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**DIGITAL PIONEERS ACADEMY HOSTS KICKOFF EVENT FOR FOOTBALL PROGRAM TO HONOR TRAGIC DEATHS IN SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

*The Players Coalition Announces \$100,000 Seed Grant to Support the Team*

**Washington, DC: 1 pm ET** – Digital Pioneers Academy, a public charter school in Southeast DC, announced a \$100,000 grant from the Players Coalition to establish the school’s first football program. The football program will honor the legacy of two students and one teacher who were tragically killed this school year, all of whom were connected by their love of football.

“These tragic events showed the profound role football plays in building community and helping students thrive. The coaches were the trusted adults that all scholars—especially the ones in grief—turned to in need. Investing in a football program is an investment in our students’ academic and social well-being,” said Digital Pioneers Academy Founder and CEO, Mashea Ashton.

At the event, the Players Coalition, a nonprofit founded by former NFL players dedicated to making an impact on social justice and racial equality, made a \$100,000 contribution to the program.

“Investing in opportunities for students to heal and thrive through sports aligns with the Players Coalition’s commitment to using the power of sport to ensure equity, safety, and opportunity for youth. It is an honor and privilege to be able to support Digital Pioneers Academy as they launch their football program. We are dedicated to this community and look forward to continuing to deepen our partnership,” said Kyle Arrington, Super Bowl champion, author, philanthropist, and Players Coalition advocate.

The contribution will go a long way toward meeting the program’s \$275,000 fundraising goal to cover transportation, uniforms, equipment, coaches, and fields. DPA has set up a [GoFundMe page](#) to raise the remainder of the program’s start-up costs.

The event included a performance from DPA’s step team, as well as a visit from Kyle Arrington. Arrington was born and raised in Prince George’s County and had a successful career as a

cornerback with the Ravens, Buccaneers, and Patriots. He gave a motivational address to students about overcoming adversity.

DPA students had been asking for a football program since the school opened in 2018. At the time, the school lacked the student population and the facilities to make a football team possible. But after the deaths of Antione, Jakhi, and Keenan, Mashea saw that she needed to fundraise to finally make this dream a reality.

The benefits of a football program extend well beyond the joy of competitive athletics. DPA students who participated in after-school activities saw increased grades and attendance and decreased disciplinary issues. For the football team, part of the team's practice regimen will include study hall three times a week. In addition, student-athletes will have to maintain a certain GPA and the coaching staff will be composed of local leaders with deep relationships in the community who can serve as mentors to students.

"Our amazing resilient scholars deserve endless opportunities. DPA will always prioritize its core academic mission as a computer science-based school, and we see developing a strong football program as aligned – and not in tension – with that goal," Ashton said.

### **About Digital Pioneers Academy**

The mission of Digital Pioneers Academy (DPA) is to develop the next generation of innovators. The public charter middle and high school prepare students to meet or exceed the highest academic standards while cultivating the strength of character necessary to both graduate from four-year colleges and persist in 21st-century careers. Founded in 2018, DPA currently serves 500 students in grades 6th through 10th grade and will add a grade a year until becoming a full 6th-12 grade school in the fall of 2023. In the 2022 family survey, 9 out of ten parents said they would refer DPA to a friend or family member searching for a school.

### **About Players Coalition**

Players Coalition is an independent 501(c)(3) (charity) and 501(c)(4) (advocacy) organization, working with professional athletes, coaches and owners across leagues to improve social justice and racial equality in our country. Founded in 2017 by NFL players Anquan Boldin and Malcolm Jenkins, Players Coalition continues to grow exponentially with representation from more than 1,500 athlete advocates across 12 professional leagues.