

GESU SCHOOL

Educational Excellence in the IHM and Jesuit Traditions

Summer 2011



Gesu chooses national nonprofit leader Bryan Carter to continue the successful work of retiring President Christine S. Beck.

Bryan Carter's life will come full circle this summer when he becomes president of Gesu School. As someone who credits his Catholic grade school and Jesuit high school education with helping him face the challenges of growing up with five brothers in a single-parent household in the heart of Cleveland, he says he knows first-hand the incredible power a quality education can have for children living in the inner city.

"When I visited Gesu and saw the discipline, structure, the students' composure and the teachers' dedication to the children, it reminded me of my childhood," says Carter, who has served as resource and community development director for the national adoption agency The Cradle since 2009. "People need to understand what's going on behind these walls. This school is transforming lives and providing children with the opportunity to succeed, and I want to build on that remarkable track record. I also want to have an impact on parents and the surrounding community, working in partnership with the school to do something really special."

Through his position with The Cradle, which has placed more than 14,000 children into permanent homes since its founding in 1923, he has increased the number of donors by 67 percent, increased the number of dollars raised by 86 percent and achieved goals set for encouraging African-American individuals to become adoptive parents. He says the work has been a wonderful way to apply the business skills he developed as an entrepreneur and pharmaceutical manager with Johnson & Johnson, Abbott Laboratories and Pfizer toward a valuable cause while giving back to the community – and he looks at his new position at Gesu as an extension of that privilege.



David, Cameron, and Malik gather for a photo the night of their Gesu graduation. They look forward to successful futures at Roman Catholic, St. Joseph's Prep, and Neumann Goretti High School respectively, while incoming President Bryan Carter looks forward to building on Gesu's track record of "transforming lives and providing children with the opportunity to succeed."

"It's important for people to see that an investment in successful models like Gesu is a shared investment in our future," says Carter, who holds a bachelor's degree in political science and business management from Case Western Reserve University. "Children in disadvantaged situations come in behind academically and turn it around for the best possible start, leave as better students more interested in their future, and go on to have success in high school and college. I'd like to broaden support by continuing to talk about those exceptional outcomes with philanthropists, business leaders and others, including those in the African-American community."

Carter succeeds retiring president Christine S. Beck, a long-time advocate for inner-city youth who served on Gesu's Board of Trustees for six years before becoming president in 2003. "We have been extremely fortunate to have such a caring, mission-driven professional as Chris lead Gesu and set a strong foundation for the future," says Gesu Board of Trustees Chairman J. Gordon Cooney Jr. "Gesu not only has become a national model for inner-city education, it has helped thousands of children live productive lives. We are confident that Bryan will help us build upon that foundation to benefit the children, who deserve the opportunity to achieve their dreams."

The Kindergartners sing "Just the Way You Are" by Bruno Mars to retiring President Christine S. Beck. Chris was honored with a surprise school-wide performance showcasing the talents of the students and faculty in each grade. The entire school dressed in purple—Chris's favorite color—for the special occasion.



The 8th grade met with Senator Robert Casey Jr. on their class trip to Washington, D.C. Senator Casey, who taught at Gesu as a Jesuit Volunteer in the 1980's, spoke with the students about the importance of giving back.

Some Things Remain the Same. Sr. Ellen Celebrates 20 Years of Changing Lives.

At this year's May procession and a reception that followed, Gesu honored Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, for 20 years of changing lives as principal of Gesu School. When Sr. Ellen first arrived at Gesu, the school served about 200 children. In order to bolster enrollment, she visited area kindergartens to encourage parents to send their first graders to Gesu. Sufficient enrollment is a concern of the past, thanks to Gesu's reputation for providing an excellent education in a safe environment. Today Sr. Ellen finds herself managing a student body of 450+



Eighth graders Rakirah and Ayanna offer a praise dance at the school's May Procession. During the service, the school community honored Sr. Ellen for 20 years of dedication.

students, guiding 29 full-time faculty members plus additional staff, and coordinating an extensive curriculum geared toward the special needs of North Philadelphia's children. Her daily activities range from chasing down students after school who ventured in the direction of a recent shooting to welcoming "home" successful alumni who return year after year. Gesu thanks Sr. Ellen for her incredible stamina and love as she has shouldered her tremendous responsibilities over the years.

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From the President

Dear Friends,

During my years at Gesu, first as a trustee and then as President, I have been moved by your loyal generosity. Thank you for your commitment to Gesu's children and to our mission of justice in education.

I continue to be moved by our children, as well. Routinely, their lives include incarceration, gun violence, drugs, custody battles, hunger, family uncertainties, fights. Yet somehow, as we try to keep the street out of our building, Gesu's children develop confidence, create dreams and goals, and learn the skills to succeed.

This year our 8th graders won academic trophies in English and History. Our Boys JV Basketball team was undefeated. Our students won trophies in forensics, achieved in Math First and public speaking, and they are learning to read well. When you ask them what they want to be when they grow up, they say: pediatrician, lawyer, police officer, investigator, artist, teacher, singer, author, sportscaster, surgeon – and U.S. President!

Don't we have an obligation in this great country of ours to educate all our children well, including those who have few options in their lives? What a disservice when many of our country's high school graduates don't have the skills to perform well in college! Studies show, again and again, that if children don't read at grade level by 4th grade, they may never catch up. How can we let that slide by and ignore the needs of so many children?

Gesu has an impressive track record in helping inner-city children succeed, but we need your ongoing advocacy and investment. Once again, I quote Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children."

I hope you will help.

With thanks and blessings,

Christine S. Beck
President and CEO



New Assistant Disciplinarian and Counselor Named to Better Address Students' Behavior Challenges. Former 6th Grade Teacher Troy Sams hopes to be an authority figure students can relate to.

When a student's disruptive home life starts spilling over into school, a child acts out in class, or a bullying issue needs to be addressed, Gesu students will find a fresh, yet familiar face on the Gesu team assembled to cope with such situations: new Assistant Disciplinarian and Counselor Troy Sams. A graduate of St. Joseph's Prep and Temple University, Mr. Sams worked in behavioral health for a number of years prior to joining Gesu's faculty in 2006 to teach 6th grade. In his new role, Mr. Sams will focus on

developing a bullying program that better addresses the particular needs of inner-city students. With his background, Mr. Sams believes he's essentially been training his whole life for such a position.

Principal Sr. Ellen describes the arrangement as "ideal" and notes that it will relieve some of the burden carried by Fr. Neil in the time-out room and Sr. Pat and Mrs. O'Neill in the counseling office. "Troy really communicates well with the boys. It's going to be a good move," agrees Gesu President Chris Beck.

As a young, educated, black man who "grew up in the same type of neighborhood as these guys, but was blessed with many opportunities," Mr. Sams believes he is a figure to whom the students will be able to relate, and who truly understands the troubles that they face. Mr. Sams notes that many of the problems that the students manifest in school begin at home or in the social setting they've grown up in. "A lot of kids have lots of responsibility, and play more of the parent / caretaker role at home," he notes. "They are used to being in charge. They don't get the opportunity to be kids."

"I believe in treating them [the students] with respect and in turn demanding respect... Kids can tell who cares," explains Mr. Sams, who is hoping his new role will truly make a difference in their lives.



Sixth graders Dama and Zahir celebrate the last day of school and Troy Sams' last day as a teacher. Although Mr. Sams admits he will miss molding one class of students over the course of a year, he looks forward to the impact he will have in his new role as Assistant Disciplinarian and Counselor.

discipline for pre-K through grade 6, work with the school's counselors, and explore additional initiatives, such as expanding the peer mediation program with Dr. Erwin and

Community Comes Together in America's Birthplace to Celebrate Educational Justice through the Successes of Gesu School. Supporters gather at the National Constitution Center to raise funds, salute school's impact and honor Rev. George W. Bur, S.J. & Christine S. Beck with the Gesu Spirit Medal.

There couldn't have been a more perfect union of place and purpose as 300 people gathered on May 5th at the National Constitution Center for "We the People" – a celebration of educational justice and the impact Gesu School has had on thousands of inner-city children.

"Gesu's leaders have had an unswerving commitment to social justice and to the notion that every child can learn," said Board Chairman J. Gordon Cooney, Jr. in his introductory remarks. "That is central to its success over nearly 20 years. Gesu works!"



Students captured the audience members' hearts with their song and dramatic presentations tracing the theme "Hold Fast to Dreams." The evening was a celebration of all who help Gesu's students hold fast to their own dreams by supporting the school.

More than \$285,000 was raised at the event, which featured performances from the school's gospel choir and other students along with thoughts from Gesu alumni, leaders and special guests about what the school has meant to them. The evening also focused on the stewardship of Gesu's first two presidents since Gesu's 1993 conversion from a parish school to an independent Catholic school, with founding president Rev. George W. Bur, S.J. and second president Christine S. Beck awarded

the Gesu Spirit Medal for helping empower children to break the cycle of poverty and violence through education.

A long-time advocate for inner-city youth, Beck was presented the award by Gesu Principal Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, for helping ensure the school's long-term viability and reputation as a national model by developing innovative programs, spearheading technological improvements, creating valuable partnerships, overseeing a \$12 million capital campaign and launching a three-year scholarship campaign.

Gesu Trustee Dr. Byron McCook presented the medal to Fr. Bur, who has spent most of his life working on housing equality and educational access for the poor, for saving Gesu from closure and helping it flourish in its first decade as an independent school.

This year's benefit was organized by committee co-chairs Keith and Frank Pension and Eilise and Bill Rouse, with Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter as honorary chair.

Students Reap Rewards of Good Behavior and Academic Achievement. Twenty 8th graders meet Phillies' shortstop Jimmy Rollins.



Twenty 8th Graders met Jimmy Rollins through the JRoll Aces Program, facilitated by Trustee Bob McAlaine. Photo ©Heddy Bergsman

This year, the entire school participated in the Philadelphia Phillies' Phanatic About Reading Program, arranged by Trustee Bob McAlaine and coordinated by resource room teacher Amy Brignola. The students read for twenty minutes a day for a month and each submitted a book report. While the school was not randomly selected from among participating schools for a visit from a player this year, twenty 8th graders were chosen to participate in JRoll's Aces. The students, who had to have all passing grades and no disciplinary action, were selected by lottery to meet Jimmy Rollins and stay for the game.

(Photo right) The 6th grade class sings a song about photo-synthesis at President Chris Beck's thank you celebration. Their choice of song paid tribute to Chris's instrumental role in procuring the school's beloved science lab.

Gesu Isn't Gesu Without You! The public phase of our campaign for scholarships is underway.

You already know that Gesu is a safe haven for kids exposed to violence, a place of learning for children lacking in opportunities, a model for other inner-city schools. But did you know that Gesu couldn't be any of these things without YOU? It's your support, advocacy, and enthusiasm that enable Gesu to thrive.

With your help, we are trying to secure Gesu's future by raising \$8 million for scholarships over the next two years as part of the campaign, *Gesu Isn't Gesu Without You*. To date, we have raised nearly \$4 million under the leadership of campaign co-chairs Bob McAlaine and Julia Rafferty. This June we launch the public phase of this campaign and need your help to bring it to a successful completion! You will receive more information about this vital campaign in the coming months, but you can learn more now at www.gesuschool.org/campaign.html.



Athletic Corner



The **JV boys basketball** team finished the regular season undefeated with 12 straight wins, and went on to claim the CYO Region 8 championship.

Students Run Philly Style athletes Kimberly, Taylor, Madison and Angel - all 7th graders - completed the 10 mile Broad Street Run as part of the Honickman Center Team.

The **track team** counted 81 runners this year! At the Archdiocesan Championships, the novice boys 4 x 100 m relay team of Amir, Rashaun, Curtis, and Javier captured 1st place. Nia took 2nd place in the cadet girls 200 m and 3rd in the 100 m. Javier finished in 2nd place in the novice boys 200 m, while Zaniara took 2nd in the novice girls shot put.

Tennis athletes expanding their skills through a partnership with the Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education Center numbered 21 this year.

Heard in the Halls

- Seventh grader **Kimberly** was honored with The Jimmy Medal for showing resiliency, empathy, humility and loyalty, among other qualities. All Jimmy Medal recipients receive a second medal with which they honor another who embodies the spirit of Jimmy. Three Gesu students who had already been honored with The Jimmy Medal passed the honor forward to teachers **Laura Weatherly, Eileen Erwin and Angela Keeler**. President Chris Beck bestowed her Jimmy Medal on **Linda Hartzell**. For more information about The Jimmy Medal, visit their website at www.jimmymedal.org.
- **Gesu's 7th Grade** placed 41st in the nation and 11th in the Archdiocese in the online math program, First in Math.
- Gesu's Academic Challenge Team of 8th graders **Davonne** and **Semaj** and 7th graders **Nysir** and **Taylor** took first place in the English round at the West Catholic High School Academic Challenge.
- In Forensics, 7th grader **Lauren** won first prize in the poetry category at the Ancillae-Assumpta Academy competition and was a finalist in poetry at the LaSalle High School Competition. Eighth grader **Taahira** won 3rd prize in the prose category at the LaSalle competition.

Now Online

- The high school destinations for the Class of 2011 are in! See them online at www.gesuschool.org/classof2011.html.
- In April, Director of Development Suzette Baird stepped down after eight years of dedicated service to Gesu School to accept a position at the Church Farm School. Major Gifts Officer Seán Lavelle has assumed the role of V.P. of Development in her stead. Read more about the transition at www.gesuschool.org/development.html.



Sixth grader Dama proudly displays her certificate for achieving first honors at the end-of-year awards ceremony. High achieving students like Dama benefit from programs such as Gesu's advanced writing and advanced math classes, which stretch talented students to reach the next level.



At the end-of-the year awards, these students were recognized as "Most Improved." At Gesu, we believe that EVERY child can learn. With your help, we strive to provide our students with the resources they need to reach their full potential.



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And much more!

Ailing students treated by asthma specialist. Dr. Anthony Rooklin offers expertise after learning of the need for help.

On May 31st, Dr. Anthony Rooklin made his 3rd journey to North Philadelphia on a critical mission. For the last two months, Dr. Rooklin has been helping half a dozen Gesu students get their asthma under control: determining the right medications, writing scripts, and teaching the parents how to manage their children's conditions. Many of the children suffer from undertreated symptoms that have seriously interfered with their lives. "Most of the parents aren't even aware someone like me exists," explains Rooklin, a specialist in pediatric asthma with Asthma & Allergy Associates.

Treating students in North Philadelphia is not without its challenges, of which Dr. Rooklin is all too aware. Seeing children when they are well is key, because these appointments help identify what's working and clarify what steps should be taken to prevent symptoms from returning. Unfortunately, appointments

are frequently missed. Compounding the problem, few asthma specialists practice nearby. Once Dr. Rooklin has the children's conditions stabilized, arranging appropriate follow-up treatment will be difficult.

What motivated Dr. Rooklin to get involved, despite the challenges? Last year, Dr. Rooklin attended Gesu's annual celebration to raise scholarships with friends Edna and Ken Adelberg, where he heard Kwadre '08 recount the impact his 7th grade classmate's death had on his own transformational journey. Kwadre's classmate had died of a severe asthma attack. "I thought, 'Maybe I should get involved with Gesu, as this is my area of expertise,'" explains Dr. Rooklin, who notes such tragedies are rare. Gesu School is indebted to Dr. Rooklin, the Adelbergs, and all the members of our "village" who share their unique gifts to change lives.



Students get into a performance by dancers from The Rock School for Dance Education. Through a partnership with the school arranged by Trustee Randi Zemsky, Gesu's 2nd graders have been introduced to ballet during weekly classes with a Rock School teacher. Through such partnerships, as well as a commitment to regular instruction in music and art, students are exposed to a world they otherwise might not ever experience. Photo courtesy of Tiffany Yoon



Have you ever wondered what's on the minds of our children?

Two recent events—Speak Up! and the Gesu Writing Contest—provide insight.

Along with students from Young Scholars Charter School, LaSalle Academy, and Hope Partnership for Education, Gesu students participated on the Youth Leadership Committee that planned a Speak Up! event on April 13th. Speak Up! is a program developed by AIDS Alive to bring together youth, parents, and educators to discuss topics of importance to the community and promote good decision-making. Attendees participated in one of three breakout sessions on topics the Youth Leadership Committee had chosen and prepared: Depression/Suicide, Sex Before Marriage, and Respect.

Dr. Erwin participated in the Speak Up! program with the students. "I attended the Depression/Suicide session and it was quite powerful. We talked about how common this problem is and different ways to cope with depression. Many students try to hide that they have a problem from adults because they are scared to turn to someone

other than their friends for help." For more information on Speak Up! visit their website at www.speakup2000.com.

In May, Gesu honored the winners of this year's Writing Contest for North Philadelphia Middle Schools. Again endorsed by Mayor Michael Nutter, Gesu's 3rd annual competition focused on the topic "Why Study?" With answers ranging from getting a good job to self-fulfillment, 113 students from four different schools participated.

The winners who emerged from the blind judging process conducted by Sr. Mary Bur, IHM, principal of West Catholic High School, and Christian Rupertus, St. Joseph's Prep English Department faculty member, were: 6th grader Laura from St. Martin de Porres in 4th place; 8th grader Albert from John F. Reynolds School in 3rd place; 8th grader Victor from LaSalle Academy in 2nd place; and 8th grader Ikeis from Gesu School in 1st place.

Upcoming Events

- 6/27 New President and CEO Bryan Carter takes office
- 6/27 Summer Camp begins
- 9/7 First day of school

Our **United Way** Donor Choice Number is 7408 (Gesu Community Service Project).

Corporations can make a huge difference in the lives of Gesu children while receiving tax credits for their contribution through the Pennsylvania Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. For more information on corporate giving and the EITC program, contact Seán Lavelle at (215) 763-9077 or sean.lavelle@gesuschool.org.