

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Erika Johnson

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A Promise Undeterred by a Pandemic

The Preuss School UC San Diego fundraiser raises \$595,000 to boost distance learning success



Fall semester distance instruction began at The Preuss School—a charter middle and high school on the campus—on Aug. 10. Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Communications, taken prior to the start of the pandemic.

Jaya Carter, a seventh-grade student at The Preuss School UC San Diego, wants to make her parents proud when she graduates. She already has a path outlined in her head—attend college, enroll in medical school and become an anesthesiologist.

“I want to help people, and when I make money, I can help my parents with whatever they need, and give back to them because they did so much for me,” said Jaya. She added, “I like how the teachers at Preuss give you tutoring and help you.”

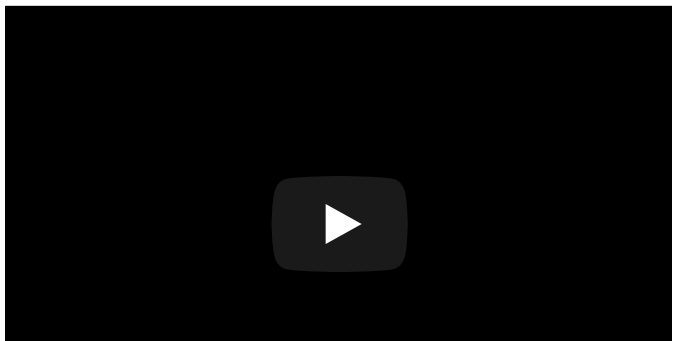


Jaya Carter, a seventh grade student, is one of more than 800 scholars who attend The Preuss School, which prepares low-income, first-generation scholars to succeed. Photo by Erika Johnson, taken prior to the start of the pandemic.

On Sept. 9, a record-breaking [Digital Day of Giving fundraiser](#) was held by The Preuss School to support the dreams of scholars like Jaya. The charter middle and high school, located on the UC San Diego campus, serves low-income scholars who strive to become the first in their families to graduate from college. More than \$595,000 was raised to help fulfill the promise made to each scholar—that they will achieve a university education, elevate their family and transform their community.

The future of learning was a primary focus of The Preuss School Day of Giving. Support garnered helps cover the cost of laptops for each scholar as well as school-wide software licensing. In addition, students who did not have cameras were provided with one, so that they may take part in live class discussions over Zoom. By expecting students to continue to wear their uniform and be present on camera, teachers have been able to engage students in community. And the strategy has worked—class attendance has approached nearly 100%.

“It is through the support of our committed donors and talented faculty that we can build a bridge to success for underserved scholars by closing the achievement gap,” said Helen V. Griffith, executive director of The Preuss School. “But more than that, we create a belief system that our scholars belong, that they can compete against any other student in college and will become tomorrow’s leaders.”



Like dozens of other schools across the region, The Preuss School pivoted to a distance learning open plan on March 16 to ensure safety as the COVID-19 pandemic grew. Leveraging the unique connection to UC San Diego as well as the dedicated support of donors, the school was able to deploy a laptop to each scholar as well as

hotspots to promote connectivity. Within two weeks, all 850 students were able to access the online curriculum.

“Our goal is to teach learners early on that they have agency and should be the ones making decisions about their future,” said Matthew Steitz, who joined the school as principal in July. “Instead of requiring scholars to fit into a particular model, we encourage them to build upon their unique strengths and pursue subjects and learning experiences that fulfill them.”

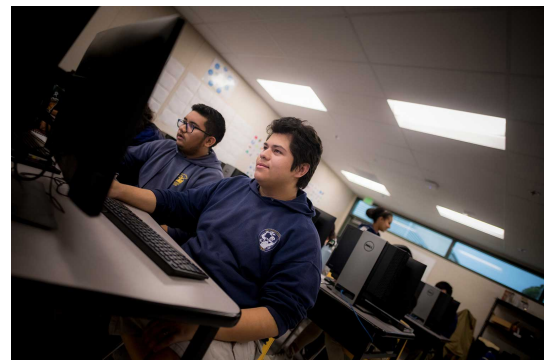
Philanthropy also enabled the school to launch the Preuss Scholar Support Mobile Library. The library-on-wheels offers scholars a chance to pick up and return physical library books and textbooks as well as art, engineering and music supplies. The mobile van is available at four community library locations in San Diego so that students and families do not have to travel to The Preuss School campus to retrieve items.

Though distance learning cannot replace the immediacy of in-person discovery, The Preuss School has worked diligently to uphold impactful courses, like the University Prep Advisory Program, through the support of donors. Here, each scholar enrolls in a class of peers, and together they receive mentorship from a teacher for their entire seven-year tenure, becoming a family. Activities are geared toward personal development, college preparation, literacy and mathematical skill reinforcement and more.

The mentorship is a draw for many scholars, including 11th-grader Andy Garcia. “My favorite thing about Preuss is how close the teachers and students are.”

Alex Tep, a 10th-grade scholar, echoed the sentiment. “I like Preuss because it's a smaller school; a lot of the students here are very focused, they know where they are headed and what they want to accomplish. It's an inspired and passionate community.”

Thanks to the philanthropy of more than 115 donors, including many Preuss alumni, The Preuss School experienced enhanced support during an unprecedented time in education—raising nearly \$100,000 more than the targeted goal. Their generosity contributes to the [Campaign for](#)



Preuss scholars were provided laptops, cameras and hotspots to make distance learning more accessible at home. Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Communications, taken prior to the pandemic.

[UC San Diego](#) and its [Student Support and Success Initiative](#), which is designed to empower scholars to make waves in San Diego and beyond. To learn more about giving to the Preuss School, please visit the [Day of Giving](#) page.

The Campaign For
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