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PRESS RELEASE

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Upland Unified Marks Historic First Day at Pathways Prep Academy

UPLAND – Upland Unified School District celebrated the opening of Pathways Prep Academy on Aug. 10, welcoming the inaugural class of 100 students to the West End region's first Early College High School. The historic milestone was marked with live music, dancing, and bursts of colorful confetti as students arrived to cheers from faculty, staff, community members, and local leaders before beginning a new educational journey that will allow them to earn college credits and an associate degree while pursuing their high school diploma.

The VIP gala brought together Congresswoman Judy Chu, Upland Unified Board President Mary Locke, local educators, Upland community members, and a contingent from Atlanta's nationally recognized Ron Clark Academy, whose innovative educational model helped inspire the creation of Pathways Prep.

"We are so excited to see all of you here today," Pathways Prep Principal Courtney Miller said. "We have waited for this day for many months. You came to Pathways Prep because you believe in our mission, and we're going to help you discover your purpose and leave a legacy for the classes to come, because you are the first class in the history of Pathways Prep!"

The excitement and enthusiasm of Pathways Prep's first day was personified by freshman Lily Zarza, who couldn't wait for the school year to begin. Zarza also said she is ready for the academic challenge presented by Pathways Prep, eager to begin earning college credits, and poised to be part of the school's emerging legacy.

"I came to Pathways Prep so I could be a part of the school's history," Zarza said. "My goal is to become Pathways Prep's first valedictorian. My dream job is to be a psychiatric nurse, and earning an associate degree in high school will help make that possible. On the first day, I want to meet new friends and find out which House I will be part of."

To build community from day one, students were introduced to Pathways Prep's House System, a tradition designed to foster teamwork, leadership, and school spirit. During the opening assembly, each student learned their House assignment as colorful confetti cannons erupted and classmates celebrated together. Students were assigned to one of four Houses: Altruismo (black), Amistad (red), Rêveur (blue), or Isibindi (green).

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The first day of school marked an important milestone for Upland Unified Chief Academic Officer Dr. Shinay Bowman, the founder of Pathways Prep Academy. Speaking to the school's first cohort of students, Bowman told them their high school experience would open doors to opportunities and possibilities they may have only dreamed of.

"We know when you step through these doors, it's going to be magical," Bowman said. "You're going to have the best years of your life. You're going to be high school students and college students at the same time. You're going to have fun, and we're going to set you up to take over the world."

Bowman said she was inspired to create the school after she visited the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta in 2021, a private fourth- through eighth-grade middle school with a 100% graduation rate and a legacy of preparing its students to attend Ivy League colleges. When Bowman returned, she began developing the idea for a public high school using the Ron Clark model. Now, Pathways Prep is no longer a dream, but a reality.

Every aspect of Pathways Prep was intentionally designed to inspire students. Classrooms bear names such as The Ivy League Study Hall and The Language Loft, while colorful murals, the Phoenix Code, and the school's graduate profile reinforce the values of generosity, responsibility, empathy, authenticity, and tenacity. Together, these elements reflect the school's commitment to preparing students for success in college, careers, and life.

"The opening of Pathways Prep Academy represents an investment in the future of our students and our community," Locke said. "These students are making history as our inaugural class, and we are incredibly proud to provide them with an innovative educational experience that will prepare them to thrive in college, careers, and whatever path they choose. We cannot wait to see the legacy they begin building today."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

UUSD_PathwaysPrep1: Pathways Prep Academy student Kadin Fitz arrived on campus to cheers and high fives from staff and community members as they welcomed each Pathways Prep Academy student to their first day of school on Aug. 10.

UUSD_PathwaysPrep2: Congresswoman Judy Chu (center) presented Pathways Prep Academy principal Courney Miller (left) and Upland Unified Board President Mary Locke (right) with commemorative certificates during a VIP gala to celebrate the opening of the new college prep academy.

UUSD_PathwaysPrep3: Amber Bravo (center) is celebrated by fellow Isbindi house members, Physics teacher James Granger (left), and paraprofessional Stephen King (right) after being sorted into her new house during a Pathways Prep Academy sorting ceremony, where each student was placed into one of four "houses" amid bursts of colored confetti and cheers from staff and classmates.

UUSD_PathwaysPrep4: English teacher Quintan Valles addresses students during the first day of school at Pathways Prep Academy, the first early college high school in the West End region of San Bernardino County.

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