Educating Tomorrow’s Leaders
Dear Friends,

In this issue of Gesu Magazine, we highlight how our unique educational model shapes tomorrow’s leaders.

At Gesu School, we believe in the IHM maxim that “every child can learn.” Our non-selective admissions welcomes students of all ability levels. We provide remedial support through advanced courses, guiding students to achieve their highest potential.

In the Jesuit tradition, we educate the whole child through rigorous academics and a curriculum infused with soft skills. Our MAGIS initiative—Motivation, Awareness, Grit, Independence, and Social competence—develops graduates with strong character who are prepared to confront obstacles and succeed. Gesu educates thoughtful citizens and leaders through service and civic engagement, such as Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, student council, and the Gesu Justice League, a peer-to-peer bulling prevention program. Gesu students embrace their cultural heritage, learn the legacy of significant figures, and meet Gesu’s vowed teachers.

Gesu Justice League, a peer-to-peer bullying prevention program.

Gesu educates thoughtful citizens and leaders through service and civic engagement, such as Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, student council, and the Gesu Justice League, a peer-to-peer bullying prevention program. Gesu students embrace their cultural heritage, learn the legacy of significant figures, and meet Gesu’s vowed teachers.

Students learn to care for our common home through religion, art, hands-on science, and service. Social justice seeps into Gesu’s curriculum and daily life.

Peace and blessings,

Bryan H. Carter
President and CEO

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For Black History Month, 5th grade girls presented a “live museum” of their heroines. KYW Newsradio journalist Hadas Kuznits and 6abc Action News covered the event!
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
A Snapshot at Gesu

Gesu students grow in civic engagement in each grade and collectively as a school community. Gesu intentionally develops solid citizens and leaders of our school, our city, and our global communities.

Students build community by collaborating with their class buddies and prayer partners. Second graders and 6th graders practice reading together; 4th graders help Pre-K fine tune their skills with scissors and forge friendships through art projects. Over 50 students in grades 1–5 participated in Girl Scouts and Boys Scouts, earning badges for first aid and community service, while cultivating confidence and civic knowledge. Student Council’s Catholic Schools Week food drive garnered over 500 items for the Nutritional Development Services (NDS) Community Food Program. This year, Gesu earned our 6th annual designation from the Anti-Defamation League as a No Place for Hate School for our school-wide initiatives that promote inclusivity, diversity, and bullying prevention.

Advocates from Gesu to Harrisburg: The Gesu Justice League

In only its second year, the Gesu Justice League blossomed. These 6th, 7th, and 8th grade volunteers directed school-wide anti-bullying initiatives. Students delivered lessons on bullying prevention in grades Pre-K–4. They designed posters for the Gesu halls with positive messages of friendship and tolerance, and created a video educating peers on types of bullying and how to use dialogue to address challenging situations. Vice Principal Alana Lee notes, “They are Gesu superheroes who model every day that we have to respect ourselves and others. That’s the Gesu way.”

Their leadership caught the attention of Pennsylvania State Representative Donna Bullock, Gesu parent and Board Member. On January 31, the Justice League donned their superhero capes and testified at Rep. Bullock and Rep. Stephen Kinsey’s policy hearing on bullying prevention. On April 10, students spoke at a rally at the state capitol to share their experience as school leaders and support House Bill 2009, which proposes anti-bullying curriculum throughout PA schools. To recognize their advocacy, the Justice League was awarded the 4th annual Carmela G. Cerrallo Anti-Bullying Leadership Award and a generous $1,000 donation for program development.

MLK Day of Service Draws Students and Neighbors Together

On January 15, over 70 neighbors and students gathered at Gesu to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy of service and commitment to equality for all. Along with block captains, teachers, parents, and St. Joseph’s Prep students, Gesu students held a block clean-up, packed hygiene kits for Project HOME, and made bookmarks with inspiring notes for seniors at Simpson House and homeless people living with HIV/AIDS at Calcutta House. The day ended with the film *Hidden Figures* and a discussion on civil rights. This year’s event embraced the theme “Learning to Meet Hate with Love.” For the first time, Gesu partnered with Global Citizen 365, expanding our presence in our community. Thanks to Gesu Girl Scout Troop 9043 for their leadership!

Gesu Students Express Support for Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

Gesu offered a prayer service on March 14 in memory of the victims of the school shooting. After a silent procession to The Church of the Gesu, students presented intercessions and songs for peace. They shared a ritual of remembrance, reading each victim’s name and placing a candle for each on the altar. Each classroom adopted one of the victims to hold in their prayers throughout the year.
“Let us work together to give our children a better and more sustainable world.”
—Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J., Vice Principal

Gesu weaving social justice into our curriculum and daily life. Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J., Vice Principal, leads the effort in teaching our community to care for our common home. This year, he spearheaded an intensive recycling program from the faculty room, to the cafeteria, and offices. Each Gesu family received his letter encouraging participation in Philadelphia’s initiative to become a waste-free city. With a theological foundation in our Jesuit and IHM roots, including Pope Francis’s call to action, environmental projects and awareness permeate learning and service at Gesu. Through classroom engagement and participation in activities such as Philly Spring Clean-Up, we hope our Gesu students become leaders in their neighborhoods.

Art Meets Science for Earth Day (right)
7th grade girls create Earth Day banners with a unique slogan to save the planet.
Artist: Cameron, Grade 7

Kindergarten Pledges Stewardship
Even Gesu’s youngest students develop awareness of how their actions can preserve our planet, from reusing cups to reducing pollution.

Earth is our only home. Love and Protect it.

Exploring Penguins with the “Blubber Experiment”
Second graders immerse themselves in literature, science, and art to discuss the impact of global warming on endangered Emperor penguins. To learn how blubber keeps penguins warm, students place one hand in a plastic bag filled with Crisco, the blubber. Then they place both hands, covered and uncovered, into a bucket of ice water to see the difference. Says Teacher Mary Ryder, “The experiment on World Penguin Day is always popular and memorable and results in many screams and giggles!”

Advanced students in grades 3 and 4 watched the documentary Chasing Coral. They created posters to raise awareness about global warming and coral bleaching and to advocate for “coral support.”

The entire 8th grade responded to a NASA challenge. Over six weeks, students learned about energy sources and built their own solar ovens. Eighth Grade Teacher Annette Pickett provided each team with only a pizza box. The goal? Design a solar oven equipped to melt a s’more. Students’ independent research guided the project—from their supply list to what location and temperature of the sun would be most effective.

This spring, 8th graders harvested their own plots of lima beans for four weeks in Gesu’s science lab. Says Mrs. Pickett, “They are city kids. They were amazed at the roots and sprouts because they had never seen this before.” Why implement this project? Explains Mrs. Pickett, “To make science real for kids and to help them appreciate that earth gives us nourishment.”

About her creative projects, she reflects, “I am looking at future scientists. You never know what that spark will do.”
Student Gallery

Clockwise from top left: Black History Month Hero by Christian, Grade 6; Photo Collage by Keyonna Savage, After-School Staff; “Oh No!” Oil Pastel by Gianna, Grade 4; “Family Time,” Oil Pastel by Kara, Grade 7; “Jazz Player,” Oil Pastel by Mehki, Grade 4

GESU School

By Christian, Grade 8
Backe Advanced Writing Program

GESU School,
It is one of a kind.
It is a special jewel.
You could never deny
That it is a school so
beautifully defined.
The teachers care for the students.
They treat them like their own.
But when they act up,
They treat them like
they’re grown.
It is amazing how kids get along.
It is really something.
We have advanced classes in
writing and math.
We learn in the science lab and
do ballroom dancing.
I am going to miss this place.
It created me.
And the best thing about Gesu,
Is that there’s no place
I’d rather be.
Winner of 3rd Place in Children’s
Scholarship Fund Philadelphia Annual
Writing Contest Grades 6–8, Awarded at
the Kimmel Center

I AM
By Elijah, Grade 2

I am a good student and a helpful kid
I wonder what my cat is doing
at home
I hear my heart beating fast
I see my Dad watching me in heaven
I want a new home
I am a good student and a helpful kid
I pretend to be an actor
I feel grateful for my family
and friends
I touch my Mom’s heart when
she is sick
I worry about my Mom and
my little brother
I cry when I miss my Dad
I am a good student and a helpful kid
I understand that I’m not a grown-up
I say all kinds of kind words
I dream that my Mom will get a car
I try to make breakfast for my Mom
I hope my family is safe
I am a good student and a helpful kid

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

Alliance for Catholic Education Saint Joseph’s University (ACESJU) partners with Gesu.

ACESJU Fellows volunteer for two years in under-resourced Catholic schools. These well-trained teachers abide by four pillars: education, community, spirituality, and simple living. The program provides tuition for a graduate degree, housing, and a small stipend. For seven years, volunteers have shared their dedication to children and social justice with the Gesu community. They inspire us to reach for the Magis, to do more in service and for the greater glory of God.

MARY LIVA
3rd Grade Girls Teacher
ACESJU ‘13–’15
B.A. Villanova University
M.S. Saint Joseph’s University

FUN FACT: Now in her 6th year at Gesu and carrying on the Princess Tea Party tradition. This year’s unicorn theme featured blue and pink drizzled popcorn, a photo booth, and plenty of tea (and pink lemonade).

“I love the look on students’ faces when they move up a reading level, recognize a word they didn’t know before, or pick up a book that they thought was too big or too hard, and read it. In these moments, my heart swells, and I can’t fathom being in any other profession.”

SIERRA WILSON
Grades 2-5 Resource Room Teacher
ACESJU ‘15–’17
B.A. Canisius College
M.S. Saint Joseph’s University

FUN FACT: Now in her 4th year at Gesu with a teaching arsenal that includes “secret signals” and “2-minute talks.” Each student creates a unique signal, known only to Ms. Wilson, to indicate when extra assistance is needed in class. To motivate students, she delivers mini-pep talks, even in the cafeteria.

“I have never seen anything like Gesu School. The students are so caring, polite, and eager to learn. The faculty and staff are all amazing to work with, and it has been a really positive work and learning environment. I have learned so much from teachers and administrators, and I look forward to building on that knowledge in the years to come. Some highlights are the Walk Against Hate, Philly Spring Clean-Up, and 8th grade graduation.”

RAVEN MANRIQUE
Service Coordinator, Religion and Spanish Teacher
ACESJU ‘17–’19
B.A. Baylor University
M.Ed. Saint Joseph’s University

FUN FACT: From Laredo, Texas, and speaks fluent Spanish. This year, in addition to serving as Gesu’s Service Coordinator and managing the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) program, Ms. Manrique is teaching Spanish to students in Kindergarten–2nd grade.

*In progress

JESSICA MILLER
4th Grade Girls Teacher
ACESJU ‘17–’19
B.S. Saint Joseph’s University
M.S. Saint Joseph’s University

FUN FACT: Teaches crochet to help students relieve stress while learning a new skill and a sense of giving. Students make scarves, hats, and headbands, keeping one item and donating the rest to a homeless shelter and to Gesu’s gala.

*“As an ACE fellow, the program allowed me to start my career while continuing my education. Attending Catholic school my entire life allowed for an easy transition and made me feel right at home. ACE provides resources such as a community with my cohort, guidance on my spiritual path, and most importantly, guidance on my road to becoming the best educator I can be. Through education, I am able to give students the tools to reach their dreams.”

TAYLOR SCHUCK
Kindergarten Teacher
ACESJU ‘17–’19
B.S. University of Scranton
M.S. Saint Joseph’s University

FUN FACT: Teaches American Sign Language. Ms. Schuck’s students learn to read and sign, from Christmas carols to their favorite animals. On a trip to the Philadelphia Zoo, her students used their signs at the exhibits—without prompting. She’s proud that they applied their knowledge to real life!

*“Starting in February, a student showed me a book and asked what certain words were. Every morning, she chose the same book and sounded out the words. One day, she asked if she could read the entire book to me. It finally hit me that I helped my students learn to read. I was in awe of this little girl and how much she grew over a few months. Truly, my whole class took my breath away. I am so proud of them!”

*In progress
News from Gesu’s Graduate Support Program

The Graduate Support Program, initiated in 2016, is launching two new efforts to guide Gesu families through the high school admissions process.

The Truth About Boarding Schools

Gesu families gathered for the first Boarding School Night on April 17, 2018. The panel discussion offered an overview of the boarding school experience and addressed common myths. Gesu thanks these institutions for participating: George School, Girard College, St. Andrew’s School, Valley Forge Military Academy, and Westtown School.

Parent Academy 2.0

In the new academic year, the GSP will host monthly meetings for 8th grade families. Each month will focus on a phase of high school admissions, highlighting actionable steps for guardians and students, including admissions timelines, test preparation, and financial aid.

Are you a Gesu graduate?

For more information on the Graduate Support Program, including Gesu reunions, college admissions resources, and career networking, contact Director Jose Gonzalez at 215-763-3660 or jose.gonzalez@gesuschool.org.

Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg

Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg inspires the audience of nearly 300 at Gesu’s 20th Annual Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education.

20th Annual Gesu School Symposium

Our Kids Are Not Broken: Empowering Traumatized Youth

Our 20th Annual Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education featured Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg, a nationally recognized physician and expert in the field of child development. Dr. Ginsburg presented on his research and practice in utilizing strength and resilience to confront the underlying effects of stress and trauma on youth. A panel of educational and community leaders provided practical expertise on how trauma-informed pedagogy can foster a more productive learning environment.


Educational Consultant Caryn Rivers

Educational Consultant Caryn Rivers and Director of Graduate Support Jose Gonzalez assist Gesu families in researching high school fit at a Parent Academy.

The girls JV basketball team celebrates its championship win.

Girls JV basketball captures championship.

The 5th and 6th graders gridded as a team and gained momentum through the season. After celebrating a 1st-place finish in the St. Monica’s Christmas Tournament, the girls won their first Region 6 CYO League! Congratulations to the team and to Coach Joe for their outstanding 11-1 record!

Boys JV basketball posts a solid season.

The team achieved an impressive 9–1 record, reaching the CYO Region 6 Championship Tournament. Coach James is proud of the 5th and 6th graders’ consistency and unity. Thanks to Assistant Coach Isaiah Wilson, too.

Girls varsity basketball earns 3rd place in league.

With an 8–2 record and strong leadership from team captains and Coach Liva, the 7th and 8th graders reached the semifinals for CYO Region 6 and the City Tournament invitations. Eighth grader Nilaja received MVP for the 3rd place game!

Boys varsity basketball finishes 1st in division.

The 7th and 8th grade team posted an outstanding record of 20–4. They made it to the semifinals for CYO Region 6 and the final 16 of the City Tournament invitational. Coach Sean Deal and Assistant Coach Isaiah Wilson note that the team’s sportsmanship and positive attitude drew attention, even from their competitors.

Baseball team builds skills and strategy.

A young team learning the fundamentals, these 6th and 8th graders demonstrated grit through the season. Coach Rice is proud of the students’ teamwork. Thanks to Assistant Coaches Chris Osborne and Mike Talvacchia and to the many generous donors who supported the CYO team.

Co-ed track team shines.

The 30 4th–8th graders blazed across the track. At the Father Judge relay tournament, novice and cadet girls took 1st place in 4 x 100, and 5th and 6th grader Nyela placed 1st in the 100, 200, and 400 meters, breaking two records! In the CYO Championships, Nyela finished 1st in the 100 and 200, and the novice girls took 1st in the 4 x 100. Thanks to Coach Watson and parent volunteers Jayly Brane, Naima Sanders, and Tonetta Dawson.

ATHLETIC CORNER

ransparent Academy 2.0
Jamai Robinson ’96: Committed to Community Development, Entrepreneurship, and Family

Jamai Robinson works seven days a week to bolster his community and pursue his professional goals. His volunteer work spans nearly two decades. He is a dedicated husband and father of three and mentor to many in his Newark, Delaware home and beyond.

“Gesu allowed me to start over. I went from potentially being in a local gang to going to a great middle and high school, which provided me the opportunity to go to college. Through God, my mom, my extended family and friends, and Gesu, I am now able to be a leader to my community. Gesu assisted in changing a negative legacy to a positive one for my children.”

While he attended Gesu only for middle school, the impact altered his life trajectory. In the early 90s, gangs dominated Robinson’s West Philadelphia neighborhood. Although he averted involvement, the threat of violence grew. After being attacked while walking home from school, his mother transferred him to Gesu.

The transition was challenging. He credits Gesu’s staff in his success. Then basketball coach, Mr. Brooks taught him basketball and life skills: “I built a lot of confidence. He told me to toughen up and be respectful in the game. That was like life. You have to push forward,” he says. Principal Sr. Ellen Connery, IHM and receptionist and “Gesu mom” Ms. John, helped him mature. “Sr. Ellen put me in check. I appreciate that,” reflects Robinson. Gesu also offered him work cleaning classrooms. “That was a lesson, too,” he recollects. “Gesu gave me the opportunity to put in sweat equity.”

Gesu worked for Robinson. At graduation, he received the top academic award for a male student in every subject but one. Today, he remains close with his coach and teammates, several of whom attended St. Joseph’s Prep. “Our brotherhood was formed at Gesu. The Prep enlarged it,” he states. The African-American Alumni Association (A4) & Mentor Program, co-founded by Gesu Music Teacher and Choir Director H.L. Ratliff, a Prep alumnus, provided guidance. “Mr. Ratliff was always available. He helped us adjust,” notes Robinson, who later returned to mentor. Robinson also recognizes Wadell Rayley, a member of A4 and President of Community Affairs at Saint Joseph’s University, who continues to be his mentor.

His Gesu foundation primed him to succeed at Temple. He completed his degree in four years, juggling three jobs and supporting his young son. Robinson slept four hours per day, in two-hour stints between jobs. On Sundays, he crammed in eight hours of rest.

“I always wanted to be that person who helps people who live in the neighborhood to own it.”

After college, Robinson launched a banking career. During 12 years at Wells Fargo, he managed customer relations and million dollar investment services. Robinson channels his business acumen to strengthen community development, a concept he observed at Gesu. His real estate portfolio covers his childhood neighborhood, where he teaches financial literacy to future homeowners. His newest venture? A North Philadelphia facility that supports adults with developmental disabilities.

“It’s about providing opportunity. It’s the education of the whole person. […] I can’t imagine a better cause when it comes to kids or a school that makes a better difference. I just love the place. There’s nothing more important than good quality inner-city education in today’s world. If there’s anything I could ask people to do, whether it’s volunteer, or to give money, or simply to be a presence in some way, do it, it matters.” – Steve Piltch

“Jamai Robinson ’96: Committed to Community Development, Entrepreneurship, and Family

2018 Gesu Spirit Medalists Honored at Gesu Gala

The Gesu Spirit Medal honors individuals who have shown extraordinary commitment to Gesu School through their loyalty and actions, and who have made a significant contribution to Gesu School’s success as a model inner-city elementary school. We honored this year’s recipients at the May 10 Gesu Gala.

J. Gordon Cooney, Jr., Esq.
Partner, Morgan Lewis; Former Chairman of the Board of Directors, Gesu School

As leader of Morgan Lewis’s litigation practice, J. Gordon Cooney, Jr. oversees the firm’s litigation operations across the globe. With a focus on defending class actions in state and federal court, Gordon has appeared in the courts of more than 35 states. He has argued before the United States Supreme Court and many federal circuit courts.

Gordon’s relationship with Gesu began in 1999, and he joined the Board in 2002. In 2010, Gordon was appointed Chairman of the Gesu School Board of Directors. During his seven-year tenure as Board Chair, Gordon worked tirelessly to bring Gesu to a new age of financial health and growth. Gordon and his wife, Gretchen, are strong champions for Gesu’s mission and its children. Together they have provided scholarship support annually and through a generous endowed gift. Since completing his tenure on the Board of Directors, Gordon remains involved with the school as the lead member of Gesu’s inaugural President’s Advisory Council.

Steve Piltch, Ed.D.
Head of School, The Shipley School; Board Member, Gesu School

Steve holds a Bachelor’s degree from Williams College, two Master’s degrees in education, and a Doctorate in education from Harvard University. He has taught in public and independent schools and is currently an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. Steve has been Head of School of The Shipley School since 1992. He has served on a number of boards, including The Gladwyne Montessori School, The Wyndcroft School, Girard College, ADVIS, and PAIS.

While Steve has been an outstanding leader of The Shipley School for 26 years, he often says that Gesu School is his “second favorite school.” Steve joined the Gesu School Board of Directors in 2005. He has demonstrated his commitment to Gesu by opening his home to introduce new individuals to the school and serving multiple times as moderator for our Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education. Steve has been a staunch advocate for Gesu’s students and has embraced our alumni who have attended The Shipley School.

To view photos and videos of the Spirit Medalists and the gala, visit: gesuschool.org/2018galarecap
An 8th grader conducts a solar energy experiment in Gesu’s science lab. Your support prepares students to build solid careers and make a difference!