

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

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For Immediate Release

Endowments invests \$700K to launch program that prepares youth for future work and commitment to community

Pittsburgh Readiness Institute will help students learn skills, attitudes and values needed to be good citizens and effective workers

PITTSBURGH, Pa., Feb. 5, 2020 — The Heinz Endowments today announced the launch of a new and innovative education initiative to help youth and young adults meet the employment and civic demands of a constantly changing society.

The foundation is initially investing \$700,000 this year in the creation of the Pittsburgh Readiness Institute (PRI), beginning with a six-week summer program for approximately 50 high school students that will serve as a pilot for the PRI strategy. Based on the outcome of the pilot, PRI's roll-out will continue next year with an updated program that expands beyond the summer, culminating in 2022 with establishing a year-round program.

PRI's educational approach involves providing participants the opportunity to work for pay on real-world projects that provide solutions to industry and community problems. By collaborating with schools, employers and civic leaders, the institute is believed to be the country's first out-of-school-time training program that focuses on helping students develop the skills, attitudes and values to become what the program calls "community and future ready" for a productive life at school, on the job and in society.

Students from schools throughout Allegheny County will qualify as candidates for the program through teacher and community leader recommendations. Partners in the program currently include the Consortium for Public Education, Community College of Allegheny County and the University of Pittsburgh, which are working with the Endowments to create the framework for PRI and run the summer program.

“We want our young people to be prepared for current and future jobs in the 21st century, but we also hope that they will create a more just society,” said Endowments President Grant Oliphant. “The Heinz Endowments believes the Pittsburgh Readiness Institute will help students realize the contributions they can make to the workplace and to their communities.”

The institute also is designed to encourage educators and other professionals who serve as PRI instructors to take the insights they've gained from the program back to their schools, companies and community groups. PRI organizers hope these individuals and their institutions will continue to collaborate with other organizations in preparing future generations to be good citizens and effective workers.

The Endowments initiative is led by Stanley Thompson, who is Executive Director of PRI as well as the organization's Senior Director of Education, a position he has held since 2008. "We have three separate sectors — education, industry and community — that look at what they're contributing to someone's post-high school experience, and they're using their own lens to say, 'This is what we think you should focus on,'" he said.

"The problem with that approach is it's piecemeal, and although there are kids who benefit from the expertise that educators, industry and community leaders have to offer, the fact that their visions are not aligned leaves many kids at a disadvantage. We're hoping to create greater alignment."

In addition to helping different sectors better coordinate their efforts for educating today's students, the Endowments' decision to establish the Pittsburgh Readiness Institute was partly in response to the 2016 Allegheny Conference on Community Development report "Inflection Point: Supply, Demand and the Future of Work in the Pittsburgh Region." The report forecasted that the region will have a shortfall of 80,000 workers by 2025.

The foundation also recognized the increasing focus on students' career and college readiness as reflected in the state Department of Education's Future PA Ready Index, now used in evaluating Pennsylvania schools.

While overseeing the Endowments' Education Program, Dr. Thompson observed these trends as he and foundation staff worked with schools, community-based organizations, and civic leaders to advance educational achievement and life skills for K-12 students in the Pittsburgh region.

Before joining the Endowments, he served as Executive Director of Times Squared Academy for Engineering, Mathematics, Science and Technology, a K-12 charter school in Providence, Rhode Island, and a senior associate for a national school reform network at Brown University. A former English teacher, he also has worked as a middle and high school principal in Wisconsin and Rhode Island; director of a career and technical center in Rhode Island; and associate director of high schools for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in Massachusetts.

The PRI will test approaches for instruction, personal exploration, career guidance and coalition building, Dr. Thompson said. Eligible students for this year's summer program must be entering their senior year of high school. Those selected will be paid a yet-to-be-determined stipend and will be placed in teams during the six-week session to learn how to analyze problems and develop creative solutions that benefit the larger community, industry or both.

Each student team will have a cohort of instructors that includes an educator, a business professional and a community leader who will guide the students in completing their projects. The instructor teams also will undergo training before the student program begins. To document their collaborations and project designs, students will produce digital portfolios highlighting aspects of their work that they can share with a guidance counselor, college admission staff or employer.

The Summer Institute will be housed at either the Community College of Allegheny County's North Side campus or the University of Pittsburgh. There's also a possibility that students will be divided between the campuses.

PRI seeks to create "community and future readiness" for students in line with its goals to "Ensure that every learner – regardless of their zip code, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and ability level – has the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to design and lead a purposeful life – in matters personal, professional, and public – because they are well-supported by the schools, employers, and civic institutions in the Pittsburgh region."

"The preparation for and work on real-world projects will provide experiences that are expected to help students learn skills and values that can be used in a variety of vocations, demonstrate their talent and potential, and increase their interest in contributing to their communities," said Dr. Thompson.

"As students return to school with a better understanding of how to live purposeful lives, PRI organizers hope adult instructors will use what they learned from the program's collaborative experiences within their organizations and through interaction with other institutions, possibly contributing to a cultural shift in how to approach education in the region."

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