

By Laura Margoni Jun 20, 2013

Marking a Milestone: The Preuss School's Tenth Graduating Class Achieves Record College Acceptance Rate



Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

When the Preuss School UCSD opened its doors on the UC San Diego campus in 1999, no one knew it would become a national phenomenon. From the donors whose generosity literally built the school to the teachers, students and parents who took a chance to be part of an educational experiment, everyone involved believed in the vision for the school. But none of them knew that Preuss would achieve the level of success that it has achieved today.

“We felt like guinea pigs,” recalls Jacqueline Kennedy, a member of Preuss’ first graduating class of 55 students in 2004. “A school like Preuss hadn’t existed before. There was so much pressure on us, on everyone, because we were all still figuring things out.”

Jesse Lopez, a fellow 2004 Preuss graduate, agrees.

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“There was this huge sense of accomplishment when we graduated,” he says. “We all had this feeling that we weren’t just changing our own lives but changing the way education happens.”

Established as a charter middle and high school for low-income, highly motivated students who strive to become the first in their families to graduate from college, Preuss has become known as one of the best high schools in the nation. For three years in a row, *Newsweek* has named Preuss the top transformative high school in the nation, citing the school’s ability to lead the way in getting low-income and first-generation students ready for college and beyond. The school was also ranked the top charter school in California in a report by the University of Southern California, and has been consistently ranked as one of America’s best high schools by *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post* and *U.S. News & World Report*, among others.

Now, as Preuss prepares to celebrate its 10th graduating class on June 28, the school’s success is more evident than ever. All 96 students in the Class of 2013 have been accepted to a four-year college or university, a milestone for Preuss which already boasted a 90 percent or higher acceptance rate for each of its graduating classes.

New Chancellor’s Associates Scholars Program Helps Make Dream of College Reality

While getting into a top college is a dream come true for many high school students, paying for it can become something of a nightmare. But for a few local students, the cost of college will be significantly easier to bear thanks to UC San Diego’s new Chancellor’s Associates Scholars Program.

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“We are extremely proud of all our talented Preuss students,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Their success is a testament not only to their hard work and dedication, but to the educational model that Preuss provides.”

Kennedy and Lopez can attest personally to that model. Although they came from different parts of San Diego County —Kennedy from Southeast San Diego and Lopez from San Ysidro—they both benefited from the rigorous curriculum and college-bound culture that Preuss provided.

“In my neighborhood, with my family background, it was hard for me to believe that college could be a choice for me,” said Lopez, the son of immigrant farmworkers who never graduated from high school. “But Preuss gave me the opportunity to have that choice. It gave us the education, tools and resources to dream without boundaries.”

Since Lopez and Kennedy graduated nearly 10 years ago, they have built upon the educational foundation Preuss provided. Lopez graduated from MIT and worked for a management consulting firm and PepsiCo in New York City before moving to Dallas last year to work for PepsiCo's Frito Lay division. Kennedy graduated from UC San Diego and received her Master of Public Administration degree from New York University. She currently works with Community Solutions, a non-profit based in New York City, whose mission is to strengthen communities to end homelessness.

"What I'm doing is what Preuss is doing," she said. "I'm helping to improve communities and making a positive contribution."

Like Lopez and Kennedy, the Class of 2013 is already on the path to achieving their dreams. Many students will remain in California with the majority enrolling at a University of California or California State University campus. Eighteen seniors will attend UC San Diego this fall with others attending UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Irvine, UC Davis, UC Merced and UC Riverside. Other students will attend private or out-of-state schools including Dartmouth College, New York University, Swarthmore College, Lehigh University, Bowdoin College and University of Virginia. Two seniors are recipients of the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarship, which provides all educational expenses through undergraduate and graduate school to 1,000 students nationally each year. Preuss has been home to 26 Gates Scholars over the last seven years. Many other Preuss students have received scholarships from numerous organizations and foundations.

"Our goal is to prepare all students for college," said Preuss Principal Scott Barton. "The results show that we're doing the right things here."

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