

PATHWAYS HIGH



PATHWAYS HIGH'S FIRST YEAR: An Interview with Julia Burns, Co-founder

TC: It's been just over two years since the *Tosa Connection* interviewed Pathways High co-founder, Amber Regan, about your participation in the XQ Super School Challenge. The high school has now completed its first year. Please provide an update – the school's location, enrollment, curriculum and what you learned from your first year.

JB: A lot has happened in the past two years! Starting a school is not for the faint of heart. As hard as the founding team thought we were working during the planning year, the real work began when students came through the front door. The school is located in downtown Milwaukee at 336 West Walnut Street, across from the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. We are walking distance to many businesses and the booming district around the new Fiserv Forum. As Pathways High is a regional high school, we drew 82 students from as far north as Cedarburg, as far west as Pewaukee and many places in-between. We fell short of achieving our long-term goal of a 50/50 split between urban and suburban enrollment but knew going in that this would be one of our most difficult goals to achieve. Public schools have limited resources and we do not have access to targeting recruitment. This year, our goal is 65/35 split in urban-suburban enrollment. Our first year, we had students in grades 9 – 12, and our first graduating class for our two seniors. One graduate, a Tosa native, matriculated to UW-Milwaukee and is studying engineering. The other, a Fox Point native, is embarking on a gap-year program in Israel.

TC: Pathways High is described as a real world, project-based learning school. What does the curriculum look like?

JB: One of the frustrations the founders have with many high schools, is the lack of connection between classroom work and real-world skill development and opportunities. In our opinion, students should never be asking a teacher, "When am I going to use what I'm doing in class in the real world?" One way to make learning relevant, is through the application of knowledge and skills to real problems that are important to students. At Pathways High, the curriculum is delivered through cross-disciplinary seminars that incorporate projects, direct instruction, and independent and collaborative work. Just as every individual creates unique pathways to success, no two seminars will look exactly alike. Some are taught by one teacher, some by multiple teachers and some by a teacher and an outside expert. Students fulfill the state standards required for graduation through the seminars. Students demonstrate mastery of standards in multiple ways, but primarily through work products and artifacts.

One example is our Entrepreneurship seminar that every freshman takes. This seminar is team-taught by one of our teachers and faculty from the UW-Milwaukee Lubar Entrepreneurship Center. Students learn the design thinking process by working through the Business Model Canvas steps to developing their own business. Last year, a team of four students researched and created the business concept of a one-for-one sock company called MKE Socks; pitched the

concept during Wisconsin Startup Week in early November where a business mentor volunteered to coach them in launching the business; sold their first pairs of socks at a holiday market on December 16th; and have donated over 250 pairs of socks and counting. In addition to mastering several state standards, the students developed critical 21st Century skills, referred to as EMPOWER skills at Pathways High including, problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and reflection. I think the Mastery Transcript Consortium (mastery.org), of which Pathways High is a member, sums it up best. "High school students will inherit a world that demands their creativity, collaboration, and resilience and that requires them to apply what they know to situations they cannot predict. Shouldn't we prepare them for their world instead of testing them on how they navigate ours?"





TC: Is it difficult to find teachers for Pathways High and what are their backgrounds?

JB: When we were planning Pathways High the founders believed that teachers and administrators who shared our vision for developing the whole student and providing real world opportunities would be drawn to us. Thankfully, this has proven to be true. We're particularly proud of the breadth and depth of our team. Our Director, Kim Taylor, is a veteran teacher and administrator in both suburban and urban schools across the Milwaukee region. Stacy Knetter, Principal, is a National Board Certified STEM teacher with 14 years of International Baccalaureate teaching experience at Ronald Reagan High School. Franz Meyer, Dean of Culture, is a Chemistry teacher and nine-year veteran of Teach for America-Milwaukee and most recently was the lead teacher coach for TFA-Milwaukee. Angelique Byrne, Art and Design teacher, was a founding teacher at Kettle Moraine Perform, one of three premier charter high schools in the Kettle Moraine school district. Dr. Anthony Shafer, English teacher, is the former chairperson of Cardinal Stritch's Secondary Education Literacy Department. You can see the biographies of our entire team at pathwayshigh.org.

TC: Opening a school in under two years is certainly a big accomplishment. What, in particular, are you most proud?

JB: I'm most proud that even as a brand new high school, our mission and educational model is being recognized by corporations, foundations and the Wisconsin Department



of Public Instruction (DPI) as important for the Milwaukee region. For instance, for the past two years we've received a significant technology grant from the Northwestern Mutual Foundation and this past June we learned that we were selected by DPI to receive the Wisconsin Charter School Implementation grant. Pathways High was one of only 26 charter schools (one of 5 in Milwaukee and one of only two high schools in Milwaukee) to receive the \$650,000 multi-year grant. The grant awardee selection was highly competitive, with awards given to only 58% of applicants.

TC: What do you view as Pathways High's biggest challenge?

JB: Pathways High's biggest challenge is the same as that of the Milwaukee region -- the status quo. Change is hard, especially when it involves revamping 125+-year-old traditions. Fortunately, momentum is beginning to build. For example, Milwaukee civic, industry and education leaders have come together to support the Milwaukee Tech Hub initiative to address the urgent need to prepare our current and emerging workforce with both the technical and 21st Century skills necessary to drive the economic growth of our region. The need for talent extends beyond those companies traditionally defined as technology companies. Healthcare and financial services organizations are faced with significant talent shortages. Pathways High is excited to be working with several of the companies leading the initiative to grow talent in the region. The more we equip students with transferable 21st Century skills and provide

them with exposure to opportunities in our region, the more likely the students will be to stay and grow their careers in Milwaukee and contribute to the region's success. We're excited for all that our pioneering students will accomplish!

TC: How do people learn more about Pathways High?

JB: We'd love to host any interested students and families at Pathways High. Please check out our website, pathwayshigh.org, for one of our scheduled open houses or join us for our mid-year student work Exhibition on January 16, 2019. We are still accepting enrollment applications for the 2018/19 school year. 

