

# Early momentum

## Teens build their confidence and earn college credit, all before high school graduation

By Penny Walker, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story was featured in the [summer 2025 issue of ASU Thrive](#).

**By Amanda Loudin**

As parents of seven children, Julie and Dietrich Evans spend a lot of time thinking about how to pay for college tuition. So, when they moved to Fountain Hills, Arizona, in 2021, they were disappointed to learn the local high school didn't offer a dual-enrollment option. They still had half their brood to usher through high school.

Last fall, all that changed for the better when Fountain Hills High School partnered with the Accelerate ASU program.

Through the partnership with ASU, junior and senior students at Fountain Hills High School can earn credits in college-level courses with no fees. Teachers are present and support the online ASU coursework — and in fact, build it into the school day — and students are expected to participate.

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### College credit for high schoolers

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 88% of students who take college courses in high school continue on to higher education.

Some 550 schools have offered higher education courses for college credit through partnerships with ASU, with more than 60 advanced-level online courses to choose from.

School administrators interested in learning more can request

When the Evans family learned about the program with ASU, they knew this would be an opportunity for their son, Avery, to get a head start on college.

information about Accelerate ASU at [accelerate.asu.edu](https://accelerate.asu.edu) or visit [asuprepglobal.org](https://asuprepglobal.org).

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“We immediately planned out how many classes he could take senior year to maximize the opportunity,” Avery's mom, Julie, says.

Avery has done just that and will graduate high school with 16 to 18 college credits this spring. With an eye on a career in sports medicine, Avery's ASU classes have included sports medicine, math and English. He accomplishes it all while balancing a busy, high-level multisport athlete's schedule, as well, part of the Evans' family tradition — three older siblings are college athletes.

“We highly value academics and athletics, using sports as a platform for a strong and healthy life,” says Julie, '98 BA in elementary education.

In fact, the family of entrepreneurs own a fitness gym as one of their small businesses.

Avery aspires to play basketball in college and has also earned top placements in state-level swimming competitions. Put together with the rigors of the ASU classes and his high school classes, Julie says that Avery has developed time management skills that will serve him well when he enters college full time next fall.

“If you stay disciplined,” Avery says, “it's much easier to manage everything.”

The structure of Accelerate has been helpful in this approach.

“It's easy to ask for help when I need it,” Avery says. “The professors are available. Having a high school teacher in the room also helps.”

Avery's parents have watched him develop through the program and have been impressed by what they've seen.

“It's well organized,” Julie says, “with prompts leading up to major assignments, making the process more manageable for students.”

For his part, Avery says he has learned a great deal in the college-level courses.

“The material is more in-depth, and I feel like I'm getting ahead in college-level work.”

## **Inspiring others and gaining college credits**

Like Avery, Fountain Hills High School senior Shania Rivera is a multisport athlete, and throughout school she has played softball, volleyball, swimming and basketball. She's also active in leadership roles, sitting on the superintendent and student advisory councils, and works two part-time jobs — one at a day care and one at a post office.

On top of all that, thanks to Fountain Hills High School's programming with ASU, which the school calls Fountain Hills University, Rivera is halfway to earning her associate degree.

With a packed schedule like that, Rivera benefits from a hefty dose of self-discipline and a willingness to start each day early, beginning with an economics class at 7:45 a.m.

“Then I work on my ASU courses, and from noon to 3 p.m., I work,” she explains. “I have an hour to prepare for softball practice, which runs from 4 to 5:30 p.m. After that, I focus on schoolwork, socializing and other responsibilities.”

Rivera’s Accelerate courses have included Intro to Anatomy and Physiology, Intro to Psychology, English 101 and several math classes. Her Accelerate time counts toward both high school and college credits, and when she graduates high school this May, Rivera will have earned 19 college credits.

According to her mother, Francisca Rivera, Shania’s ability to keep so many balls in the air is no surprise.

“She has always challenged herself, even as a kindergartner running for student council,” Francisca says. “She pushes herself academically and takes advantage of opportunities like these ASU classes. Fountain Hills offering these courses is a great opportunity for students.”

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## Sierra Vista’s solutions for its middle and high school students

In southern Arizona, in response to community needs, the Sierra Vista Unified School District worked with ASU Prep Global to create a new academy offering a flexible hybrid learning option for students in grades 7–12. Students complete coursework online and attend in-person sessions at least four hours a week, a unique model that works best for students and families who seek more flexibility during the school year.

Hybrid students remain SVUSD students, with access to all extracurricular activities, clubs, sports and events like prom and graduation. Classes include an array of offerings, such as human anatomy and physiology, engineering and physics, and macro- and microeconomics, taught by ASU Prep Global instructors. Students can also earn college credit for certain ASU classes. The academy serves 52 students, with plans to expand to over 200.

Learn more at [asupreglobal.org](https://asupreglobal.org)

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The Rivera family resides in the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, bordering Fountain Hills, and Shania has been an active member of the community.

“I have held ambassador titles within my tribe,” she says.

Prior to the Accelerate ASU program, Shania found the idea of college coursework intimidating, but the self-paced format has made it manageable, she says: “It helps busy students like me balance school, sport and work.”

Shania’s next step is preparing for college, where she will play softball and work toward a career as a physical therapist.

## What’s good for the students is good for the school

Brent Olsen, ’22 BA in English, a Fountain Hills English teacher and basketball coach, has watched Avery, Shania and all the students thrive through the program the school has with ASU, and says its flexibility works well for students.

“For instance, while Avery has dedicated class time, he also has the freedom to move at his own pace, working ahead or taking breaks when schedules become more demanding,” Olsen says. “The same is true for Shania, and for our other students.”

One of the biggest benefits of the Accelerate ASU program is that it removes the barriers to college for students, according to Olsen.

“Many students who previously didn’t see themselves as ‘college material’ are now finding success in these courses, building confidence and seriously considering higher education,” he says. “Others who may have thought college was financially out of reach are seeing new possibilities, thanks to the program’s affordability.

“The majority of our students are earning A’s and B’s, entering college with strong GPAs, and, most importantly, gaining the confidence that they can handle college-level work.”

The student population at Fountain Hills totals 335, according to Principal Barrie Muzbeck Pinto. Students took 115 courses this year in the Accelerate ASU program.

“Next year, we plan to open some courses to accelerated sophomores,” she says. “If a sophomore takes full advantage of it, they could complete up to nine college courses before they graduate.”

By partnering with ASU, Fountain Hills High School has also raised its own status.

“It helps us continue our ‘A’ rating,” Pinto says, “and also increases student engagement and performance.”

Parents, according to Olsen, have been overwhelmingly positive about the program.

“They have asked, ‘What’s the catch?’” Olsen says. “The truth is, there isn’t one.”

That’s exactly what Julie Evans has discovered.

“Now that ASU’s program is in place, we’re absolutely thrilled.”

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## About the author

A journalist, Amanda Loudin's work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Harvard Medicine and other national media outlets.

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



The Evans family is pleased that Kaiya (far left) and Avery (center) will earn college credits while still in high school. Photo by Brandon Sullivan

**Text image(s)**





Shania Rivera will have earned 19 college credits during high school by the time she's done. Photo by Brandon Sullivan





Brent Olsen, '22 BA in English, a Fountain Hills English teacher and basketball coach, has watched multiple students thrive through the program the school has with ASU. Photo by Brandon Sullivan