



National Charter School Week: Purdue Polytechnic High School

By Educator Barnes – May 14, 2019

Purdue Polytechnic High School (PPHS) is a public charter school partnered with Purdue University. It opened Fall 2017 in the Union 525 building. Currently, it is located downtown on the fourth floor of Circle Center Mall. The downtown campus will relocate to the Mallory Building on the near east side for the 2020-21 school year. This school year wraps up the second year of the school's existence. Next, school year a second campus will open in the Broad Ripple Area.

Purdue Polytechnic High School was created to address a need. Purdue University wanted to address the 'brain drain' issue. Purdue attracts talent from across the United States and globally. Students come to Indiana, soak up knowledge and skills, and then leave. This does not benefit Indiana. Purdue wanted to attract and retain local talent, and this is how Purdue Polytechnic High School came to life.

The partnership between Purdue and this high school allows students to have opportunities they might not have in the traditional public school setting such as working with different industries to solve problems. These students also receive an additional bonus which Marketing and Recruitment Coordinator Charli Renckly-DeWhitt highlighted:

As long as students meet minimum requirements, they earn admission to Purdue University. Admission to Purdue is really competitive so to have a guaranteed spot is incredible. Purdue knows the kind of hands-on educational model we have at PPHS and trusts that our students will be better prepared for the rigors of Purdue than their counterparts at other schools.

What else is unique about Purdue Polytechnic High School? What type of student should attend this school? The best way to answer this question is to hear from a current student. Sophomore Jacy Thomas was more than happy to share why Purdue Polytechnic is the right school for her and why it might be the right high school for your child.

What was your education like before you came to Purdue Polytechnic High School?

I went to school in the same township, Franklin Township, from kindergarten through eighth grade. Elementary was great. I loved all of my teachers, and it was fine. Then, I went to middle school. I was like holy macaroni; this school is huge!

There were so many kids in the classroom. I knew it wasn't fair to me or to the teacher. Sometimes voices didn't get heard enough, and sometimes some students needed more attention. It's totally understandable, but I didn't want to risk that for my high school education.

My health was not as good as it is today, and so I was absent a lot. I had to be at Riley, and I had to miss school for it. It was kind of a bumpy situation. No one deserves to be in that situation. It was no one's fault, but I needed a smaller setting.

Why did you want to attend Purdue Polytechnic High School?

Purdue really caught my eye, not just for my health reasons but also for the STEM. I like science. I like math...technology, engineering; I thought I should give it a try. That's how I ended up at Purdue Polytechnic.

How are the class sizes at Purdue Polytechnic versus your middle school experience?

There's like roughly 15 to 20 kids per class. It is way smaller, and it's way more efficient. We get through our sessions faster, and it gives us more time for one-on-one time with the teacher. We have a very flexible schedule. If you don't understand, you can come back during homeroom time.

What does a typical day look like at Purdue Polytechnic?

Our homeroom is at the beginning of the day from 8:45 to 9:30. The rest of the day is either classes or PLT which is personal learning time. That time is what you decide to work on. It is self-disciplinary. For the last fifteen minutes of the day, you go to your PLC which is your personal learning community which is also your homeroom class.

Other schools have a hard schedule where you have to be here at this time. Friday, you schedule your classes for the whole week. You get your subjects: math, history, English, engineering, and then you have your clubs on Friday. I prefer to get my classes scheduled at the beginning of the week. It is flexible. You could do two classes a day, and then you can use your personal learning time to complete work. We also have an online platform that gives you the week's curriculum and the tasks you need to get done. If you know you are going to be absent, you can schedule around that. It is your responsibility and requires self-discipline.

Does personal learning time and completing work on the online platform happen on campus or can students work at home?

You have to come to school every day. If you schedule a class and don't show up, that is skipping and abandoning your responsibility.

How does this work for your coaches? *Note: All teachers are called coaches at PPHS.*

Coaches can see who has reserved a spot for their class for each day. They teach the same class each day during the week. Also, coaches can schedule you to meet with them. This is called a dojo. Coaches schedule you to meet one-on-one with them before you make your schedule on Friday, so that time is blocked off on your schedule.

Doesn't this make your class size even smaller than 15-20?

Oh yes. I see what you mean. There could be 15 people in a class, but only five signed up to go on that Monday.

How does the staff support students with using their personal learning time efficiently?

For each subject area, there is a designated place. If you need help for math you go to a certain place. It's the same for engineering or any other subject.

How does Purdue support this school?

Purdue supports us in different ways. They sent people to talk to us about FRC (First Robotics Competition). It's varsity robotics. We have mentors to guide us. We go to Purdue to learn about college life. I love their campus. We went there three times last year. We are distinct from them. We are a high school. We have a close relationship, and we are own on thing. There is guaranteed admission to Purdue. There is an expectation to attend Purdue, but our school, our principal is supportive of other options.

Are there athletics and clubs at this school?

By the time I graduate, all of the sports will be there. I am part of the founding class so I have to grow with it. We have clubs as well. Our FRC team went to world. Anything you want, you can make happen. If advocate and get a teacher to sponsor, you can make your club happen.

What have you found difficult at Purdue Polytechnic?

The badge system caught me off guard. It was an adjustment. We still have a GPA. Every project cycle is four to six weeks. There is a theme for each cycle. In English, cycle one was fiction. You earn a gold badge which equals 4.0, silver 3.5, bronze 2.5, and not yet is a zero. The great thing about this system is you can fix your badges. You can always go back. There are always second chances, but you have to be trying. You shouldn't abuse the system. Your badges, which turn into your grades, are not finalized until the end of the school year.

What would you say to someone who is considering this school?

Are you ready to learn about self-discipline? Do you feel like you are being challenged? Do think you could better improve yourself? Do you want change? Are you sick and tired of the traditional learning system? Do want to see education looked at from a different perspective? If yes, then come to Purdue Polytechnic High School. STEM is the future. You might as well join us and get with the program.