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STEPPINGSTONE SCHOLARS CONTACT:

Paige LeGrand

Vice President of Development & Communications

plegrand@steppingstonescholars.org

610.960.5065

Penn Engineering and Steppingstone Scholars Partner to Launch Inveniam, a 'STEM Equity and Innovation Lab'

October 20, 2020 (PHILADELPHIA, PA) – The University of Pennsylvania’s School of Engineering and Applied Science (Penn Engineering) and Steppingstone Scholars (Steppingstone) today announced Inveniam, a first-of-its-kind “STEM Equity and Innovation Lab.”

By providing socioeconomically underserved and underrepresented students from Philadelphia free access to foundational science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) resources, Inveniam aims to create a pathway to Penn Engineering and into the technology careers that will define the 21st century.

Through technology, scholastic partnerships, curriculum development, extracurricular programming, and research opportunities, Inveniam will provide much-needed educational access to Philadelphia’s K-12 students who traditionally would not be able to engage in such pre-college preparatory work.

Together, Penn Engineering and Steppingstone will expand current programs and develop additional broad-based initiatives which will provide Philadelphia students with high-quality training and enrichment programs that connect them to STEM education and careers.

Committing to an initial 5-year agreement, Penn Engineering and Steppingstone will begin with the development of a new blended AP Computer Science course. The full-year course will begin in the Fall 2021 semester, in which Penn Engineering students will create online content modules to supplement high school classroom instruction. Inveniam aims to enroll roughly 3,000 Philadelphia students in this course. Similar content for high-level math and physics courses will follow.

Beyond providing the content expertise from faculty, students and staff, Penn Engineering will collaborate with Steppingstone to expand current and develop new extracurricular programs. Penn Engineering’s Data Science Building, slated for completion in 2024, will provide state-of-the-art laboratories and classrooms for these programs.

Inveniam will initially offer three such extracurricular programs for Philadelphia high school students. Steppingstone's Blended Learning Initiative, which currently serves 70 students with college-level course content, will expand to 100 students by the summer of 2022. A new engineering internship program will begin with 10 high school students in the summer of 2022. Finally, a new Data Science Scholars program, providing pre-college and career mentorship to 20 students, will launch in the Data Science Building upon its completion.

Steppingstone will lead student recruitment, staffing, and program coordination while also committing to raising \$1 million in support of Inveniam's initiatives in collaboration with Penn Engineering. Funding commitments for Inveniam have already been received from the Chappell Culpeper Family Foundation and The S. Albert Fund, a general fund from The Philadelphia Foundation.

"Inveniam comes from the inscription on the Penn Class of 1893 Gate, '*Inveniemus viam aut faciemus*,' which means, 'We will find a way or make one'," says CJ Taylor, Penn Engineering's Vice Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. "As the University founded by Benjamin Franklin, America's earliest champion of STEM, we uniquely understand the importance of finding or making a way for students, especially in science and technology."

"By partnering with Steppingstone, which shares this mission," he continues, "we have designed an innovative program committed to delivering STEM opportunities for underserved and underrepresented students. This access is the single most important way we can create greater diversity — and more qualified, skilled professionals — within the local and national technology industry."

The point of contact for Inveniam at Penn Engineering will be Daniel Miller-Uueda, who is assuming the role of Director of Community Engagement and Outreach in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Inveniam seeks to respond to a local and national challenge entrenched in the lack of access and engagement to STEM, especially among Black and Hispanic students as well as women. Although Philadelphia ranks seventh among top U.S. cities for growth in technology hiring, employers report difficulty in finding skilled professionals. Currently, only 1% of students in the School District of Philadelphia, regardless of income, have access to computer science courses. Nationally only 44% of high school seniors will graduate from a high school that offers any computer science courses. And of these students who matriculate to college and graduate with a bachelor's degree in computer science, only 8% are Black, 9% are Hispanic and 17% are women.

Through Inveniam, Penn Engineering will expand its admissions and counseling presence in Philadelphia schools. By engaging with these underrepresented groups at the earliest stages of the pipeline into higher education, the partnership will begin to address these disparities.

"Coming off a summer where the issues of systemic racism and socioeconomic injustice have been front and center, Inveniam aims to address these challenges head on," said Sean E. Vereen, President and CEO of Steppingstone. "By focusing Inveniam specifically on STEM, we seek to fill a major gap in our city, not only in its K-12 educational offerings but also, in its workforce development. By partnering with Penn Engineering, we are creating a true educational and social mobility opportunity for low-income students with a passion for science, technology, robotics, math and more. We want to not only encourage this passion; we want to invest in it. Inveniam is that investment, which for too long has been unavailable to these students."

Inveniam students will be eligible for paid internships at Penn Engineering. Other internship opportunities will also be cultivated as both organizations will engage the Philadelphia region's corporate community to provide these crucial professional development experiences to Inveniam students.

While its educational programming is slated to begin in the fall of 2021, *Inveniam* is also building partnerships to launch a venture capital component of its STEM Equity and Innovation Lab by the end of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Inveniam will partner with venture capital and private equity firms to create the Internship and Placement Program that will develop a path from college to career and socioeconomic mobility. Sponsors of these internships will share their expertise, networks and mentorship that result in post-graduation career opportunities. This program recognizes the critical nature of providing access to venture capital and business building opportunities to underrepresented communities, allowing them to bring their passion and ideas to fruition.

For more information regarding *Inveniam*, please visit: www.steppingstonescholars.org/ventures.

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About Steppingstone Scholars

Steppingstone Scholars is an educational social mobility organization. For low income students in the City of Philadelphia there are no clear pathways made specifically for them to go to college and enter the workforce. Since 1999, Steppingstone has been working to address this systemic problem by creating not just one pathway, but many. Serving students ages 10 – 24, Steppingstone offers three (3) solutions-oriented approaches: *Academy*, which provides transformative, rigorous learning opportunities to high-achieving educationally underserved students to access and succeed at highly resourced schools; *Pathways*, which leverages custom resources inside public K-12 schools (neighborhood, charter, and citywide) to create pathways to college and the workforce for educationally underserved students and; *Ventures*, which creates broad enrichment programs that innovate the ways in which schools, nonprofits, and communities can more equitably serve engaged citizens ready to enter college and a changing workforce. This systemic multi-faceted approach helps students identify, create, and confidently walk their pathways through institutions of higher education and work, well-prepared to begin breaking the cycles of disinvestment and socioeconomic inequality that has existed in Philadelphia for generations.