



ARIZONA FOUNDATION

Academic Year 2025-2026

AAF MISSION

The mission of the Aspire Arizona Foundation (AAF) is to support the higher education needs of Payson, Arizona and the surrounding Rim Country rural communities.

We help young adults aspire to higher education by making college education Accessible, Attainable and Affordable.

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Meet Aspire Scholars

Noah Spalding

Noah Spalding is a strong example of the quality and impact of Payson's educational system. Arriving in 2018, he attended Rim Country Middle School (RCMS) and Julia Randall (JRE) before entering Payson High School with great energy and involvement. On the sports field, he played defensive lineman for the Longhorns and ran track where as track team captain, he and his teammates – Marco Guereque, Braddock Flaherty, Mason Herrera – placed third in State in the 4 x 100 Relay. As the long snapper on the PHS football team, he received second team All-Region recognition.

But sports were not his only involvement. "I love people and have always been curious about talking to people with different points of view than my own," he said. He is active in DECA, which prepares emerging leaders for college and careers, and in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He also serves as a youth leader for ministries in Young Life and Wyld Life, a Christian outreach program for high school and middle school students.

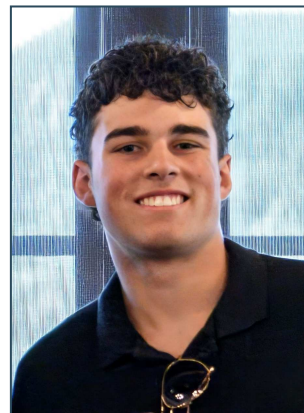
Michael Breeze, faculty member at Payson High School, observed, "Noah has a gift for authentic connection, patience, and guidance. He inspires others through his consistent commitment and the comforting atmosphere he seeks to create. He does nothing halfway, but what sets him apart is his humility and curiosity."

If sports and volunteer work haven't kept him busy enough, Noah also spends time in an internship with Pioneer Title in Payson. According to his supervisor, "Noah provides a youthful perspective to a variety of programs and has been instrumental in integrating traditional real estate practices with modern marketing strategies."

He plans to remain active in all his current activities as he begins his college career next fall at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix. He might be involved in the GCU track team, but he thinks his pre-med focus in Bio-Medical Engineering will probably keep him very occupied. "I have a heart for those who can't find a remedy for their health problems," he shared. "So, I want to pursue studies in Endocrinology and explore holistic approaches to medicine."

He will have a solid start at GCU with 42 dual-credit hours transferring through his participation in the Aspire Arizona Foundation (AAF) dual-credit program. His \$5,000 AAF scholarship combined with the Canyon Rising Honors Scholarship from GCU will help him get off to a strong start.

"I am so thankful to Aspire Arizona Foundation," Noah added. "I have talked to friends in other places and none of them have a program like Aspire. We are so fortunate to have a community that is supporting our education."



Noah Spalding

Education Elevates Everyone!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Paul Brocker

President
Aspire Arizona Foundation



In 2016, a recently formed nonprofit organization – Aspire Arizona Foundation (AAF) – was looking for a way forward in its mission to make a college education for the local, rural students accessible, attainable, and affordable. The original thinking was to support the local students who wanted to take advantage of a proposed Arizona State University (ASU) campus in Payson that was

the buzz at the time.

When that effort did not materialize, the question became: what now? Several Aspire Board members decided to meet with representatives of Gila Community College (GCC) and Payson High School (PHS) to explore how the nonprofit might continue its interest in helping local students, and a remarkable partnership was formed.

As we reflect on the past 10 years, we see an incredible story of how the Payson community and beyond has come together to improve the lives of 737 Rim Country students to date. I am proud to report that as AAF wraps up its 10th year of supporting local students in their dual enrollment (they receive both high school and college credits) course work, one significant measure of the impact that donors who embrace this mission have had on these students is clear. With the payment of the spring GCC tuition for our Aspire Scholars, AAF donors have now paid for 10,383 college credits for Payson High School and home-schooled students. Ninety-four percent of those students have received a “C” or higher in their course work and 144 students have completed more than one full year of college courses before graduating high school.

This year, two Aspire Scholars will graduate from both GCC and Payson High School at the same time, making them the 5th and 6th students to achieve that status since those early days in 2016 when all this began.

AAF initially paid for only one course per semester per student. Parents were required to pay for any additional courses. However, because of a growing community commitment to this effort, AAF today can pay for three courses per semester for participating students.

Dual enrollment has taken the spotlight across the nation, and the benefits continue to accrue. The National Student Clearing House Student Tracker service reports that “high school students who participate in dual enrollment courses are significantly more likely to earn a post-secondary degree.”

“Dual enrollment remains one of the strongest predictors of long-term student success,” says Matthew Holsapple, senior director of research for the National Student Clearing House. “At their best, these early college experiences do more than open doors. They equip students with the confidence, resilience, and momentum they need to pursue and achieve their academic goals.”

AAF’s partnership with Payson High School and Gila Community College has continued to grow and expand. This past spring semester, 130 students were enrolled in dual enrollment courses, and we anticipate similar numbers this fall. I say it often and with great appreciation: None of this would happen without the AAF donors who have embraced this mission. Thank you one and all.

Meet Aspire Alumni



Hayze Chilson

My name is Hayze Chilson. I was the salutatorian and student body vice president for the Payson High School Class of 2021, which is a fancy way of saying I am the proud runner-up of my class!

Thank you to the Aspire Arizona Foundation donors for your contributions, ensuring that students from our community are afforded the opportunity to get a head start on their education and become leaders of the next generation. To meet the moments of the 21st century, I truly believe that leaders must possess innate, community-oriented people skills—skills you often find in abundance in small towns. However, far too often, kids from rural areas are written off due to a lack of educational opportunities.

What the foundation has done is remove those barriers, giving students from Payson increased economic mobility—mobility that allows us to reinvest in this community and continue the cycle of creating opportunities for the next generation. Donors, your impact on Rim Country cannot be overstated. Thank you!

Looking back at what I’ve achieved and experienced in my life thus far, the foundation has been fundamental in shaping who I’ve become. I was born and raised here in the area and am a proud descendant of one of Payson’s founding families. When I was in middle school, politics and keeping up with the news was still a nerdy thing, and I had my heart set on going to college in Washington, D.C. As I went through high school, dual-credit classes served as the vehicle to build and sustain my analytical thinking skills, helping me demonstrate that I understood and believed the “why” behind my thinking, something I knew would ultimately give me an edge in interviews, admissions and essays down the road.

In January 2024, I graduated *summa cum laude* from George Washington University’s School of Media and Public Affairs, where I double majored in Political Communication and Political Science. Of the 130 credits required for my degree, 49 were dual credits earned at Payson High School through transfer coursework—all of which transferred! Although I didn’t realize it when I began taking dual-credit classes as a high school sophomore, those early credits ultimately made it possible for me to graduate a year and a half early. Without that head start, attending school in Washington, D.C., even with substantial academic scholarships, would not have been financially feasible. Simply put, without Aspire, achieving my academic goals would not have been possible.

After graduating from college, I began working for an international development think tank based in D.C. A highlight of that experience, at just 21 years old, was serving as the de facto communications director and organizing an event alongside the G20 in South Africa, where we hosted the Queen of the Netherlands. After a little under two years, I realized my passions lie in education and moved back home to begin substitute teaching. Next month, I will start school to earn my teaching certificate, with eventual plans for advanced degrees.

Dual-credit classes can help students graduate from college early and enter adulthood with the advantage of a reasonably priced degree and less student loan debt, something that often constrains graduates to jobs they may not enjoy. *Donors, your investment does not end with one student; it carries forward into classrooms, careers, and communities for years to come.* Thank you for making that impact.

Education Elevates Everyone!

Invest in the Next Generation

HOW DO YOU ENVISION YOUR LEGACY?

Does giving forward to the next generation of Payson scholars make you smile?

Create a lasting legacy for Payson High School and Rim Country home school students by including the Aspire Arizona Foundation (AAF) in your planned giving decisions. By establishing an AAF legacy gift, you may be able to make a larger contribution than you thought possible, while realizing significant financial and tax benefits. Check with your financial advisor to see what works for you.

AAF covers the entire cost of the dual-credit program offered to eligible Payson students. Since 2016, the dual-credit program has helped 737 Payson students earn over 10,000 college credits, saving their families many thousands of dollars in college tuition. Invest in the future of this important program and your community by including AAF in your planned giving decision.

Consider gifting your:

- **Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) as a Qualified Charitable Donation (QCD)**
- **Appreciated Stock**
- **Making a Beneficiary Designation.**

“Don’t let your IRA become an IOU to the IRS.”

*Darin Shebesta, Certified Financial Planner
Arizona Charitable Gift Planners Annual
Conference*

Your foresight and thoughtful planning will create life-changing opportunities for the next generation of college-bound Payson students. Please email or call Paul Bocker at paul@aspirearizona.org

Parent Perspective



When my oldest child began high school nearly a decade ago, a dear friend encouraged me to look into dual-credit courses as a way to prepare for college. At the time, I didn't realize just how transformative that advice would

be for our family. Since then, my three oldest children have all taken advantage of dual enrollment opportunities, and the impact has been remarkable. Not only have these courses helped them build confidence, but they've also given them a clear understanding of the expectations, pace, and structure of college-level work.

One of the most meaningful benefits has been the financial relief made possible through the support of the Aspire Arizona Foundation. By allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school, this opportunity has significantly reduced the overall cost of higher education for our family—easing the financial burden and making future planning far more manageable.

In my daughter's case, the benefits go even further. With the support of the Aspire Arizona Foundation, Ainsley is able to apply directly to a nursing program at Mesa Community College upon graduation, effectively eliminating nearly two years of college coursework.

My oldest, Ethan, is currently applying to law school after completing his bachelor's degree at Brigham Young University in just two and a half years, despite dedicating two years to serving a church service mission. These achievements have been made possible in part by the strong foundation he built through early college coursework.

My son Aidan is currently serving a church mission in Australia but has been accepted to Utah State. When he returns, he will be able to pick up where he left off thanks to the Aspire Arizona Foundation.

Our three older children will all have graduated with a considerable number of dual credits. Ainsley graduated with 41 credits, Ethan had 36 and Aidan 35. Aspire Arizona Foundation is a blessing and we are so incredibly appreciative for their contributions over the years on behalf of our children.

Katie Meredith, parent



\$2500 Scholarship

Madison Plante, Addie Parker, Madison Johns



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Suite 1
Payson, AZ 85541

Mailing Address

Return Service Requested

Aspire
ARIZONA FOUNDATION

SIXTH ANNUAL
CHARITY GOLF
TOURNAMENT

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2026
Format: Four-Person Scramble
8:00 AM Shotgun
at the Payson Golf Club

REGISTRATION

\$125	Player includes Lunch and Silent Auction
\$100	Tee Sponsor
\$750	Title Sponsor
\$20	Non-Golfer Special includes Lunch and Silent Auction

Deadline to Register is Monday, September 7
Visit AspireArizona.com to Register

ASPIRE ARIZONA FOUNDATION
CHARITY GOLF
TOURNAMENT

TITLE SPONSOR PACKAGE

- Foursome with cart
- 3' x 5' logo banner
- Product placement in the swag bags given to every golfer
- Your logo featured on each golf score card and tent cards at the luncheon tables

Includes all items listed above for \$750

To become a title sponsor contact Mike Christ at
mike.christ@me.com or (312) 560-3497

Aspire
ARIZONA FOUNDATION

Aspire Arizona Foundation (AAF) is a Payson based 501 c 3 nonprofit organization. Since 2016, AAF has assisted local rural high school, and home-schooled students get an early start on their college education by paying the tuition for dual-credit courses at Gila Community College. To date, 737 Rim Country students have enrolled in dual-credit college-level courses; 144 students have earned more than one full year of college; AAF has paid \$607,109 in tuition.

**Create Opportunities.
Change Futures.**

100% of your donation supports dual enrollment for Payson students. Help students earn college credits, reduce educational costs, and prepare for successful futures.

**Tuition paid by
AAF donors to date:
\$607,820**

Aspire Arizona Foundation is a
501(c)(3) nonprofit
Tax ID 46-4130332

CONTRIBUTION FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

I would like to support

Dual-Credit Tuition for

_____ One Student @ \$210

_____ Two Students @ \$420

_____ Three Students @ \$630

_____ Five Students @ \$1050

_____ Another Amount \$ _____

To make an **in-kind stock gift**, please email Paul Bocker at paul@aspirearizona.org or call 928-472-2588 to receive stock gift instructions or donate online at aspirearizona.com/donor-information/givenow/

Faculty Perspective

**Dr. Melanie Russell, English Professor, GCC
Investing in Potential:
Why ASPIRE Arizona Foundation Matters More Than Ever**



As a Gila Community College (GCC) professor here in Rim Country, I have the privilege of working with students who are doing something extraordinary: earning college credit while still in high school. Many of these students are the first in their families to imagine a future that includes higher education. Their motivation is strong, their curiosity is real—and their success is made possible, in large part, by ASPIRE Arizona Foundation.

ASPIRE funds are not abstract dollars on a balance sheet. I see their impact every day in my classroom. These funds directly support tuition assistance that allow students — especially those from rural, low-income, and historically underserved communities — to participate in dual enrollment programs. Without ASPIRE funding, many of these students simply would not be able to take that first step into college.

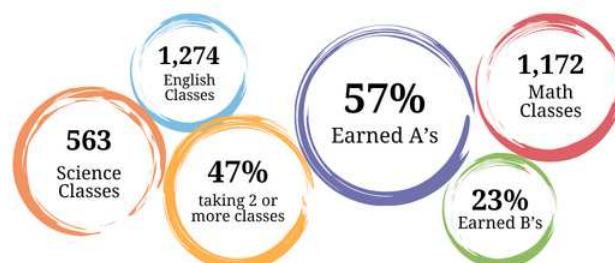
When students enroll in a dual credit course, they are not only saving money on tuition; they are gaining confidence. They begin to see themselves as college students. ASPIRE funds help cover the costs that often stand in the way: enrollment fees, online learning platforms, and the behind-the-scenes coordination required to align high school and college systems. These investments remove barriers and replace them with opportunity.

The return on investment is powerful. Students who complete dual enrollment courses are more likely to persist in college, complete degrees on time, and reduce overall student loan debt. For families, this can mean thousands of dollars in savings. For communities, it means a more educated workforce. For students, it means options—choices they may not have believed were possible before.

ASPIRE donors make this transformation possible. Your generosity sends a clear message to students: *You belong here. Your education matters.* Continued support ensures that ASPIRE can reach more students, expand access in rural and tribal communities, and respond to growing demand for dual enrollment opportunities across Arizona.

As someone who teaches these students and witnesses their growth firsthand, I can say with certainty that ASPIRE funding is an investment with lasting impact. Every dollar donated helps create pathways to higher education, economic mobility, and a stronger Arizona. Thank you for believing in our students—and for helping them believe in themselves.

3,337 College Classes Taken By Aspire Students (2016 - 2026)



Aspire awardees for 2025/2026

Aspire Scholarships

\$2,5000 Recipients

Madison Johns
Addie Parker
Madison Plante

\$5,000 Recipients

Cameron Cooper
Kyndall Hatch
Noah Spalding
Jessa Tenney

Aspire Achievement Award (Earned more than 30 Credits)

Eaton White - 30 Credits
Caelum Rosselli - 30 Credits
Brody Potter - 30 Credits
Miraya Platt - 30 Credits
Lilian Warner - 31 Credits
Roshanah Rodriguez - 31 Credits
Isaac Luna - 31 Credits
Tulsi Miranda - 32 Credits
Aaron Wilson - 33 Credits
Jackson Mason - 34 Credits
Sea Anna Broberg - 34 Credits
Laura Gustafson - 40 Credits
Audrey Dillard - 41 Credits
Noah Spalding - 42 Credits
Ainsley Meredith - 42 Credits
Lincoln Mcdowell - 46 Credits
Carter Mcdowell - 46 Credits
Jessa Tenney - 47 Credits
Tatum Mcdowell - 54 Credits
Kyndall Hatch - 56 Credits
Kassandra Apodaca Vega - 65

Aspire Ambition Award (Earned more than 20 Credits)

Isaiah Dudley - 22 Credits
Payton Stuart - 24 Credits
Cheyenne McClellan - 24 Credits
Treigh Marinelli - 24 Credits
Morgan Cluff - 24 Credits
David Schalesky - 25 Credits
Madison Plante - 25 Credits
Brooklyn Snyder - 26 Credits
Addie Parker - 26 Credits
Madison Johns - 26 Credits
Samuel Hogue - 26 Credits
Cameron Cooper - 26 Credits
Bailey Cline - 26 Credits
Lainey Althoff - 27 Credits
Amber Hennessey - 28 Credits
Jada Bertone - 28 Credits

Meet PHS and GCC Graduate

Kassandra Apodaca Vega



A senior at Payson High School this past year, Kassandra Apodaca Vega credits the Aspire Arizona Foundation and the dual-credit program with changing the trajectory of her life. By providing a pathway to free college courses, the program has allowed her to earn an Associate of Arts degree in General Education alongside with her high school diploma. For Kassandra, the program is about more than just credit hours; it is a catalyst for life-changing opportunities. And she has taken full advantage of it!

Reflecting on the impact of Aspire, she emphasized the empowerment it provides students. "The ability to take free college classes has provided us a chance to empower our lives," she noted during a speech expressing her gratitude to the program's donors at our annual Aspire Scholars Breakfast at The Rim Club.

Coming from a family where her parents were unable to pursue their own higher education, the program holds deep personal significance for Kassandra. She describes how the opportunity allowed her and her older brothers to jumpstart their collegiate paths without placing a financial burden on their family. She expressed how this support has been vital, noting, "Being able to start this affordably has made the extra work worth it."

Kassandra's success has been bolstered by dedicated educators like Ms. Tamara Fowler and Dr. Melanie Russell, who encouraged her growth in writing and critical thinking. The time in their dual-credit classes gave her added confidence. As she transitions to university life, she recognizes the collective effort behind her academic achievements. Looking back on her high school experience, she expressed deep gratitude for those who championed her education. "I will never forget the support that has been provided to me through my high school years" Kassandra said.

With over 60 college credits in hand, and several certificates as well, Kassandra is ready to embrace her next chapter at Arizona State University as a Sun Devil, standing as a testament to the transformative power of community support and academic ambition.



\$5000 Scholarship

Jessa Tenney, Kyndall Hatch, Cameron Cooper, Noah Spalding

Education Elevates Everyone!