Dear Friends,

We are excited to share our fourth edition of our Gesu School Spotlight! These pages chronicle our 2019-2020 academic year, highlighting in-person learning and the later shift to remote education. They offer glimpses into our classrooms and virtual learning spaces, both of which embrace the principles that make a Gesu education so invaluable in today’s landscape.

While this year has brought unexpected challenges, it has further united our Gesu community and strengthened our resolve to provide holistic, innovative education and empower students to transcend all forms of poverty. Now, more than ever, we stand firm in this mission and our Jesuit and IHM roots of social justice, faith, creative hope, and love.

As a national model of transformative inner-city education, we reaffirm our commitment to our 450 Pre-K – 8th grade students and to instilling courage, conviction, and character into tomorrow’s leaders.

Thank you for being part of the Gesu School community. We hope you enjoy the pages that follow.

Peace and blessings,

Bryan H. Carter
President and CEO

Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM
Principal
Merging Science & Art in Middle School

Gesu 7th graders are learning STEAM through the Wagner Free Institute of Science’s SNAP program, Science, Nature, and Art in Philadelphia. Students studied cell models of animals in science and then applied that knowledge through art, creating “tessellations.” The projects represent the multiplication of cells.

Sixth graders created clay figures of dinosaurs to complement their unit on Earth science. Lessons integrate knowledge of the Earth’s layers with historic time periods, dinosaur extinction, and minerals. Students are learning techniques for sculpting clay, one of the oldest natural materials.

Thanks to Wagner’s Resident Teaching Artist, Audrey Jakab, for bringing her knowledge and creativity to Gesu!

“What I learned during this process was a lot of the different eras and extinctions throughout history.”

—Brook’Lin, 6th Grade

“The theory, hands-on learning, and art collaboration are fantastic. The students are engaged and can visualize how the topic all comes together. They enjoyed learning and using their creativity. Science became fun!”

—Jo-Anne Young, 7th Grade Girls Teacher
Building Faith & an Empathic Worldview

To strengthen community, each Gesu class is paired with a prayer partner and class “buddy.” Throughout the year, friendships between older and younger students emerge through tutoring, special projects around holidays, and simply having fun.

Catholic Schools Week includes “Buddy Day” as a highlight. Eighth grade boys and Kindergarteners collaborated on a writing project about how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated courage. Seventh grade girls helped 1st graders learn and personalize a prayer to St. Jude.

These middle-school girls also initiated an after-school mentoring and tutoring program for Gesu girls in Kindergarten and 1st grade. They were inspired to give back from their own experience being mentored by Gesu’s Junior Board, young professionals who meet monthly to discuss high school and college options, explore career possibilities, and help students navigate their early teenage years.

“The prayer partners/class buddies program has become a staple at Gesu. Students look forward to meeting, especially at our school-wide Masses, because they are able to pray together in the Church of the Gesu. This experience is very beneficial. It allows students to bond with each other in a mentor-mentee kind of way. Most importantly, it strengthens our school community and builds confidence.”

—Alana Lee, Vice Principal
To commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday, the Gesu community gathered for a prayer service, including discussion of his life as a minister and leader for justice and his importance in our nation’s history. Students watched Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream Speech.” They recited a pledge of unity and prayed for justice and peace. Members of the Gesu Gospel Choir led students in inspiring songs, such as “We Shall Overcome.”

“Celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. King is important because he lived a radical Christianity that challenged citizens of the U.S. to live up to the country’s founding ideals and Christian disciples and all people of good will to live out the implications of the kingdom of love, justice, and peace that Jesus preached and worked to build. King’s life and work transcend the particularities of the times in which he lived.”

—Gesu School Mission & Ministry
Rev. Ray Donaldson, S.J. and Laura Weatherly

I have a dream that I will be successful in school.
I have a dream that I will graduate and go off to college.
I have a dream that I will make a friend that wants the same as me.
I have a dream that I will graduate medical school and become a surgeon.
I have a dream that I will make enough money for myself and to support others.
I have a dream that I will be the most loving and caring person.

—Breyona, 7th Grade
Celebrating Black History, February & Every Month

To recognize Black History Month, Gesu students studied role models whose lives have impacted our country and our world. Gesu is proud to celebrate students’ heritage throughout the academic year and throughout our school, with artwork, religious iconography, and books that reflect positive representations of the Black community.

Second graders learned about Black inventors and illustrated their contributions, from a guitar and the three-light traffic signal to the door knob and hot comb.

“It is important for our students to learn that even during the horrors of slavery and the unfairness of segregation, African Americans were changing the world for the better, even if we have never heard their names. I want our students to idolize scientists, mathematicians, and entrepreneurs alongside well-known Civil Rights leaders and activists. Students need to learn about the accomplishments of Black scientists and inventors who have improved our lives. If we increase awareness of their contributions, students will know that they, too, can create something life changing.”

—Sierra Wilson, English Language Arts Teacher
Nurturing Creativity & Talent

POEM BY JHAIS, 7TH GRADE
Backe Advanced Writing Program

Grit means to go through the storm and reach your goal
Even if you need to walk barefoot on a concrete road
To try and see yourself succeed
Even if you are as small as a bee
To have patience and perseverance
Even when you crave attention
To make haters your rocket fuel
And go to great new heights
To show your true strength
And extend it to its greatest length
To have passion for what you do
And show it like it’s a fashion
To be committed even when you fail

And when you finish, you will benefit
From your new-found confidence
To believe in yourself when no one does
And your power is in how you can empower yourself
And build yourself up taller
To make sacrifices to reach your goal
Even if you have to roll the dice
To make it you can’t fake it
You have to work hard and have perseverance
Shifting to a New Learning Landscape

While Gesu temporarily closed for our community’s safety, learning and social support continued. Our dedicated teachers instructed students remotely, from online reading groups to mindfulness activities. Our counselors and social worker provided student “check ins” and class sessions to process current events. Administrators attained a grant for additional laptops. Our Graduate Support Program conducted high school financial aid virtual sessions. Weekly faculty meetings included training in distance learning.

Gesu will continue adapting to an evolving learning environment and meet our students’ needs with care and cutting-edge methods.

“I kept virtual learning as close to our normal routines as possible, and provided as many engaging ways to learn. Even if students are at home, they need multiple modes of accessing content. I provided interactive activities on the Seesaw app, workbook pages to reinforce skills, and videos and live teaching for real-time experience and access to me. I utilized technology the same as in the classroom, so students were familiar with it. It gives them great independence. Parents and I can access work and leave encouraging comments, which students love! I also prioritized social-emotional learning to make sure we didn’t lose sight of skills such as resilience and optimism.”

—Melanie Colozzi, 1st Grade Teacher
Gesu's 23rd Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education

A CONVERSATION WITH IBRAM X. KENDI

SAVE THE DATE FOR GESU SCHOOL’S VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11TH AT 5 P.M.

Bestselling author, historian, professor and leading antiracist voice

Event is free of charge. Register at gesuschool.org/2020symposium.