

Students at the Center of their Education

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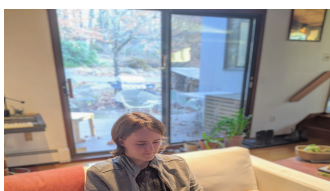
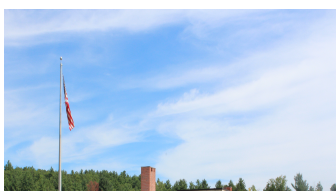
Parker

FRANCIS W. PARKER
CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL

Dear Friends,

As a mission-driven school, Parker's program is informed by the 10 Common Principles. The 5th Common Principle talks about Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach. "The governing practical metaphor of the school should be 'student-as-worker', rather than the more familiar metaphor of 'teacher as deliverer of instructional services.' Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves."

It is this principle that allows students to be at the center of their educational experience at Parker--but what can that look like in action? Division 3 student Jasper Green took his educational journey at Parker into his own hands this past summer. Determined to join the calculus class instead of the scheduled pre-calculus class he was slated to take, Jasper investigated how to make it happen. Below you will read about three different perspectives- his parents', MST domain leader Diane Kruse's, and his own.





Stacie and Jon's
experience

What were your thoughts when Jasper came to you and said that he wanted to skip pre-Calc and go on to Calculus?

My husband and I were so pleased because this was good evidence of him taking charge of his learning. During the spring shutdown, Jasper became much more interested in math. He spent a lot of time watching Khan Academy each week which we didn't fully understand until he said he wanted to skip pre-Calc. I honestly thought he was playing video games during a lot of that time. The pandemic has presented some "silver linings" in education. I'm not sure his curiosity would have been piqued like this if he hadn't had so much independent time to think (and perhaps even get bored).



Jasper's story

I had been using Khan Academy starting the end of last year when we were preparing gateways, and I finished mine early, and I started to get bored as we weren't learning new material at this point. I decided to start getting ahead. On a whim, I continued into the summer because it was kind of fun. When I saw the Precalc syllabus I realized what I had been doing in Kahn was what was going to be learned in the next year. After thinking through my options with my Dad, I decided to at least check out the possibility of jumping to Calculus. I then checked with Diane about what was required and what I would learn in Precalc.

Diane mentioned how if I completed ALEKS (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces is a Web-based, artificially



Diane's experience

-How did Jasper let you know that he was interested in making this change from pre-calc to Calc in his schedule?

This summer, Jasper began doing independent work with Khan Academy, and got far enough along that he reached out to inquire about whether or not we would accept that work in lieu of our precalculus/trigonometry course. We had a video conference and I presented Jasper and his family with several options for doing a full online precalculus course. Because of the timing, I was worried that he would not have enough time to fully complete the course before the school year began, so I mapped out several different options that would encourage his initiative while also ensuring he had the mathematical background he would need to move forward.

-As a teacher, what are your thoughts when a student takes

How were you involved in the process of how to make this jump happen?

We encouraged him to reach out to Deb Merriam and then we stepped back as we really wanted him to manage this himself.

What are your impressions of how this process happened?

Deb connected Jasper to Diane, and then very quickly, Diane, Jasper, and my husband had a video conference to discuss whether or not this was a good decision. Diane was both encouraging of his interest, but pragmatic in the sense that she knew that watching Khan Academy videos isn't enough to really understand the concepts. She recommended an online test to assess how much he really knew, and then online modules to fill in the gaps. He was so committed to completing the modules in August that he lost

intelligent assessment and learning system), I would be able to test out of Precalc and into Calculus. She set up ALEKS for me, and I completed the pretest and found I was decently close to completion. I decided to just go for it. I then completed the ALEKS curriculum in

ownership of their journey like this at Parker?

I love when students are pursuing their own goals—and I want to try to find different ways to say “yes” when a student has ideas about what they want to learn or do.

-What was the process like that Jasper needed to complete in order to make this happen?

He was highly independent in his work. The math courses that I set him up with are self-paced but do not include much instruction, so he needed to be able to read examples, make sense of the math on his own, look things up and seek help when stuck, and find energy and motivation in the middle of Covid. He put in some LONG days to reach his goal.

-How was he supported through this journey?

I think that the more progress Jasper made with his work, the more motivated he became. (I wonder if my questions about whether or not it would be possible in the limited

interest in learning how to drive! He completed all of the modules and then retested and he passed. If he hadn't passed the test, Diane had recommended an online course he could take while taking Pre-Calc to deepen his interest in math.

I'm amazed that Diane had the energy to encourage one student's interest in the run up to starting up school again amidst a pandemic. It takes extra work to individualize instruction this way and many schools won't do it; it is simply easier to keep kids with the pack. The teachers and culture of Parker do such an incredible job of teaching the kids how to self-assess, which includes both knowing when they want to pursue an interest like Jasper did with Calculus and when they need to take more time, which Jasper also did in Div 1 AH when he recognized he needed to work on his writing.

How do you feel about

three weeks, making it into Calculus, and entering it smoothly. I absolutely do not regret my decision, as ALEKS and Diane got me completely ready for a smooth entry into Calculus.

It felt good to make the decision myself and reinforced my view of Parker as being freeform. Most public schools wouldn't really let this happen, just forcing everyone into the center of the bell curve instead of forcing everyone forward.

I want to do something in Math in my future and in College. I'm thinking of majoring in math when I enter college as it's really the most interesting field I've encountered so far.

time he had was also a motivation—he strikes me as someone who may have thought, “Challenge accepted!”) And I think that the unanxious expectations of the whole setup may have left him free to explore the possibilities without fear—this was about exploring what he could do, not meeting

**your son's ability to
do this and his
decision to do it?**

I feel very proud that he made an independent decision and then advocated for himself. He'll need to do that throughout his higher education experience if he wants to maximize his learning.

someone else's demands or externally imposed goals.

**-What can others
learn from Jasper's
path this summer?**

If you are curious about whether or not something is possible, ask!

And when life puts you in quarantine, math is still there for you!

**-Could you give me a
few words on your
thoughts of Jasper
being at the center of
his education and
how
student-as-worker,
teacher-as-coach
comes into play
here?**

Honestly, this was all Jasper. I set up the course and offered help if he needed it, and I set some clear parameters for the level of performance he needed to achieve to reach his goals, but Jasper is the one who did all of the work. I think he may have enjoyed working with such singular intensity on this goal—and I know that the level of self-direction and self-discipline he had was the key to his success. He worked really hard!

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