FROM THE President

Dear Friends,

A Gesu School education affords children the opportunity to transcend the cycle of poverty and violence that is often a part of their daily existence. Gesu School educates the whole child! What does this mean? Gesu provides students with a rigorous academic curriculum. We prepare students to attend competitive high schools and aspire to college graduation and careers that best utilize their skills, while being productive citizens in the community. We introduce students to programs in the arts, sciences, and athletics—inspiring them to explore new interests and cultivate their God-given talents.

At Gesu, we also nurture our children's character and spirituality, which stems from our rich history in the Jesuit and Immaculate Heart of Mary traditions. Aligned with the five principles for graduates of a Jesuit school, Gesu students learn to be “open to growth, religious, loving, intellectually competent, and committed to doing justice.” Gesu champions the IHM ideal that every child can learn, practicing non-selective admissions and tailoring instruction to each learner.

This issue of Gesu Magazine shares the many facets of educating the whole child. You will hear not only the voices of Gesu’s children and alumni, but also our faculty, staff, donors, Board members, and volunteers—each of whom plays an invaluable role in shaping our children’s growth.

Just as we instill in our children the Jesuit tenet “to be men and women for others,” we acknowledge that you have done so for Gesu. You make an indelible impact on our children’s lives. For that, I am personally grateful.

Peace and blessings,

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President and CEO

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Why a Gesu Education Works

Gesu School offers rigorous academics to prepare students to succeed in high school and college. But a Gesu education is so much more.

Our mission stems from the religious congregations who sponsor Gesu—the Jesuit belief in *cura personalis*, care of the whole person, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary conviction that every child can learn. Infused in the curriculum for grades Pre-K through 8 is a solid academic foundation with emphasis on spiritual and character formation. Gesu educates the whole child.

**Nurturing Men and Women for Others**

A Gesu education is steeped in Gospel values of faith, hope, and love. Bryan Carter, Gesu President and CEO, notes, “We start each morning with prayer and pray when students change classes. Every day, the spiritual component is top of mind for children and faculty.”

The religious curriculum includes Catholic beliefs and traditions with strong emphasis on respecting all faiths and exposure to the world’s major religions. “We are a Catholic School. The majority of our students, about 92%, are not Catholic, but we want them to understand the spiritual side of Catholicism,” says Carter.

According to Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J., Gesu Chaplain, “The foundation students get through learning scripture and the Catholic approach to sacraments gives them a sense of God’s presence that they will carry with them as they make their choices throughout life…and in using their gifts and talents as they grow.”

In keeping with the IHM belief in “love…in joyful service of God and His people” and the Jesuit quest for the *Magis*—ever striving to do and be “greater” for the service of God—students engage in community outreach, such as running a clothing drive for homeless children each Advent season. Fr. Neil presides over monthly masses and educates students on missions, encouraging students to contribute to their global community.

Carter also holds “Ignatian and IHM assemblies” with students in grades 4-8. Their December discussion centered on the *Magis* and “doing more in the name of Jesus for others.” He states, “Our children understand what these principles mean. All that we have at Gesu School is...
because someone has the Magis for our students or has been ‘a man or woman for others,’ for our students.’

Growing Socially and Emotionally

At Gesu, spiritual and character formation are inextricably linked. “We want our children to understand treating others with respect and valuing differences,” emphasizes Carter.

Gesu has been recognized for creating an environment that fosters acceptance and celebrates diversity. For the second consecutive year, Gesu earned the designation as a “No Place for Hate” school by the Anti-Defamation League for participating in Unity Day during Bullying Prevention Month, a “Putting the Pieces Together” activity during Autism Awareness Month, and the ADL’s Walk Against Hate.

Assemblies that teach students to embrace difference are common, such as a recent visit from performer and Psychologist, Dr. Michael Fowlin, whose powerful monologue spread the message that “everyone is beautiful.”

Gesu’s whole child approach also envelops students’ social and emotional well-being. According to Carter, “We deliberately serve a population that lives in high poverty. Collateral issues that go along with a high poverty existence are social and emotional issues.

“The role of counselors is critical. You can have all the academic success, spiritual education, and character-and values-based initiatives, but if we don’t address what some of our kids bring to school in terms of emotional needs, then it won’t be a success.” To support students and families, Gesu provides two counselors and a social worker.

Tailoring Instruction to Each Learner

Gesu practices non-selective admissions. Carter explains, “We have children with academic ability on a spectrum, where some struggle and others are high achievers. Our objective is to understand that all can learn and not to underestimate any child.”

Gesu’s curriculum provides differentiated instruction—from the Advanced Math Program and the Backe Advanced Writing Program to the Resource Room and Learning Support for students needing extra assistance. “Each student gets the focused attention he or she needs and deserves, whether at a higher level or in the Resource Room. Then in the classroom, this leaves the teacher with a smaller number of students with whom he or she can work,” states Carter.

As an extension of the curriculum, Gesu offers specialized programs to fully develop each student’s academic ability. Gesu’s Youth Education for Tomorrow program targets students in grades 1, 2, and 3 who are performing at least two years below grade level. YET builds essential literacy skills and brings students up to grade level by the fourth grade—a critical time in their learning. Students receive one-to-one attention from a teacher 4-5 times per week after school.

Our Youngest Scholars Program

challenges high-achieving students in grades 3-5. The program features a five-week themed summer component, led by Colleen Comey, Director. Students delve deeply into a topic, such as the rainforest. During the academic year, students participate in both in-school and after-school programs that emphasize STEM, athletic and cultural experiences, and literacy, such as volunteer Rosalee DiIulio’s advanced reading group.

According to Troy Sams, Assistant Dean of Students, even Gesu’s extracurricular activities, such as the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) program, are designed to educate the whole child, “giving students a total experience here at Gesu.” GEM offers weekly and biweekly activities each trimester for grades 6–8. Opportunities include community service and practical applications, such as nutrition and banking. Teachers and volunteers also offer academic courses, such as Latin, and recreational activities, for example, chess, photography, and baseball.

For over 14 years, Gesu and The Rosemont School of the Holy Child have collaborated to give Gesu students access to state-of-the-art technology. The Rosemont Partnership provides students in grades 4-5 with use of Rosemont’s lab—the latest programming, game design, and video equipment. Students create apps, coding, and even circuitry.

Opportunities in performing arts also shape students’ education at Gesu. Students in grades 3–5 engage in 36 weeks of multi-disciplinary dance classes through the RockReach In-School Residency with The Rock School for Dance Education, a partnership forged by Gesu Trustee, Randi Zemsky. Seventh and eighth grade students participate in Dancing with The Students—a ten week program in the waltz, tango, merengue, and swing taught by professional dancers and choreographers. Through the program, founded by Gesu Trustee, Susan Martinelli Shea, students glean skills in not only dance and performance, but also etiquette.

Gesu equips students with the academic skills to succeed as 21st century learners. Equally important, Gesu grows students who are spiritually grounded, curious, compassionate, and well rounded.

Photo left: Deep in thought at the chess club tournament, a GEM program favorite!
Photo center: Eighth graders perform in the Dancing with The Students ballroom finale.
Photo right: The annual first grade Christmas pageant depicts the Christmas story.
PRE-K & KINDERGARTEN Teachers’ Aides:

HELPING GESU’S YOUNGEST STUDENTS GROW

Teachers’ Aides provide essential assistance to ensure that students grasp academics. They also play a critical role in educating the whole child.

Gesu’s Pre-K and Kindergarten Teachers’ Aides do it all. From tying shoes to reading stories. From working one-to-one with students to accompanying their classes to lunch, recess, and “specials.” They juggle multiple tasks and embrace a “whatever is needed” attitude. Each Aide contributes unique talents, making a significant difference in students’ lives.

Ms. Porter values the relationship among Teachers’ Aides, whom she identifies as her “teammates.” “We get advice from each other…and share ideas,” comments Ms. Porter, to understand students’ learning styles and how to best meet each child’s needs.

Ms. Asta recognizes the value of Mr. Vito’s “nurturing, friendly” presence in the classroom: “I was worried parents wouldn’t appreciate a man in Kindergarten. But it’s had such a good effect…. A lot of these children don’t have a daily male presence. To see a man in a nurturing role—buttoning coats, tying shoes—it’s different for them. They don’t have that every day.”

Pre-K Teacher, Ms. Weir recognizes Ms. Warner’s dedication to Gesu’s students from Pre-K to 8th grade for nearly two decades: “She is authentically invested in making sure these students have every opportunity to advance academically and for them and their families to be well. She does everything in her power to show care for that.”

“I love these children. I care about them. I want them to be successful: to learn and grow and do well in life. It’s rewarding to me in a very special way.”—Ms. Paul

Grade: Currently works in Pre-K and the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) after-school program, in addition to serving as a substitute teacher; worked previously in the tuition office

Years at Gesu: 7

On Working at Gesu: Shifting from working as a Nurse’s Assistant and private caregiver to a Pre-K Teacher’s Aide was a natural progression for Ms. Porter, who has made a career out of caring for others. In her work as a Teacher’s Aide, she guides Gesu’s youngest students through their day—from breakfast and circle time, to learning letters during centers, and going to their specials—music, art, and gym.

Ms. Porter “incorporates learning in routines” through games—teaching students to organize their cubbies and learn even during recess with video play and physical activity via the SMART Board.

Witnessing her students learn is “most fulfilling” for Ms. Porter. She observes, “I see them go from having me help with their coat and buttons or shoes, to doing it on their own, to helping another student. They feel proud, and I feel excited for them.”

On Educating the Whole Child: Ms. Porter is invested in this approach, “teaching not just numbers and letters” but “life skills,” such as good hygiene and a positive attitude.

Ms. Porter’s ingenuity also benefits students in the GEM program’s cooking and nutrition, as well as arts and crafts classes. She engages students in socially conscious projects, such as recycling and “refashioning their clothes.” She integrates public speaking, self-esteem, and collaboration in classes, especially with middle school girls.

On Working with Ms. Moore: Ms. Porter appreciates that she and Ms. Moore share a “team approach.” Ms. Moore characterizes Ms. Porter as “firm and caring” in her work with the 19 Pre-K students. “I find her to be very organized…a great asset for young children….She is also creative and enjoys doing hands-on activities with the kids.”
ANDREA WARNER

Grade: Currently works in Pre-K and the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) after-school program, as well as in the front office and as a substitute teacher

Years at Gesu: 19

On Working at Gesu: Ms. Warner began working at Gesu when her son was a student, and she has maintained close ties with Gesu families over the years. Ms. Warner has assisted in the office, at lunch, and during recess. “Whatever Sr. Ellen needs,” she indicates.

Ms. Warner cherishes spending all day with her 19 Pre-K students—from facilitating their breakfast and lunch, to monitoring their centers, and helping teachers complete their instruction. “I talk individually with students or give a little hug to help keep them on task. Some just need a little attention,” she reflects.

What is most gratifying in all of her time at Gesu? “My reward is seeing students beginning to write their names and recognizing their letters….Pre-K graduation is my favorite moment—to see the parents come and see what the students have achieved.”

On Educating the Whole Child: In addition to her work in Pre-K and the office, Ms. Warner also helps students sharpen their critical thinking and social skills in the GEM program. She teaches word games and puzzles to “help students work together” and communicate “off of their phones or iPads.”

On Working with Ms. Weir: Ms. Weir describes Ms. Warner as “faithful, kind, festive” and appreciates the “many hats” she wears: “...Everything from tying shoelaces, to wiping noses, to teaching students prayers and comforting them...supporting their learning by helping them stay on task during instruction, rewarding them with stickers and words of encouragement when they succeed at a task.”

VITO ASTA

Grade: Currently works in Kindergarten and the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) after-school program; previously worked in the school summer camp and after-school program

Years at Gesu: 10

On Working at Gesu: “Gesu has always been a part of my life,” states Mr. Vito, who started working in summer camp as a teenager. In addition to his current role in Kindergarten, he carves out time after school with the GEM program, helping children develop computer skills, as well as enjoy baseball and basketball. Instead of taking his lunch, he ventures to the roof to play basketball with students and help them cross the monkey bars.

Mr. Vito sees his role in the classroom as fulfilling “whatever the teacher needs...from circle reading to helping a table cut and paste a project, and setting up homework folders.” He especially enjoys teaching students to hold a pencil and write their letters.

On Educating the Whole Child: Making learning fun is Mr. Vito’s philosophy. “Ms. Asta has the academics down,” he says. “I help make sure the kids get along and are growing socially....It’s not just sit at a desk for six hours a day.”

On Working with Ms. Asta: Mr. Vito respects Ms. Asta’s experience in the classroom: “She’s been teaching for so long. She knows to tell me when to help with a child who needs discipline or work with someone individually.”

“You couldn’t do this job by yourself,” explains Ms. Asta. She acknowledges Mr. Vito’s many contributions. He “keeps students on task,” is “organized,” and helps her handle whatever needs arise.

KATHY PAUL

Grade: Currently works in Kindergarten; previously worked in learning support

Years at Gesu: 8

On Working at Gesu: Ms. Paul’s career began in business and hospital administration. She relishes the change from a corporate environment to the classroom. “It keeps you young and focused on what’s important,” she recognizes. She brings her experience as a mother of three to the classroom. Ms. Paul multi-tasks throughout the day, “constantly redirecting students to what they should be doing....Complete the assignment, catch the ball, learn the song. Whatever you can do to help teachers feel their lesson was completed.” She affirms, “I want the teacher to be more worried about the lesson plan and what she needs to accomplish academically.”

From orchestrating small group work to her favorite task, reading to students, Ms. Paul focuses on the positive and empowers students to become independent. She explains, “Students get very excited when they see what’s possible and accomplish it. I like students to do the work themselves and feel good about that.”

On Educating the Whole Child: Ms. Paul helps students with more than academics. She also instills “basic manners and what’s expected of them as they grow up and prepare for first grade.”

What motivates Ms. Paul? “…The most enjoyment I get is day after day...helping them with an assignment, writing their name...buttoning their coat, being ready in line. When they can actually do it, it’s ‘Wow!’”

On Working with Ms. Byce: Says Ms. Paul, “We have a wonderful relationship....We work off each other and support one another.” According to Ms. Byce, Ms. Paul keeps the class of kindergartners “neat and tidy,” which is not an easy feat! She describes Ms. Paul as “very flexible, patient, and motherly.”
Gesu School is a pioneer, not only as a model school, but also as a leader in the dialogue on pressing issues in urban education. Gesu launched our Annual Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education in 1997 to improve education for students nationwide. For 17 years, the symposium has gathered policymakers, educators, funders, and prominent panelists—such as Tim Russert, Stedman Graham, Joe Klein, and Paul Tough—to generate conversation and effect change.

This year's theme, “The Journey through an Independent School,” featured Keynote Speaker André Robert Lee, Director and Producer of the documentary, “The Prep School Negro.” Following a film screening, a panel discussion probed issues of race and class in elite high schools. Over 200 education leaders participated. The first-ever parent workshop provided a forum for families to discuss the film and their roles in students’ education.

Lee’s film recounts his journey as an African American man from North Philadelphia to the predominantly white, upper-class Germantown Friends School and the “psychological homelessness” he experienced navigating between “two worlds.” While Lee wished his family were more involved in his school, he also felt ashamed of how he spoke, his attire, and his parents’ professions (a factory worker and a sanitation worker). Lee thrived academically but struggled emotionally. Many audience members related to Lee’s story, citing “PTSD” after their experiences at elite high schools and colleges—as a child of refugees, a minority student, or a student on scholarship. Panelist, Daryl Shore, Vice President, JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Gesu Alum, attests that some students’ experiences at elite high schools are “supportive” and “positive.” He also recalls the challenges of returning home to his North Philadelphia neighborhood. Says Shore, “I would get from my friends…you forgot where you come from.” He attributes his success to Gesu, primarily Sr. Ellen and Fr. Neil. Shore notes, “Gesu told me it’s ok to be smart.”

Bryan Carter, Gesu President and CEO, explains the film’s value: “…Gesu School is 99% African American, and our children’s experience really mirrors what André experienced. Many of our children grow up in deep poverty situations. Our children go from one school…where they see primarily African American faces in the classroom to another [high] school where they may be one of three black students in an English class….How are we at Gesu preparing our children for that reality, and how are our partner schools/receiving schools supporting the children so that the experience at the new school is a positive experience?”

Symposium panelists offered systemic-level solutions to support students. Panelist Howard Stevenson, Ph.D., notes that students, administrators, and families must practice conversations around “racial literacy.” Further, families need to internalize that they are not “guests” of an elite institution but part of the community.

Schools’ infrastructure should integrate social mentoring and multicultural experiences. Affinity groups and diversity alliances should be student-driven and student-governed. When students confront “racial illiteracy,” they should be equipped with tools to identify it and strengthen cultural understanding.

Sending schools, such as Gesu, and receiving high schools must establish partnerships to help students transition academically, socially, and emotionally. High schools must recognize potential stresses for students and have interventions in place.

Gesu’s Annual Symposium tackles tough issues in urban education. Staying at the forefront of educational scholarship ensures we are educating students to navigate their futures, even beyond their years at Gesu.

“[E]very day when I walk into JPMorgan Chase…it’s because of Gesu that I’m able to walk into that building and sit in the role that I have today and have the life that I have. And that’s mainly due to Gesu, but mostly to Sr. Ellen and Fr. Neil. So I just want to say, ‘Thank you for everything. I love you.’”

—Daryl Shore ’94, Symposium Panelist

Watch the panel discussion at youtube.com/gesuschoolworks.
Negative Sights in Philadelphia
By Cierra, Grade 7
Backe Advanced Writing Program

Thousands of strangers
Passing each other.
Philadelphia is a tsunami ripping
through streets.
These people are as rude as chewing
with your mouth full.
Down the same freshly dampened
sidewalk,
An angry businessman shouts into his cell phone.
He screams as loudly as a threatening
boom of thunder
While an oncoming taxi
Screeches to a halt,
Nearly hitting a jaywalking pedestrian.
Puffing a cigarette, a homeless woman
Rolls her eyes
At a giggling teenaged girl,
Who is tightly clutching her Gucci purse
As fear rumbles through her head.
She is a cowardly lion.
The musty, polluted air fills the lungs of a mother
As she sits at an outdoor café sipping orange juice,
Rubbing her growing belly.
She wonders who is going to help her Raise this child.
Here a trembling mind is a wild roller coaster that is everlasting.
A retired preacher calls out scriptures faithfully only to have
His voice get louder in the pounding stereo system.
The preacher is a rooster yelling early in the morning.
The pitter-patter of rain begins to fall once again,
Creating puddles in the street.
Umbrellas pop open, softening the harsh city tones.
Silence sweeps briefly across the street
Before it returns to its sameness Blurring through time itself.
Eileen Erwin, Ph.D., Teacher of Gesu’s Backe Advanced Writing Program, has never heard of a similar program existing in another elementary school.

The program represents Gesu’s ingenuity and focus on educating the whole child. To challenge bright students and prepare them for competitive high schools, Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, created this program in 1999 with significant annual funding from the Backe Foundation.

The program currently serves 93 students in grades 1-8 and is led by Dr. Erwin, who earned her B.A. in English from Fairfield University and her Ph.D. in Urban Education from Temple University. Her passion for social justice guided Dr. Erwin’s career choice, primarily experiences in Bridgeport, Connecticut teaching adult literacy, urban high school students, and children whose families are affected by AIDS. Dr. Erwin reflects on these experiences and their influence: “Seeing how African Americans were treated, seeing racism happen before my eyes…I was shocked by the inequality. I couldn’t believe this was happening in America.”

For 14 years, Dr. Erwin has shared her writing and teaching expertise with Gesu’s students. She creates the writing portion of the English Language Arts curriculum for grades 4-8 and supplements it for grades 1-3. Students are invited to the Backe Program based on teacher recommendations, test scores, and reading ability. They write, revise, and publish five pieces per trimester—a rigorous pace.

Students attend class in small groups, allowing for individualized attention. They convene in their own writing classroom, where Dr. Erwin challenges them at the outset of each class with vocabulary, analogies, and sentences to edit on the SMART Board. They have access to donated laptops and draw inspiration from walls adorned with famous authors and student work.

Students learn genres required by state standards, but Dr. Erwin pushes them beyond, teaching poetry and even business writing. They read high-level literature by Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and other writers often taught in high school and college. They tackle The New York Times to prepare for writing their own arguments on topics such as virtual schools and single-gender education.

Dr. Erwin brings high expectations and innovative teaching methods to the classroom. “It’s that combination of logic and creativity that creates great writers,” she reveals. “…By pushing the creativity and the organization, you can help students get a foundation for high school and college.”

How do students respond to the program’s demands? “They’re a bit shocked initially,” says Dr. Erwin. But they meet the challenge. The fifth graders even ask for homework.

“They’re appreciative in hindsight,” Dr. Erwin acknowledges. “Even college students contact me and tell me, ‘You taught me how to write, and that’s why I’m doing well in college.’ This keeps me going.”

Dr. Erwin’s students never cease to inspire her. “Every day there’s somebody that amazes me, or makes me laugh, or touches my heart….I’ve never felt like this is a job. It just feels like a mission that I’m completing in my life.” She recalls the story of a young man “from a difficult home situation and now thriving at a boarding school. When you see justice happening, you see good happening. And you see God’s work in action here.”

What makes the program so successful? Dr. Erwin explains, “You have a principal who is innovative and can then implement it….You can have ideas that you can put into practice. You don’t have a lot of that power in many schools.”
Gesu’s Sponsor a Child Program: Impacting Students’ and Donors’ Lives

Sponsors Kathy and Peter Linneman create possibilities through community.

Kathy Linneman and Dr. Peter Linneman, Founding Principal, Linneman Associates and Wharton Professor Emeritus, have supported Gesu’s Sponsor a Child (SAC) program since 2011. As the first in their families to graduate college, both Kathy and Peter attest that education was life changing. They now strive to make education accessible to all, “especially in a world where people give up on children from certain circumstances,” notes Peter.

The Linnemans recognize that SAC “creates more than a school, but a community” that nurtures students. They have sponsored three students: Jermain in grade 2, Chelsea in grade 4, and Diamond, whom they sponsored for two years before she moved out of state. What motivates them to continue year after year? “You feel quite emotionally connected...because of coming and seeing what Gesu School is accomplishing and getting to see the child,” the Linnemans reflect.

Currently, SAC sponsors donate $7,000 per year per student and can choose their level of involvement. They are invited to participate in two Sponsorship Breakfast or Luncheon events per year at Gesu, complete with board games, to foster an informal atmosphere in which sponsors and students get to know each other. Twice a year, sponsors receive personalized letters or updates from students. Some sponsors opt to visit Gesu more often or engage with students outside of school. Others remain anonymous. The SAC program allows for flexibility.

The Linnemans cherish the relationships they have forged by attending Sponsorship events. “The games part is great. It’s very genuine,” Peter explains. “You can interact and really get to know the child,” says Kathy. They describe Jermain as “a very enthusiastic little guy, from the first time we met him” and Diamond as “charismatic, self-confident, and quite curious.”

Jermain eagerly anticipates their visits, especially viewing the photos the Linnemans share of their travels to Africa and other places. They talk about the places Jermain will one day visit and the possibilities for his life. “You hope if you had children at that age, they would have that presence and comfort being around adults, that they would be that pleasant and focused, which is obviously part of the environment that has been created here. They were extraordinary in that way,” state the Linnemans. It’s all part of what they call the Gesu “package”—education that includes not just academics, but also “discipline, focus, hope, and belief.”

An educator himself, Peter, who has been on faculty at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business and the University of Chicago, applauds Gesu’s approach to educating the whole child: “I taught very bright kids at Wharton for a long time. You need to transmit technical stuff: add, subtract, read, write. But you want to, hopefully, create a thirst for learning and a belief in ‘the possible.’” The Linnemans see sponsors as part of this effort.

What are the Linnemans’ hopes for their students? “To be the best ‘them’ that they can be,” states Peter firmly. “I don’t care if the students get As or Bs, as long as they do the best they can….I know that’s the atmosphere here: Do the best you can. Both of us admire that about Gesu.”

The Linnemans characterize their experience as sponsors as “genuine.” At Gesu, they observe, attending Sponsorship events does not stem from a “sense of duty” or “to be seen,” but to engage with the students and build community. “It sets an environment for the kids that there are other people, a broader network, who care. Some kids come from environments where that’s not always the case,” says Peter.

For those who are considering involvement in SAC, Peter encourages, “Don’t feel like you have to save the world. Just impact a life.”

To learn more about the Sponsor a Child program, contact Kelly Grattan, Director of Development, at (215) 763-9077 or kgrattan@gesuschool.org.

Building Students’ Futures: EITC and OSTC Programs

Companies that donate to Gesu School through the EITC and OSTC programs maximize state tax incentives and change the course of students’ lives. For more information on corporate giving, EITC, and OSTC, visit www.gesuschool.org/corporate_giving.

Dr. Peter Linneman and Kathy Linneman, with Jermain, Grade 2 and Chelsea, Grade 4

To learn more about the Sponsor a Child program, contact Kelly Grattan, Director of Development, at (215) 763-9077 or kgrattan@gesuschool.org.


**Heard in the Halls**

**Sustaining Agreement with Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus “Unanimously and Enthusiastically” Endorsed.**

February 3, 2015, marked the renewal signing of the Sustaining Agreement between the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus and Gesu School—one of only two Jesuit elementary schools (Pre-K through eighth grade) nationwide. Fr. Robert Hussey, S.J., Provincial, executed the agreement, which acknowledges the sponsorship of Gesu School by the Maryland Province and affirms “the commitment to this shared ministry” among Gesu’s Board of Trustees, the Society of Jesus, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters.

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8th graders have already been accepted to top high schools: Boys’ Latin, Cristo Rey, Hallahan, Haverford, Little Flower, Mercy Vocational, Merion Mercy, Roman Catholic, Shipley, Springside Chestnut Hill, West Catholic.

Alumnus Tyree ’14 was a starter on the Archbishop Wood basketball team as a freshman.

Alumnus Stephon ’11 is a Lenfest Scholar and honor society student at Boys’ Latin. In summer 2014, he attended a biomedicine program at Drexel University and Summer Search through Brown University.

At the 7th Annual Waldron Mercy Forensics Tournament, 6th grader Dh’myni and 8th grader Caitlin won in the poetry category.

The Anti-Defamation League recognized Gesu as a “No Place for Hate” School for the second consecutive year for our commitment to respecting diversity and promoting anti-bias and anti-bullying initiatives.

Seventh graders Kyheim and Briana and 8th graders Robin and Jamaal won 3rd place in English and 2nd place overall for combined subjects at the West Catholic Academic Challenge!

Gesu’s Dancing with The Students ballroom dance troupe performed prior to the Philadelphia 76ers game on December 5.

Thanks to Fox and Roach Charities for funding Google Chromebook laptops for grades 7-8. Faculty also received training to implement this technology in the classroom.

During Advent and the Christmas season, Gesu students collected clothing for Cradles to Crayons, which serves homeless families. As of February 6, students have raised $2,074.59 for the missions this academic year. Students donated $500 to Catholic Relief Services for orphans of Ebola in Liberia. We applaud their generosity!

IN MEMORIUM

In recent months, Gesu mourned the loss of three members of our community.

Michael Scrivani, our beloved “IT guy,” tirelessly met students’ and staff’s technology needs. We remember his genuineness and his positive, helpful attitude.

Phil Kendall was a longstanding Gesu Trustee since 2007. We gratefully recognize his dedication and the wisdom he shared with Gesu over so many years.

Kathryn L. Swope was a member of the original Gesu Development Board and mother of Rev. John Swope, S.J., incoming President of Saint Joseph’s Prep. We acknowledge her many years of service to Gesu, particularly during our pivotal transition from a parish school to an independent school.
Students take initiative to start Gesu’s baseball team.

It began with the perseverance of two fifth graders—Christopher and Aaron. In 2013, they asked Fifth Grade Teacher, Chris Osborne, to coach Gesu’s first baseball team. He agreed, with the condition that the boys bring their proposal to Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM. They marched to the Principal’s office and made their case. Although too young to play in the Archdiocesan CYO League, the fifth graders’ selflessness paved the way for their fellow students.

Ten of the team’s fifteen players had never played baseball. Very few had watched a game. Few leagues exist in the neighborhood, so only top players are selected to participate. Gesu’s team provides a unique opportunity for students from North Philadelphia.

While the team doesn’t have enough gloves for all of its players to use during practice, Coach Osborne circumnavigates this issue. Half of the team does calisthenics, while the others practice fielding. Coach Osborne appreciates support from St. Joseph’s Prep—facilities, coaching sessions, and mentoring for players.

The team played eight exciting games. Coach Osborne describes them as “very positive, unified, and supportive of each other.” While they only won a single game, they remained undeterred. Coach Osborne applauds their effort: “What was most inspiring was the positivity they kept throughout the season….They showed improvement in every game…and never gave up.”

At Gesu, lessons learned on the field translate to the classroom—namely hard work, confidence, and optimism. Says Coach Osborne, “Practicing is the only real way to improve. That goes with athletics and academics.” The main lesson he hopes his players grasped? “Sometimes, I try my best and fail. I have to learn not to say ‘I quit.’ I have to learn to know I will improve if I keep working as hard as I can.”

Eighth grader, Jamaal, enjoyed being on the field and “learned that baseball is a game of trust, teamwork, and awareness, just like life.” His team, he says, was “proud…to start the ‘legacy of baseball’ at Gesu School.”

The team anticipates its second season. Christopher and Aaron will finally have their chance to take the field.
**Alum Creates Positive Change Through Art**

2005 Gesu graduate succeeds in media studies and career.

Saeed Briscoe, Gesu Class of 2005, balances his studies at Temple University with managing his own business and serving his community. Although still in college, he has developed his own brand, SaeedsVP—photography, film, graphic design, and apparel. Briscoe owes his creativity to his Mom. He owes his strong work ethic and character to his Dad. And he owes his “ability to balance all of this” to Gesu School.

Briscoe credits his success to Gesu’s environment and teachers, who provided “the foundation for making yourself and the world better.” He elaborates, “…Everything I learned here, in some aspect or arena of my life, I know I’m still referencing….even Sr. Ellen’s discipline. Fr. Neil and Fr. Bur—the structure they set….They always maintained a safe learning environment, and that was very significant….That’s part of nurturing the whole person.” When he started at West Catholic High School, Briscoe attests that he “felt confident and ready.”

Encouraged by the Gesu community, Briscoe discovered his creativity at age 12. He recalls meeting Gesu Trustee, Keith Pension, in the cafeteria while he was drawing. They discussed his art, done in pen on computer paper. Ms. Pension asked what would benefit Briscoe’s work. He answered simply—a pencil and drawing paper. For his birthday, Ms. Pension accompanied Briscoe to purchase proper art supplies to nurture his talent.

In high school, Briscoe continued cultivating his artistic skills. In 2009, he won a tri-state competition with his modern take on Cezanne’s, “The Card Players.” His mixed-medium piece, “The Gamble,” hung in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Years after their initial conversation, Ms. Pension attended the exhibit. “It still resonates with me that she recognized my work…and took the time to invest in it,” Briscoe recounts.

Briscoe earned his Associate’s Degree in Liberal Arts in 2013 from Community College of Philadelphia. He transferred to Temple and has flourished in his major, Media Studies and Production. Briscoe constantly challenges himself to “know fundamentals and respect the craft,” taking on internships in photography and graphic design.

Briscoe’s art conveys a social message. The Power Project, a photo series, draws inspiration from Renaissance portraits of royalty and influential social leaders, such as Gandhi. The series captures everyday, authentic individuals in regal poses “to see themselves as powerful and acknowledge individuals making humanity better,” states Briscoe.

A true artist, Briscoe boldly “embraces all forms,” including filmmaking. He single-handedly wrote, directed, and produced the feature-length film, *TIES—Lost in Life*, screened in 2014 at Philadelphia’s Beckett Life Center. The film chronicles a young couple’s relationship and the struggles Briscoe has witnessed living in North Philadelphia, such as poverty and drug culture.

Despite his demanding schedule, Briscoe regularly gives back to his community. He helped create POPPYN, Presenting Our Perspective on Philly Youth News. In conjunction with Temple’s University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia, the program teaches media production to high school students, empowering them to create positive images of youth.

Self-assured, yet humble, Briscoe has lofty goals. Drawing from his foundation at Gesu “to always strive” and to be a man for others, he plans to grow his business—writing films and novels that have a social conscience. We eagerly await his next creation.

> “Through all my work, the one core thread is to elevate the everyday experience, typically to empower somebody….A lot in the media is divisive….I recognize my platform and my capability to use it in a positive light.” —Saeed Briscoe ’05
Junior Board Launches in September 2014
Young professionals invest in Gesu.

“...The Junior Board hopes to harness the energy and enthusiasm of young professionals and engage them with the school in a meaningful way,” says Co-President, Megha Kulshreshtha. Since its successful kick-off in September, the group continues to gain momentum—pioneering new volunteer events and fundraising efforts.

Alongside Gesu students and families, members participated in LOVE Your Park Fall Service Day at Smith Memorial Playground & Playhouse in Fairmount Park. Thirty volunteers planted trees, raked leaves, and enjoyed getting to know each other. The Junior Board’s next long-term volunteer venture is a mentoring program to help Gesu’s 8th graders transition to and succeed throughout high school.

The Junior Board also garners philanthropic support from young professionals via fundraising, social events, and corporate partnerships. Their newly designed monthly giving program allows donors to contribute the cost of a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or one dinner out to sponsor a child’s education. To advance their fundraising and “friendraising” goals, the group is also planning the first-ever Gesu Gala After Hours Soiree at the National Museum of American Jewish History.

To prepare for roles as future nonprofit leaders, the Junior Board regularly participates in trainings. In December, Gesu Board Chairman, J. Gordon Cooney, Jr., presented on nonprofit board governance. Executive Junior Board members also benefit from mentorship by Gesu’s seasoned Board of Trustees.

The Junior Board brings formal structure to the Young Friends of Gesu School, active since 2008. Members serve on the Volunteer or Event Committees and attend quarterly meetings and trainings. Co-President, Brianna Taylor, predicts that the group will have an “enduring legacy which would make a measurable impact on Gesu School.”

Interested in staying informed about Junior Board news and events? Contact Julianne Mesaric, Director of the Annual Fund & Special Events, at (215) 763-9077 or julianne.mesaric@gesuschool.org.

2015 Gesu Spirit Medalists

Gesu Trustees, Keith Pension and Tad Decker, will be awarded the Spirit Medal, Gesu’s highest honor, at the 2015 Gesu Gala for their extraordinary dedication to Gesu School. To learn more about the Spirit Medalists and to purchase tickets, visit www.gesuschool.org/2015gala.
EVENTS

**Gesu Gala**
May 7, 2015
6 p.m. - 9 p.m.
National Museum of American Jewish History
For more information, visit: www.gesuschool.org/2015gala.

**8th Grade Graduation**
June 10, 2015
7 p.m.
The Church of the Gesu
All are welcome!

**Gesu Alumni Reunions**

**Classes of 2007 to 2015**
June 14, 2015
12:30 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Lucky Strike Bowling, Philadelphia

**Classes of 2006 and Earlier**
April 19, 2015
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Mass at The Church of the Gesu followed by a light brunch in the Gesu School Library
For more information, visit: www.gesuschool.org/reunions.

Please contact the Development Office at 215-763-9077 or development@gesuschool.org for more information about any of our events.

Visit www.gesuschool.org/calendar for the latest listings of events, athletics, and news!