FROM THE President

Dear Friends,

In this issue of Gesu Magazine, we recognize how the Gesu community provides the building blocks for lifelong success. Many of our 450 students face challenges stemming from an existence of poverty and exposure to violence in Gesu’s surrounding neighborhoods. Despite these circumstances, our students excel. In the following pages, we share how Gesu enables children to persevere and to soar.

Gesu’s formula for success ensures that top-notch teachers deliver personalized attention, from remedial support to advanced classes, pushing students to their highest potential. Our alumni demonstrate that this paradigm works, as exemplified by a 2013 graduate who shines as an exceptional leader and scholar.

Gesu’s identity, rooted in the Jesuit and IHM traditions, enriches the spiritual formation of our students. Children become young “men and women for others” who serve through efforts such as the Gesu Justice League.

Gesu’s volunteers, board members, and donors dedicate time and resources to give students access to a quality education. Sponsors create opportunity through scholarships and forge lasting relationships with students.

Gesu never stops innovating. Our MAGIS initiative for character development and our Graduate Support Program catapult students to success.

Thank you for supporting a Gesu School education! I hope you enjoy reading the stories that follow.

Peace and blessings,

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President and CEO

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Gesu School

Grade 5 students constructed 3-D houses of corrugated cardboard, acrylic paint, and oil pastel in Linda Hartzell’s art class.

Photo by Sabina Louise Pierce
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Front cover photo: For Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, class “buddies” in grade 8 and Kindergarten make care packages, a meal and artwork, for local outreach programs.
The Gesu MAGIS: Empowering Students to Achieve Lifelong Success

Faculty, administration, and board members collaborate to implement cutting-edge “soft skills” initiative.

Gesu graduates are confident, altruistic, self-aware, and determined. How does this happen, class after class? How do students develop these life skills, or soft skills?

In 2015, Gesu jumpstarted the “MAGIS initiative” to answer these questions. Gesu affirms that soft skills are teachable and weaves them into the curriculum for Pre-K–grade 8.

The Genesis of the Gesu MAGIS

The word ‘Magis,’ used widely by the Jesuits, means ever striving to do and be “greater” for the service of God. The acronym ‘MAGIS’ creates a nexus between Gesu’s soft skills initiative and the broader priorities of a Jesuit education. Gesu’s MAGIS encompasses personal growth and identifies skills that students should exhibit while at Gesu and carry forward at graduation: Motivation, Awareness, Grit, Independence, and Social competence.

Learning these non-cognitive skills directly impacts achievement. Gesu President and CEO Bryan Carter states, “MAGIS is part of our ‘whole child’ education approach. Gesu offers rigorous academics. MAGIS equips the students with the mindset of grit when the work becomes difficult. Also valuable is the social competence piece, growing our students to be ‘men and women for others.’”

The Planning Phase: Charting Student Success

With Principal Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, and Gesu Board Members Kate Hovde and Peter G. Gould, Ph.D., at the helm, a faculty committee defined the five essential soft skills and relevant assessment tools. With student focus groups, monthly meetings, and consultation with Angela Duckworth’s University of Pennsylvania Character Lab—at the forefront of soft skills inquiry—the committee devised its pilot program. It launched in fall 2016.

Implementation and Student Testimonials

Teachers introduced the concepts through grade-level appropriate lessons. Kindergartners created a MAGIS storybook illustrating what motivates their positive behavior. Students in grade 6 religion classes researched figures who embody the MAGIS, such as Gandhi.

Each trimester, students completed self-assessments and received a faculty assessment, focusing on positive growth.

At a board meeting, 7th graders presented personal development in one soft skill. Manaii reflected on motivation. After learning in grade 1 that her Gesu teacher attended Merion Mercy Academy, she set her goal—an academic scholarship to Merion. Since then, she’s attended Merion’s pre-high school programs.

Manaii notes, “You need all five of these qualities to succeed. I put in the extra time for everything. To get 100 on that test. More reading to further extend my vocabulary. Trying to do the best I can to get more opportunities to be noticed by people who can give me that scholarship.”

What’s Next?

Instruction on MAGIS skills continues as the committee refines assessment tools. The Gesu MAGIS reflects Gesu’s position as a pioneer in inner-city education. Gesu aims to share findings on developing well-rounded students prepared to, as St. Ignatius of Loyola proclaimed, “go forth and set the world on fire.”

Above: From Pre-K through grade 8, Gesu students embrace the MAGIS. Posters hang in every classroom as daily reminders. Below: Members of the Gesu MAGIS committee met monthly to establish the initiative and tailor it to each grade level.
What began as a discussion on bullying prevention in a faculty meeting blossomed into a student-driven, school-wide movement.

Gesu Principal Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, proposed that students help promote inclusivity. Eight students in grades 6 and 8 volunteered to lead the effort. “The specific mission of the Gesu Justice League is to prevent bullying and make Gesu a safe place. I hope to spread the word of showing justice for others,” explains 8th grader, Sydney.

Teachers Caroline Dodds, Kindergarten, and Amanda Rice, Grade 2 and a National Certified Counselor, volunteered as program coordinators. Notes Ms. Rice, “When bullying happens, research shows it lasts for 30 seconds. When peers get involved, it lasts 10 seconds. It works. Peers influence peers.” The program aims to reduce any existing bullying, avert new issues, and reinforce a positive school climate. The Gesu Justice League supports peers and improves peer relations, while maintaining dialogue with teachers.

What’s in a Name?
The Gesu Justice League is based on the comic book series—superheroes working together for good. The name intentionally engages students.

Student leaders draw inspiration from superheroes and translate those powers into action. Explains 8th grader, Kimani, “I admire Naruto because he protects his friends and family and loves them.” Adds Gregory, also in 8th grade, “I identify myself with Iron Man. If I make a mistake, I always try to fix it.”

The group wears pins and dons capes for meetings and classroom visits, identifying them as safe peers whom students can approach for support. “The pins and capes are symbols that indicate that we are here to protect and preserve the safety of others,” observes Sydney. “I feel powerful with these capes on,” beams 8th grader, Quadir.

Fostering a Safe Haven for All
The Gesu Justice League received training on types of bullying, tasks of bystanders, and interventions. They then devised an educational marketing campaign, writing role-plays for Pre-K–2 and creating socially conscious art for middle school halls.

The role-plays include relatable scenarios, such as picking teams at recess. The scenes foster dialogue and demonstrate practical takeaways—how to stand up for a friend or ask for help. Eighth grader, Gregory explained justice to a 2nd grade audience: “Justice means standing up for people who can’t stand up for themselves. It’s always doing the right thing.”

What did the 2nd graders grasp? “Treat others as you would want to be treated,” states Tyler. “You should stick up for your friends if they’re getting bullied,” advocates Brianna.

Leaving a Noble Legacy
In just six months, these student superheroes promoted powerful messages of respect and acceptance that made an enduring impact. Ms. Dodds reflects, “The 8th graders are helping to build a pilot program and make it sustainable.” In addition to caring for their peers, these leaders enhanced their personal development, growing in empathy and active listening skills. Going forward, Gesu’s counseling department will house the group, which aims to establish an after-school peer drop-in program.

“The program is in students’ hands. They are trained to be empowering bystanders, help shape the school community, and support their fellow peers. They get to be their own superheroes seeking justice for all.” —Justice League Program Coordinators
EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN THE JESUIT AND IHM TRADITIONS

“Our children need us while they are at Gesu School. They need us when they move on to high school. They need us when they enter the workforce after high school or enroll in college. They need us as young adults. Gesu School now has a systematic, proactive way of connecting with our alumni.”

—Bryan Carter, Gesu School President and CEO

Since its launch in October 2016 under the strong, energetic leadership of Director Jose Gonzalez, Jr., Gesu School’s Graduate Support Program (GSP), has built a solid foundation in high school and college access programming and begun to mobilize the school’s alumni base. After years of planning and identifying best practices in alumni relations and the transitions to high school and college, the program was established through the vision and generosity of Gesu Board Member Peter G. Gould, Ph.D., and his wife, Robin Potter.

Mission Statement: The Gesu Graduate Support Program was founded to provide resources and services for current Gesu students, alumni, parents, and guardians. The Graduate Support Program will guide Gesu students and families as they experience the high school admissions process, college exploration and selection, and ongoing professional and career development.

“I would love if this program gets to where I envision it—that alums would come back and create an alumni network that would almost feed itself at every level. The high school student would mentor an 8th grader. The college student would help with college tours for students to meet alums who are on campus. Professionals would come back to talk about career exploration or have students shadow them. Knowing that person sat in the same chair they did—nothing is more empowering for students.”

Meet Jose Gonzalez, Jr.

• Alumnus of St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland
• University of Notre Dame graduate
• Proud father of two
• Former Director of Diversity and Inclusion at St. Joseph’s Prep 2007–2016 and Director of Camp Magis for 8 years
• Goes by “Mr. Gonzo”
**High School Admissions**

The GSP recognizes the importance of early planning for high school and college. Notes Mr. Gonzalez, “One of the things we stress to parents is to talk about children developing a profile for high school admissions. This consists of grades, academic awards, after-school activities, and personal interests. High schools are looking for well-rounded students.” As early as 5th grade, Mr. Gonzalez encourages students and parents to build a “mini résumé,” including participation in Gesu extracurriculars and summer enrichment programs at potential high schools.

In 7th grade, the Director of Graduate Support meets with parents and students to discuss the importance of grades and program expectations and to preview the high school admissions process for diocesan, independent, and public high schools. To familiarize Gesu families with admissions processes, Mr. Gonzalez regularly meets with high school admissions personnel across the region. His classes with students include self-assessments and outlining goals. Then, he addresses high school fit and how it connects to achieving those goals.

**High School Success**

Once in high school, the GSP maintains connections with graduates. Through meetings at high schools and via digital communication, the GSP provides graduates with the social and emotional support needed to complete high school successfully. At visits to Merion Mercy Academy and The Haverford School, Mr. Gonzalez observed the comradery among Gesu graduates and that students felt each school was the best fit.

Mr. Gonzalez shares, “The maturity and language with how the boys spoke about Haverford, you could see they felt it was their school. It wasn’t rehearsed. It made me feel good that we have them at a place where we are challenging them and that is a good fit. It’s my job to dig and find the right fit for our students and bridge that communication with parents.”

This collaboration extends to college. At St. Joseph’s University, Mr. Gonzalez met with current students, including seniors, Bria and Imani, who encouraged freshman, Nazeim, to seek internships and connect with the Office of Inclusion and Diversity.

**College Admissions and Success**

To prepare graduates and their families to navigate post-secondary options, in 2017–2018, the GSP plans to initiate college access and financial aid workshops for parents—Parent University—and “boot camps” to jumpstart students into the admissions process. Quarterly student workshops will range from résumé building to developing professionalism. The GSP will also track data on alumni academic success rates and identify students needing support to re-engage with school or find employment.

**Career and Networking**

The GSP will offer professional development resources and organize social events to grow the Gesu network. To strengthen alumni relations and reconnect with graduates, the office will establish two annual alumni reunions.

**Parent Academy**

At a Parent Academy on high school cost and financial aid, Jose Gonzalez provides individualized attention to parents of 6th and 7th graders.

The Gesu Parent Academy is a hallmark of the GSP. Designed for parents of current 6th and 7th graders, Parent Academy is a three-part series. Parents receive a workshop binder, known as their “green bible,” to facilitate planning and to keep as a one-stop resource throughout the high school and college admissions processes.

To accommodate working parents’ schedules, courses take place early morning and evenings. Topics cover understanding high school admissions, evaluating cost and financial aid, and exploring a child’s fit with various institutions. Led by Educational Consultant Caryn Rivers, the series was well attended, with 20–30 participants.

Aisha Williams, mother of a 7th grade student, has attended all three parent academies. Her daughter has been at Gesu since Kindergarten and is interested in a career in engineering and the CIA. Ms. Williams notes, “The experience has been very enlightening and empowering. It has lit the fire you need to be an advocate for the next chapter in your child’s life. It’s been a tremendous help. It helps to get a better insight on programs offered and what the process will be when it comes time to do the applications.”

“**The road to college begins with a solid middle school experience. There is a clear relationship between middle school preparation, high school success, and entry into college; Gesu is committed to seeing that relationship through.**”

—Jose Gonzalez, Jr.
Director, Gesu Graduate Support Program

“**The Graduate Support Program is absolutely necessary to continued success for our Gesu scholars. The GSP is vital as a parent for what we need to do going forward and to setting us up for what to expect and how to handle situations we’ll come in contact with.**”

—Aisha Williams, Gesu School Parent
“Reaching the Top,” Paper Collage Inspired by Matisse
By Gianna, Grade 3

“Coming from Market,” Cloth and Marker Collage
By Nia, Grade 4

Visit Gesu School’s YouTube Channel to enjoy musical selections and other student presentations.
youtube.com/gesuschoolworks

Black History Month Heroes
Grade 2

Michaela DePrince, Ballerina
By Sinayah

Louis Armstrong, Musician
By Cole

Althea Gibson, Professional Tennis Player and Golfer
By Jeliah
Silent City
By Shayon, Grade 7
Backe Advanced Writing Program

Silent city not so much
Sirens, shots,
that’s all you hear
Cringing on my pillow
My best friend
Just to get me through tonight
A city so opposite of silent
“Bang” Bullet bouncing off my roof
I pull harder on my friend
Not silent at all

“Pow” Another attack on my soft,
vulnerable, precious skull
An internal wound to my brother
Stabbing him in the back
Crushing his spine
All you hear is “Snap”

I fall as if I fall through time
Back when everything
Was in black and white
So old school
When boys went out
Played ball at twelve a.m.
All you hear is “Swing”
Not silent at all
Come home at curfew
Not because of fear
Because of respect
For parents’ rules
All I hear is “Slam”
Goes the door
At the crack of curfew

Girls played hopscotch
’Til their feet hurt
Dancin’ Prancin’ and the rest
With their pigtails a swingin’
All you hear is “Whoosh”
Oh the sounds I hear in Philadelphia
Silent not so much

Mother Teresa Project
“I Can”, Grade 2

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”
-Mother Teresa
**Q.** Why did you choose teaching as your profession? Why Gesu?

**A.** Gesu pushes students to surpass what they think they can do. Teachers believed in me when I couldn’t. To advocate for students when they don’t think they can reach certain milestones—getting into good high schools and college—I wanted to give that back. Gesu was the only school I would’ve stayed in Philadelphia for; I just really like the mission. Being a first-year teacher, I definitely felt supported throughout all the floors of the building. Sr. Ellen always has my back.

**Q.** What has been a highlight? What has been a challenge or a learning experience?

**A.** The coolest thing was observing the baby chicks. I was hesitant about getting them in the classroom because I didn’t understand how gentle the students could be with these little creatures. What was powerful was that the students who had trouble handling their emotions and had the roughest time in class were the most empathetic. Developmentally, Kindergarteners are mostly concerned about themselves. I want to teach them respect for others. I saw students come into their own this year and learn how to be respectful. I’m very routine-oriented. This is great for kids and me. Also taking what kids give you when they come in. Sometimes it’s no sleep; sometimes they are hungry. I have to think on my toes and adapt.

**Q.** How would you describe your teaching style and philosophy?

**A.** I’m big on play-based learning. In the education world, sometimes we forget about it because we get bogged down in standards. My first few months here, we had to get through the books and get everything done. After a seminar on the importance of play, I took a step back and found play-based activities and combined them with book work. Children interpret the world and grow through play: spatial awareness, problem solving, working with others. Near the end of the year, children spent an hour and a half every morning playing in centers: letter writing, creating art, pretending in the kitchen, solving puzzles.

Creating an atmosphere of acceptance is important. I had a boy play with dolls. Others made fun of him. We had a conversation that it wasn’t a gender thing. If you want to play, go ahead. As long as you are happy and can be respectful, you can be whatever you want to be. I love collecting data and seeing the trends and how students grow. I can show a parent where a child started and ended through a portfolio, especially with writing.

**Q.** What do you hope students carry with them when they leave your classroom?

**A.** I want children to be happy and to know that their actions have consequences. They are responsible for how they conduct themselves. I want children to know it’s ok to make mistakes and try again. I want children to take pride in what they do. It sets a strong foundation for how they go on to view themselves.
Gesu’s Sponsor a Child (SAC) program plays a critical role in ensuring students receive a top-notch education. SAC sponsors make an annual donation of a scholarship. Sponsors are invited to attend two scholarship events per year at Gesu to share a meal with students and enjoy crafts and games. Some sponsors visit Gesu more often. Others opt to remain anonymous. Twice a year, sponsors receive personalized updates from students.

Paul Welch, CFA is Sr. Research Analyst & Partner with Penn Capital. He shares his motivations for supporting Gesu and how the SAC program has impacted his life.

Q. What inspired you to give to Gesu’s Sponsor a Child program?
A. I remember vividly the day in 2009 when my life changed. Chris Beck, former Gesu President and CEO, came to my office and talked about Gesu’s students and mission. I was a new father and wanted to set a positive example for my kids through philanthropic activities with children. Gesu’s combination of non-selective admissions, serving communities in academic and socioeconomic need, and its unmatched breadth of programs struck me as a rare opportunity. Gesu enabled me to be involved with an institution that was small enough that I could impact, but deep enough that it was impacting communities daily.

Q. How would you describe your rapport with your sponsored student over the years?
A. I became a sponsor to 2nd grader, Nadir—such a smart and kind young man. He graduated in 2016 and now attends Roman Catholic High School. My parents, my wife, and I looked forward to seeing Nadir at scholarship lunches. We played games and caught up on his classes, activities, and family. Consistently, Nadir asked me about my own family. Our belief in Nadir and Gesu’s mission was always reaffirmed at the luncheons.

Over the years, I saw Nadir develop personally and academically. Our conversations matured from ones surrounding football, to his passion for and recognition from the Rock School of Dance and being a mentor to his younger brother and other kids in his neighborhood. Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, Principal, and Bryan Carter, President and CEO, kept me up to date on Nadir’s progress. I visited Gesu to share how proud I was of him.

Q. What has fostered your commitment to urban education?
A. In her office, Sr. Ellen has a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr., and I remember discussing how many people sacrificed to give Nadir and me more opportunities than they had. At Gesu, there is a responsibility to inspire and grow opportunities for others.

I also collaborated with teachers to initiate a program for 8th graders on stock market investments, an often-overlooked conversation in inner-city communities. Working weekly with students and seeing them absorb concepts I learned in college was rewarding. I saw the benefits of Gesu’s supportive environment.

Q. How has your involvement with SAC been meaningful for you?
A. Gesu continues to have a special place in my family’s heart. My wife and I are sponsoring a second student, Dillon in 7th grade, and plan to continue after he graduates. My wife attends the luncheons with me. My children have donated books to the library, while my parents have also sponsored a child.

Gesu staff, teachers, and students are an excellent vehicle to impact lives and provide equal opportunity. With the Jesuit tenet to be “men and women for others” and belief in themselves, students are determined to thrive under tough circumstances. It is an honor to be part of the Gesu family and its important work helping kids form and reach their goals.

To learn more about SAC, contact Monifa Moore at (215) 763-9077 or monifa.moore@gesuschool.org.
Heard in the Halls

On March 30, Gesu hosted our annual One Day Challenge. Our friends at The Z Foundation agreed to donate $15,000 if we received 650 donations. The final results were 856 gifts totaling $63,632.13! Thank you to our loyal (and new) supporters for helping us shatter our goal!

Gesu School received a “No Place for Hate Designation” from the Anti-Defamation League for the 4th consecutive year. On May 21, 40 Gesu team members participated in the ADL’s Walk Against Hate, furthering our commitment to inclusion.

Congratulations to Bryan Carter, Gesu School President and CEO, who was inducted into the Saint Joseph’s University Chapter of Alpha Sigma Nu, the international Jesuit honor society, on February 5. Alpha Sigma Nu honors those who embody in their everyday lives the qualities of scholarship, service, and loyalty to the values of Jesuit education.

Thanks to Ellen Churchill, Board Member, Gesu participated in My Daughter’s Kitchen this spring. Seventh grade girls learned cooking basics and the fundamentals of healthy eating with The Philadelphia Inquirer/Vetri Community Partnership program.

This academic year, Gesu students raised more than $4,800.00 for the missions. Funds will be donated to: Kenya Grade School Project via Maywood Rotary Club Foundation, Catholic Relief Services for Refugees and Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl, Jesuit Refugee Services and Jesuit Refugee Services for Haiti, IHM Peru mission, and Friends of Yemin Orde. We recognize our students’ generosity as young “men and women for others.”

Congratulations to Board Members Sr. Stephen Anne Roderiguez, IHM, and Rev. Stephen Thorne for receiving the Lead. Learn. Proclaim. Award for Outstanding Catholic School Education from the National Catholic Educational Association at the NCEA Convention & Expo awards dinner on April 18 in St. Louis.

On May 31, Gesu School’s 1st–4th graders transformed the 2nd floor into a global carnival, Around the World by 3:10p.m. Classes researched countries such as China, Zimbabwe, and Columbia, and shared their new knowledge (and new foods) with each other.

Gesu Students and Teachers Continue Cultivating Community Garden at 17th and Stiles.

Since Gesu 7th grade girls cleared out the garden and planted bulbs last fall, the Gesu community has tended to the space and incorporated learning in science, math, and art classes. The GEM Community Service Club contributed by weeding this spring. Second graders observed caterpillars transform into butterflies in the science lab and released 30 in the garden in May. Under the leadership of Art Teacher Linda Hartzell, 7th grade girls created unique installations, including a water barrel, birdhouse, decorative door, and mural. Thanks to Pat Leaf, Science Lab Coordinator, who launched this project after attending the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s Green City Teachers program.

Science Lab Coordinator Pat Leaf (left) and Grade 2 Teacher Mary Ryder (right) release butterflies in the community garden with grade 2 students.

Gesu 7th graders create art installations for the community garden in Linda Hartzell’s art class.
Athletic Corner

**Baseball team advances to semifinals.**
The grade 6–8 boys team fought injuries all season, using grit and teamwork to make the semifinals in CYO Region 6. Coach Osborne, Assistant Coach Rice, and Assistant Coach Vito are proud of the team's unity and positivity. The younger players made great improvements!

**Boys varsity basketball celebrates a triumphant year.**
Led by Coach Deal, the team shined. At the Friends Central Middle School Boys' and Girls' Thanksgiving Tournament, the team advanced to the championship and took 2nd place. For the second consecutive year, they won the St. Joseph's Prep Christmas Tournament. They made the semifinals in the Region 5–8 CYO league, finishing 3rd overall!

**Girls varsity basketball focuses on teamwork.**
The team worked on fundamentals this year, with excellent leadership by the 8th grade captains. Coach Liva closed out her third year with fond memories and excitement for the season ahead. Thanks to Assistant Coach Joe, too.

**Boys JV basketball posts another solid season.**
Coach Williams completed his 14th season with an 8–2 record. The enthusiastic team of 5th and 6th grade boys won the first round of the St. Joseph's Prep Christmas Tournament and took 3rd place in the regular season!

**Girls JV basketball rebuilds with outstanding record.**
It was a great year for the CYO league team, with 8 games and 6 wins! After winning two games in 2015–2016, the team made a complete turnaround. Coach Joe is proud of the 5th and 6th graders’ hard work and willingness to accept a challenge.

**Co-ed track team shapes individual talent.**
Coach Watson enjoyed a fun season with the 4th–8th grade girls and boys track team, which focused on honing each athlete’s individual skills. Four athletes participated in the league championship in the CYO division of the Penn Relays!

**Co-ed soccer powers through a challenging season.**
Coach Corbie helped his team of 5th and 6th grade girls and boys overcome obstacles throughout the season. Their determination led them to the playoffs! Coach Corbie looks forward to a bright year ahead with multiple stand-out players.

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The Gesu School Symposium Examines Cultural Awareness in Teacher-Student Dynamics.

Gesu School’s 19th Annual Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education explored the topic of Cultural Responsiveness in the Urban Classroom. Keynote speaker Christopher Emdin, Ph.D., and experts in K–12 and higher education shared deep insight into how students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences shape the way they learn. To view a video and photos of the symposium and read a synopsis, visit www.gesuschool.org/symposium_2016.

Photo Above: At Gesu School’s 2016 Symposium are (left to right) David P. Hardy, Co-Founder & CEO of Boys’ Latin of Philadelphia Charter School; Tamika Michelle Evans, CEO & Principal of Global Leadership Academy Southwest; Pamela Barnett, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Trinity Washington University; Christopher Emdin, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Christopher Emdin, Ph.D., delivers the keynote address to nearly 300 attendees at the 19th Annual Gesu School Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education.

Photos by Edward Savaria

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**IN MEMORIAM**

Dorrance H. Hamilton
Polly Bancroft Hebble
Mary F.X. McFadden, Class of 1946
Lillian E. Neff
Ralph S. Saul, Former Gesu School Board Member and 2008 Spirit Medalist

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Alumna Poised for College and Career in Physical Therapy

2013 graduate earns scholarships to undergraduate and doctoral program.

Dama Colbert-Brinkley, Class of 2013, exudes quiet humility and a fierce sense of self-direction. Her formula for success? Challenging herself, asserting her leadership skills, and serving her communities.

Dama attests that Gesu helped her become the person she is—outgoing, altruistic, and ambitious. She began at Gesu in Kindergarten, carrying on a family legacy that spans generations.

Academic Success and Ambition

A member of the National Honor Society and ranked in the top 20 of West Catholic Preparatory High School’s Class of 2017, Dama is an academic powerhouse. Accepted into more than ten colleges and universities, she will attend Widener University with four scholarships for academics and service.

She is pursuing a rigorous seven-year program for an undergraduate degree in psychology and a doctorate in physical therapy. She plans a career as a physical therapist in a sports setting.

At Gesu, advanced math and advanced writing classes fed Dama’s eagerness for academic challenges. She explains, “Gesu taught me to be more responsible with my school work. My teachers challenged me.”

Exposure to basketball and track at Gesu sparked Dama’s interest in sports, which she fueled as a runner and power forward on the basketball team at West Catholic. While a manager of football and basketball teams in high school, she forged interests in sports analytics and training, narrowing her career focus.

A Young “Woman for Others”

Equally impressive to her academic achievements is Dama’s dedication to service and civic endeavors. Gesu molded her soft skills. Dama notes, “Gesu took me out of my comfort zone and made me open up to people more. It taught me to become a leader and work hard, how to carry myself, how to work with people and be more mature.”

She singlehandedly revitalized West Catholic’s Black Student Union, defunct for decades. “I always wanted to start a club. West Catholic has student council as a voice for students, but I thought it was important for students to have another outlet,” states Dama.

As President, she mobilized multiple initiatives, including a toy drive for a local school and a Christmas party for Gesu’s after-school program.

She coordinated a civic engagement forum at West Catholic featuring prominent speakers from the National Black Sisters Conference and the Mayor’s Office of Black Male Engagement.

A well-rounded student, Dama also participated as a school ambassador and on the yearbook committee, sang at masses, and tutored middle school students.

Staying Connected to Gesu

During high school, Dama served as a volunteer and counselor in Gesu’s summer camp and the after-school program. As a senior, she worked weekdays, balancing her studies with providing homework assistance and arts and crafts for 1st and 2nd graders. She finds joy in “being a big sister” to students.

Sr. Mary Bur, IHM, Gesu School Librarian and former Principal of West Catholic, describes Dama: “A solid student who was always willing to accept the challenge of serious attention to her studies, ready to be of service to others, and all the while be of cheerful spirit. Dama is the perfect example of a young person who developed the MAGIS skills of motivation, grit, and self-awareness while at Gesu School and who continued to strengthen these throughout her high school years.”

Dama is a testimonial that “Gesu works!”

“Ms. Pickett held us to a higher standard. It prepared me for high school and made me a better writer. It helped me manage time better. I think she saw our potential and that’s why she pushed us so hard.”

—Dama Colbert-Brinkley ’13

On 8th Grade Teacher, Annette Pickett

Dama Colbert-Brinkley ‘13 helps a student build reading skills in Gesu’s after-school program.

Dama Colbert-Brinkley ’13 graduated in the top 20 of West Catholic’s Class of 2017.
Jim Higgins has been associated with Gesu School for more than 70 years. After transferring to Gesu in 1940, Jim thrived with individualized learning and instruction. This was the start of a lifelong dedication to the school. Jim fondly recalls priests and sisters who invested in him and taught him the value of hard work and generosity. After graduating from Gesu in 1945, Jim attended Saint Joseph’s Prep and Saint Joseph’s University, where he earned a degree in accounting. While working for Hillside Capital, Jim learned that Fr. Bur needed support to turn Gesu into an independent school, so he reached out to assist. In 1993, he joined the school’s board as its first treasurer. Today, Jim teaches at Holy Family University and continues to serve on Gesu’s board and committees, offering his unwavering support. Jim is one of Gesu’s biggest champions and is always sharing about the impact Gesu has on its students and the community.

H. Chase Lenfest, a well-respected entrepreneur and philanthropist, has been supporting Gesu School for nearly two decades. Chase has a profound impact on Gesu’s children through financial support of four annual Sponsor a Child scholarships and participation in Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit program. “Dedication” aptly describes Chase’s relationship with Gesu. Despite his busy schedule, there is rarely a scholarship event where he cannot be found immersed in lively conversation or an intense game of Connect Four with students!

Gesu School fits within the mission of Chase’s varied and impactful philanthropic endeavors. He is the Founder and President of The H. Chase Lenfest Foundation, Inc., which provides financial support for programs that positively impact children’s lives in Philadelphia’s impoverished areas. Chase’s commitment to making a better life for children in the inner city and his loyal dedication to Gesu School exemplify the true meaning of the Spirit Medal.

“To me, Mr. Lenfest is more than a person who simply helps to support my education financially. He is a mentor and a friend. He cares deeply about my education and me as a person. He is always challenging me to do my best and make the right decisions.”

—Christian, Grade 7, Sponsored by H. Chase Lenfest through Gesu’s Sponsor a Child Program
Top: During Catholic Schools Week, Gesu students, including these 3rd graders, write letters to IHM Sisters at Camilla Hall nursing home to spread joy and to thank them for their prayers and service.

Left: For Black History Month, Gesu 5th graders present a “live museum” on their role models, such as astronaut Mae Jemison. Thank you for supporting our teachers’ and students’ creativity!