Trinity High School. He also conducts workshops for PEAK sponsors and heads our student interview team.

**Kelly Mullaney (Sponsor Development Chair)** joined the PEAK Advisory Council in August 2003 and the Governing Board in December 2004. She is a Vice President with The Northern Trust Company. Kelly, a native of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, earned her degree from Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. She sponsors a PEAK sophomore and is an active volunteer with several Chicago community organizations.

**Chris Killackey (Board Development Chair)** joined the PEAK board in September 2005. He currently serves as a Managing Director for Prairie Capital, a Chicago based private investment firm. In addition, he sponsors a current PEAK junior and sits on the board of the North Avenue Day Nursery, a Chicago-based provider of childcare and educational programs to the children of working families. Chris and his wife, JoAnn, live with their two daughters in downtown Chicago.

## Board of Directors (cont'd)

### Advisory Council

**Eileen Bender (Co-founder)** is an Advertising sales manager with Hearst Magazines. She became active in the Student/Sponsor Partnership – the program after which PEAK is modeled – while living in New York City several years ago. Eileen grew up in Baltimore and has volunteered as a supervisor and meal provider for homeless shelters in Chicago and New York. Eileen is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame.

**Patricia Diaz** grew up in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood and is a 1991 graduate of PEAK's partner school, Holy Trinity High School. She earned her undergraduate degree from Northeastern Illinois University and was Freshman Guidance Counselor at Holy Trinity from 1996-2001. Patricia earned her master's degree in Counseling & Human Services at DePaul University in 2002 and will complete her teaching certification in 2003. She works for Evanston Northwestern Healthcare.

**Maria M. Kelly (Co-founder)** Maria's interest in inner-city education stems from her experience teaching in New York City and serving as a faculty liaison to the Student/Sponsor Partnership. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and master's degrees in English Education and Integrated Marketing Communications. Maria taught English at St. Ignatius College Prep in Chicago for six years followed by three years in Marketing at Accenture. Maria and her husband Patrick sponsor a PEAK junior.

**Norbert B. Knapke II** is an attorney with firm of Kirkland & Ellis LLP in Chicago. A native of Fort Wayne, Indiana, Norb, earned his bachelor's degree from Notre Dame and his law degree from Duke University. Norb is a past board member of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Fort Wayne and has worked on numerous pro-bono projects for the disadvantaged. His only hobby is keeping up with his three young sons.

**Michael Kelly** is the founder and president of Kelly Construction & Design, Limited in Chicago. In addition to overseeing construction projects for his company, much of his free time is devoted to the rehabilitation of a single-room occupancy hotel on the West Side of Chicago. Mike was born in the Sauganash neighborhood of Chicago. He is a 1984 graduate of the University of Notre Dame and sponsors a PEAK senior.

**Dr. Craig C. McCall** is a licensed clinical psychologist who provides important insight into adolescent development. Craig maintains a private practice serving adolescents, adults, and families in Chicago and Northfield. In addition, he is a staff psychologist and clinical assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Loyola University Medical Center and serves on the adjunct faculty of the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. Craig also counsels PEAK students and their families when the need arises.

**Amy Weber Dice** is a former Associate Publisher for *People Magazine*, a Time Inc. publication. She has served on the board of directors of El Valor, a community organization that serves underprivileged families in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. Amy is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame. She and her husband, Ken, have sponsored two PEAK graduates.

**Joy Wingren** became involved with PEAK as the sponsor of a student in the class of 2004. A native of Hinsdale, Illinois, she is a former Vice President at Leo Burnett Company and currently has her own company, MindJoy Marketing Consulting. Joy is a graduate of the University of Missouri. She volunteers with numerous civic organizations including the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

## **Advisory Council (cont'd)**

**Julie Pendell** is Director of Development for The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Northern Illinois. A native of suburban Detroit, Julie received her undergraduate degree from Alma College and her MBA from the University of Notre Dame. Prior to joining Make-A-Wish, she was marketing manager for a dental products company in suburban Chicago and worked in sales, marketing and finance with Dow Corning. Julie is active on the Alma College alumni board.

**Ross H. Jannotta** is a native of Chicago and a Money Manager with William Blair & Company. Prior to joining Blair, he was Director of Marketing for a division of Oil-Dri Corporation of America. He earned his undergraduate degree from Williams College and his MBA from Northwestern University. In addition to sponsoring a PEAK senior, Ross is involved with the Inner City Teaching Corps. Ross and his wife, Elinor, have two young sons and a daughter and live in suburban Chicago.

**Jennifer D. Valentine** became involved with PEAK as a summer intern during the program's launch in 1998. She is now an attorney practicing primarily in civil litigation. A native of Los Angeles, Jennifer earned both her Bachelors degree and Law degree from the University of Notre Dame. Jennifer and her husband John sponsor a PEAK sophomore.

## **Staff**

**Walter A. Bledsoe** became Executive Director of PEAK in 2001 following a 10-year career in sales and marketing management with Sony Corporation. In addition to sponsoring three PEAK graduates, Walter is the founder of the Llewelyn Scholars Program at Holy Trinity High School. He is on the Community Advisory Council of The Junior League of Chicago. Walter is a graduate of Southern Methodist University.