

Med students  
Nia Buckner,  
left, and Nnamdi  
Ihejirika at  
Pittsburgh  
Arsenal 6-8.



TOM ALTYAN/UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

## Middle School Champs

Parents of middle school students might tell you it's tough to understand what's percolating in a young person's mind. Consider a seventh-grade student at Arsenal Middle School who learned CPR as part of an education partnership between the middle school and the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. The learning experience inspired her to start thinking about forensic medicine.

Sylvia Owusu-Ansah, MD assistant professor of pediatrics, says the girl was new at Arsenal last year and seemed hesitant. But over time, she proved to be very curious. "She asked very astute questions," says Owusu-Ansah, who noticed the girl's confidence building toward the end of the 2020-2021 school year. So when Owusu-Ansah bumped into the girl's mother at a back-to-school event this year and learned her latest interest, Owusu-Ansah walked away with a sense of validation for the program.

"The mother told me that her daughter wants to work in a morgue someday," says Owusu-Ansah. "So there was this misconception [at first] that she was disconnected, when it turns out she was very connected."

Pitt Med faculty and students launched the Career Help Advancement and Achievement Mentorship Program (CHAMP) in August 2020 as a way to connect medical students and middle school students from underrepresented groups.

CHAMP offers middle-schoolers advanced STEM education and provides leadership experience to the med students. "This is mentorship in a 360-degree view, because while we get to mentor these students, we are being mentored by other professionals," says second-year med student Nia Buckner, one of the medical students who serves on the program's steering committee.

Buckner points out that CHAMP offers more than a CPR lesson. Arsenal students were given STEM and wellness kits that were used in conjunction with specific curricula. And in line with CHAMP's mission of providing academic and healthy lifestyle guidance, students will learn life lessons that go beyond medicine and science. In one example, the kids will learn financial skills through the support of Dollar Bank, which is among the community sponsors helping to make CHAMP possible.

Pediatrics faculty members Noel Spears Zuckerbraun, MD associate professor, and Oriquida Torres, MD assistant professor, say their involvement in CHAMP has been incredibly rewarding. "What better way to move the needle than in our own neighborhood," says Spears Zuckerbraun.

The needle is moving among the roughly 150 students participating, says Arsenal teacher Tara Maddex. Speaking specifically to the CPR curriculum, she says the students enjoyed it, though there was one hang-up with the CPR doll each was given: "Their biggest concern was, 'Do I really have to put my mouth on this?'" Maddex says with a laugh. "But I think my kids thought it was really exciting. They were super engaged."

—Michael Aubele

## SOLUTIONS, NOT SIDES

The School of Medicine has established an Ombuds Office; it's designed to provide a safe, welcoming, confidential and unbiased setting for students to relay their concerns and explore options available to them for informal resolution.

"This impartial office is another avenue for students to have their concerns heard," says Anantha Shekhar, an MD, PhD, senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean, School of Medicine.

He expects that the Ombuds team will help identify opportunities for systemic change and be a source of meaningful suggestions for ways to improve the school.

Students may contact the Ombuds Office to discuss difficulties that have been unresolved elsewhere. They are also encouraged to contact the Ombuds Office directly if for any reason they are fearful, embarrassed or unwilling to contact other offices.

Ombudspersons are prepared to offer guidance on interpersonal conflicts with supervisory personnel or colleagues, academic disputes, bullying, harassment, grievances or questions about University policies. Its staff will help students find a resolution to their issue but will not take sides, says Dean Shekhar.

The office is likely to become a model for other Pitt units, notes Valerie Kinloch, René and Richard Goldman Dean and professor of education at Pitt, who is an advisor to the Ombuds program:

"I believe that, over time, this new Ombuds unit will be able to provide other campus units with tangible strategies and engaging practices for truly centering, valuing and supporting students and student experiences in even more proactive and productive ways," —Michele Dula Baum

For more information: [www.medschool.pitt.edu/ombuds-office](http://www.medschool.pitt.edu/ombuds-office)