

Student/Partner

A L L I A N C E

30 YEARS OF SCHOLARSHIPS
& MENTORING



2026-2027

Mentee
Handbook

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Welcome



Dear S/PA Students,

Welcome to Student/Partner Alliance! We are very happy to have you as part of our program and to get to know you over the next four years.

This handbook is intended to help you and your parents better understand our program and our expectations. We hope that you will feel comfortable to contact us with any questions, or concerns about anything. You can reach out to our Executive Director, Kristin Shannon at kshannon@studentpartneralliance.org.

Your success and your safety are our top priorities.

Best wishes,
The S/PA Team

About S/PA

In the late 1980s, Tom Cash informally started what would eventually become Student/Partner Alliance by providing ten students in Jersey City with tuition assistance at St. Mary's High School. Mr. Cash recognized that students attending top quality, college preparatory high schools in their neighborhoods were more prepared to qualify for college admission and scholarships.

Student/Partner Alliance was formally incorporated in 1993, and since that time, has provided 2,500 scholarships and mentoring support to students from low-income areas in NJ. Mentoring is an effective way to provide guidance and support to students.



Tom Cash & Sheila Klehm
(2 of our founders)

Our Students

- 100% of S/PA scholarship recipients have gained admission to college, post-secondary schooling, or armed forces in the past 10 years
- Represent a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds and religions

Our Schools

- 5 main schools located in Newark, Jersey City, and Roselle
- College-preparatory, community-based, structured, committed, nurturing

Students who have Mentors are...

- 52% less likely to skip a day of class
- 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs
- 93% of Mentees try harder, improve their attitude about school, and benefit from an improved self-concept

S/PA Mentoring Program

Structure & Events

Student/Partner Alliance

S/PA is affiliated with 5 urban private schools that offer a solid, college-preparatory education in a structured, caring environment. While each school is unique, they all produce an almost 100% graduation and college acceptance rate. S/PA coordinators at each school and S/PA staff work closely together to bring the best Student/Partner/Mentor experience to all involved through a carefully constructed program.

Program

At the beginning of each academic year, incoming students attend a S/PA orientation to learn about S/PA's program and the benefits of having a Mentor. The students will also learn about the events that S/PA has arranged for them to meet with their Mentors. Each fall, a Mentor training workshop is offered for Mentors, so that our Mentors can learn about the role of a Mentor, how to be an effective Mentor, S/PA events, their student Mentees, and expectations of the mentoring relationship. Legal and ethical considerations are discussed in this valuable training.

Events

We have planned in-person Mentor/Mentee get-togethers at the students' schools for the fall and will be planning additional events in-person and virtually throughout the school year. We expect you to attend all of these events. You will receive invitations to these events via email, and you are expected to RSVP to all events.

What is a Mentor?

A Mentor is:

- A trusted guide and friend
- Someone who will listen to you
- Someone who will help you explore new opportunities
- Someone who will have good ideas about how to deal with difficult situations
- A coach
- An advisor
- Consistent and dependable
- A positive role model
- Someone who always puts your safety and well-being first

A Mentor is not:

- A parent
- A peer
- An “ATM” (students are never allowed to ask their Mentors for money)
- A taxi service
- A therapist
- A tutor

Why Does Mentoring Matter?

The combination of a quality education and a supportive Mentor can allow you to reach your goals and succeed in high school, college, and life.

Benefits of Mentoring

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Healthier relationships and lifestyle choices
- High college enrollment rates and higher educational aspirations
- Enhances self-esteem and self-confidence
- Stronger relationships with parents, teachers, and peers
- Improved interpersonal skills

Expectations

What to expect as a S/PA student:

- A 4-year scholarship
 - Once you are admitted into our program, we agree to support you during your four years in high school as long as you work hard and remain at the school where you were admitted. You do not need to reapply each year.
- A Mentor
- Events
 - There will be various opportunities to meet with your Mentor and other S/PA students through S/PA organized events throughout the year.

What we expect from you:

- To attend S/PA events
 - Attending S/PA organized events gives you more time with your Mentor and helps strengthen the mentoring relationship.
 - If you cannot attend an event, please let your Mentor or a S/PA staff member know prior to the event. (RSVP to all invitations)
- To work hard in school
 - We expect all S/PA students to maintain a 2.5 GPA or higher.
 - S/PA staff and your Mentor will review your report cards carefully, including tardiness, absences, and teachers' comments.
 - No more than 3 absences and 3 tardies per semester
- To stay engaged
 - We expect all S/PA students to work with their Mentor to establish and maintain a mentoring relationship.
 - We ask that you keep in contact with your Mentor with the goal of checking in at least once a month.
 - Mentee is expected to respond to all Mentor's texts, calls, and emails within 24 hours.

Your Safety Is Our Top Concern

Building and maintaining a relationship with your Mentor is important, as you can benefit from their guidance and support.

Expect your Mentor to be a professional and dedicated person who wants to help you succeed as they act as an extra support system during your high school career.

We encourage you to discuss with your Mentor how you would both like to communicate between in-person meetings and use Email, Text, and Phone Calls. Any postings or direct messages on any Social Media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn, etc.) about S/PA and your Mentor must be approved by S/PA and/or your Mentor in advance.

If at any time, you feel that your Mentor or Partner is not behaving appropriately with you, please email Kristin Shannon, Executive Director at kshannon@studentpartneralliance.org.



Guide to Success

High school can be a hard time, filled with new experiences and academic challenges. Our virtual informational events and your Mentor can help you navigate these challenges and serve as an extra point of support.

Freshman Year

- Attend all S/PA events. (Make sure to RSVP)
- As you get used to your new school, stay organized and learn to manage your time efficiently as you make time for studying, family responsibilities and friends.

Sophomore Year

- Attend all S/PA events and regularly communicate with your Mentor once you are matched with one.
- Find a club, sport, volunteer opportunity, or hobby that you like and become active in it.
- Take a practice PSAT.

Junior Year

- Start thinking about college and speak with your guidance counselor about financial aid.
- Start preparing for the SAT/ACT, or take the SAT/ACT.
- Attend a college fair and talk to your Mentor about your college interests.
- If you have a 3.7 GPA or higher, you may qualify to apply for the AtomicMind Foundation Scholarship.

Senior Year

- Complete all of your financial aid paperwork and send in your applications.
- Speak with your Mentor, as they may be a good resource for you to help determine which college is right for you.

Final Thoughts

We would like to thank you for all your cooperation and efforts. We look forward to a great 4 years with you in our program! Please email us if you have any questions or concerns.

Words From our Graduates:

"Because of Student/Partner Alliance, I was able to complete a high school that helped me grow academically and emotionally. Without the support of S/PA, attending SVA would not have been possible for me and my family..."



"I hope one day I will be able to help other students achieve their dreams just as you have helped me. The value of your support will always be treasured."