**Project Introduction:** I grew up in Portland, a rural parish in Jamaica with 82,183 residents. I attended the Port Antonio High School (PA), a non-traditional school with the highest enrollment in the parish. The history of non-traditional high schools and their more prestigious ‘traditional’ counterparts’ traces back to the country’s early years of independence, where the rapidly growing population necessitated a quick expansion of educational services. The newly built, less resourced institutions were called non-traditional and developed a reputation as being a “last resort” or “overflow site” for students who did not meet the admission standards for the older, traditional high schools. Because of this reputation and the reality of serving more students with fewer resources, non-traditional high schools have been stigmatized. For Port Antonio High school, this stigma is compounded by its rural location and the lack of access to opportunities, funding, and other resources that help students thrive in their education. For example, I received very little guidance on exploring career options and identifying my career path, including selecting required prerequisite courses for my intended field. This has led to problems for me and other students when we enter universities with comparatively less academic preparation than our peers.

**Problem:** To alleviate overcrowding, Port Antonio High School uses both a dual-shift and a dual campus system. The second campus, called Campus 2, is located at Fellowship, 4 miles from the main campus. Campus 2 serves students in grades 7 and 8 (the first 2 grades of high school), representing 337 students and 19 staff. Because of the distance between Port Antonio and Fellowship, the two campuses do not share resources, and Campus 2 is thus even more starved of educational materials and equipment. The most severe deficiency identified by Campus 2’s Vice Principal is the absence of computers. Although the school built a room outfitted with sockets and desks to house computers, they are unable to afford them. Computer labs are a crucial component of a well-functioning modern school. This is where students begin to understand, through more formal academic study, the technology that influences almost every aspect of their lives and becomes empowered to play a role in building that technology. In a rural area such as Portland, where many people do not have technological access, a school lab could be the first and only point of access to computers, facilitating the development of digital skills for students at a critical early stage when they start to think about career options. The lack of computers also means that teachers cannot deliver lessons such as Information Technology and Electronic Document and Preparation Management which are important subjects and often needed for college entrance exams.

The second problem is that rural high school students have little to no exposure to professional development when it comes to guidance and help for students to understand the range of career fields available in the world. This leads to the belief that the traditional job options such as police, firefighter, lawyer, and doctor are the only occupations out there. As a result, many students are not aware of the STEM fields, and they need resources that will give them exposure.

**Project Goals:** The goal of this project is to furnish the computer room on Campus 2 with computers and resources, both tangible and intangible, that ignite and foster students’ interest in STEM careers. The tangible resources include computers, programming software, written manuals, and guides. The intangible resource is an “Open House Day” that the educational professionals and I will lead. Students attending the Open House Day will feel more confident exploring coding as they will see people who look like them and who are excelling in the field. More generally, all students will have access to computers that they can use for their Information Technology classes, homework and career research.

**Project Activities:** I will be working with the Vice Principal of Campus 2, Mr. Hevon Brown, and the Information Technology teacher, Miss Tivannee Prince, in implementing this project. Mr. Brown is my main point of contact with regard to the available physical space, and Miss. Prince and I will work together on getting different software such as antivirus, word processing, and subscriptions for programming, cloud storage and other applications that are needed. A room is already available with desks, chairs, cupboards, and a whiteboard. Due to Covid, the typical class size of 40 students has been split in half, so we now have 20 students per class. I will purchase 15 computer desktop bundles that include mouse, keyboard, and monitors from HP through a retailer in the U.S. I spoke with Jamie...
Bridge to Equality through Exposure
Jamaica
St. Lawrence University
Janeil Speid '24, Jamaica, St. Lawrence University (UWC China)

Richardson, IT Director of Planning and Operations at St. Lawrence University, who helped me put together a plan for purchasing the equipment at the best price. The Jamaican Ministry of Education has a policy which allows custom fees to be waived for donation of educational materials coming into the country. The Vice Principal will acquire the required documentation for the waiver. I will have an electrician inspect the premises and confirm that the devices are compatible with the building circuits and get the room ready for the computer installation. I will also arrange the installation of an internet network with the telecommunication company, Flow, that will be able to support all 15 computers. The computers will be installed by Miss Prince, Mr. Brown, and myself; Miss Prince has assured us our team will be able to handle the relatively simple installation process. Aside from the hardware, the cupboards will be designated for professional development materials, including the STEM and development resources that will give students exposure to the various career paths. I will also buy all the books and guides in the U.S. and export them along with the computers. These resources will provide a step-by-step process for students on how to pursue careers in the STEM field.

After the completion of the computer room, I will work with Mr. Brown and Miss Prince to host an Open House Day and invite students and their parents to come and view the space. After students and families tour the space, I will present a session giving an overview of STEM fields along with my own experience as a Computer Science student. I will also invite 3-4 STEM professors from universities in Jamaica to give a virtual presentation in their respective fields. In accordance with COVID-19 protocols, pre-made refreshments will be served before the start of the presentation. I will have posters showing people of diverse backgrounds working in a lab, programming, and doing other STEM jobs to also spark students’ interest and boost their confidence. Lastly, Mr. Brown has confirmed that the school will maintain the computer lab and update the professional development resources as needed.

In addition, on a designated day, interested PA STEM students will be invited to interact with other college STEM students via zoom. The zoom will be projected on the wall, so all students will be able to participate. I will organize presentations from students in my network, including UWC, my study abroad program, St. Lawrence University, and Jamaican universities. They will share experiences, tips, and advice on how to bridge high school and college. Campus 2 students will then have the opportunity to keep in touch with the speakers for future advice. The aim of this day is to have only student presenters in order to allow Campus 2 students to have a safe space to speak with peers they can relate to, and who are not in a position of higher authority.

**Project Timeline:** In May 2023, I will submit my request to the Ministry of Education to have the custom fees on my equipment and books waived, so they can arrive in Jamaica in early July. In July, we will install all the equipment at Campus 2 and organize the books and resources. We will plan to have the open house event shortly afterwards.

**Long Term Impact:** My hope is for each student to leave Campus 2 with knowledge of STEM fields, a basic understanding of programming, and more confidence in themselves as agents of an increasingly digital world. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, peace is “freedom or a period of freedom from public disturbance or war.” It is no secret that the most unequal countries in the world are often the most violent, and Jamaica is no exception.

Many of my high school peers, especially the males, were unmotivated students because they felt hopeless when they considered their job prospects. This project will contribute to closing the inequality gap between the traditional and non-traditional schools in the parish. It will be the start of what I intend to be a long partnership between me and my alma mater as I continue to invest in my home community no matter what stage of life I am at.