

HARPER COLLEGE'S PROMISE PROGRAM PANEL DISCUSSION INCLUDES PHS FRESHMAN, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION DUNCAN



Ivette Castanon (right), a Palatine High School freshman, participated in a panel discussion with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (left) at Harper College on Sept. 9.

As Harper College's Promise Scholarship Program becomes available for freshmen this year, families are learning about the positive impact the program can have once students graduate high school.

Freshman students at Palatine High School had the opportunity to meet U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at Harper College as he recognized the Harper College's Promise Scholarship Program and partnerships with Districts 211, 214, and 220 on Sept. 9.

At the event, Palatine High School freshman Ivette Castanon participated in a panel discussion hosted at Harper College. Secretary Duncan was a participant, along with educators, a community parent, and a local businessman. Ivette, who is one of the first students accepted into the program, described what the Harper Promise opportunity can allow her to accomplish.

"My mom told me about the program first, and I thought it was so great that they have something like this," she said. "A lot of people decide to not go to college after high school and I really want to go to college. I want to be a doctor and I have this plan that after high school I would maybe try to go to Oxford University."



Palatine High School students attended the Harper College event and posed with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (top right).

Under Harper College's Promise Scholarship Program, every student in the district can earn up to two years of tuition if they're willing to do the things in high school that will make them successful in college and in the workplace – maintain solid grades, have good attendance, do not repeat classes, and provide service to their community. The program aims to promote life skills and habits that will help students succeed in college and their careers.

This year's freshman students are the first class eligible for the program and students must maintain the program's criteria throughout all four years of high school.

Secretary Duncan commended Harper College, Districts 211, 214, and 220, as well as surrounding communities, for efforts to make sure each student is college and career ready.

"What we are trying to do is to take to scale what you are doing at Harper," Secretary Duncan said at the event. "Everyone here knows that a high school diploma is critical. You have to get one but it's insufficient. If you stop going to school right after graduation, there are very few jobs out there. The goal is to make community college free."



Ivette Castanon (center), a Palatine High School freshman, participated in a panel discussion with Arne Duncan (left) at Harper College on Sept. 9.

Secretary Duncan also explained how the importance of programs like Harper College's Promise have a national influence on education.

"We can make this the norm rather than the exception, and that will transform lives," he said.

Other students from Palatine High School attended the event with Ivette. These freshman students have started their high school careers in the right direction:

Keyla Bustamante (Class of 2019) – Keyla plans to study Physical Therapy in college. She is also interested in nursing and plans to take the Medical Terminology class at PHS. She plans to play high school soccer and also be involved in Palatine's Promise, Principal's Advisory Board, badminton, and other leadership opportunities. She plays violin in the Orchestra.

Esmeralda Serna (Class of 2019) – Esmeralda is first-generation to this country from Mexico. She is currently in the Orchestra at Palatine High School and is also a talented soccer player who will be trying out for the varsity soccer team as a freshman. Esmeralda will also be joining the Principal's Advisory Board, Computer Club, and Art Club. Esmeralda also contributes to her community through a youth mentor program called I-Compete.

Russel Wagner (Class of 2019) – Russel is the first of 6 siblings who will attend Palatine High School. He plans to study Medicine in college with a focus on working with children and giving back to his community. Russel currently is on the Cross Country Team and also plans to join the Lacrosse team in the spring. Russel is looking to get involved in school activities such as the Film Club and the Principal's Advisory Board.

Jahjarie Brown (Class of 2019) – Jahjarie has a passion for music and is currently enrolled in the music program at Palatine High School. Jahjarie is a talented percussionist and looks to be a leader in the Band at Palatine High School. Jahjarie also plans to play basketball and run track & field as well as joining the Principal's Advisory Board during his first year of high school.

Aleena Qazi (Class of 2019) – Aleena plans to pursue a college degree in the medical field. She is considering pharmacy or nursing as possible degrees. At PHS, she will take the Medical Terminology and CNA classes. She is also interested in leadership opportunities and public speaking. She plans to participate in debate and the track team.

Kianna Graves (Class of 2019) – Kianna plans to pursue a degree in elementary education. She is excited about taking Early Childhood Studies at PHS and working with preschoolers. She will also participate in Palatine's Promise (leadership club that promotes positive school culture), debate, yearbook, Principal's Advisory Board, student council, and volleyball.

Natalia Medina (Class of 2019) – Natalia will pursue a degree in English with plans to be a novelist. She is going to take all of the writing related courses at PHS such as journalism, creative writing, and expository composition. She will participate in Palatine's Promise, Yearbook, debate and the orchesis team.

Also in attendance were Rogelio Anguino (Class of 2019), and Tyler Williams-Smith (Class of 2019)

Interested freshmen can sign up for Harper's Promise Oct. 15 through Dec. 15, 2015. For more information, please visit the website [here](#).