

A Pathway to College

Grace Academy's High School Seniors Enter College in the Fall!

During the month of June, members of Grace Academy's Class of 2013 (the first class of eighth grade graduates) donned mortar boards and gowns and celebrated their graduation from high school! All nine members of the Class of 2013 graduated on time; two students each graduated from The Ethel Walker School, Northwest Catholic High School and East Catholic High School, and one each from Connecticut River Academy, Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and Conard High School, a public school in West Hartford. Most exciting of all is that these eight students have received merit and financial aid packages from the colleges they will be attending. Noteworthy among them, Ximena Franco will attend Providence College on a full scholarship and Jessica Hariprasad will attend Hobart and William Smith Colleges on a near full scholarship.

The path to a college education for the first class of graduates from Grace Academy began in the summer of 2009 when Matt Fitzsimons and Sarah Lahr Fitzsimons met Lindsey McPhee, a five-year veteran of Cornelia Connelly School in Manhattan (the first all-girls *NativityMiguel* school that adheres to the extended-day, -week and -year model). Wendy Allerton, then Dean of Students at The Ethel Walker School, and Marge Morrissey, a well-known philanthropist in Hartford, joined shortly thereafter. The creation of our all-girls school was in response to a profound need for an al-

ternative educational model that would serve inner-city girls from the most vulnerable neighborhoods of Hartford. The school would be an independent middle school for girls, grades 5-8, adhering to the nine mission effective standards of a *NativityMiguel* school, and dedicated to providing a quality, tuition-free education to girls of all faiths from Hartford's low-income families.

The Steering Committee, formed by the original founders, set ambitious goals for the new school: to inspire in students a love of learning, an awareness of each girl's own interests and ideas, a fundamental understanding of culture, and an abiding sense of responsibility to her community. Offering a structured, challenging and supportive college preparatory educational program was a major component of the long-term objective. Helping low-income students into college remains a national challenge. A recent (2015) study led by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that only 51% of graduates from low-income schools enroll immediately in college following high school. In Connecticut, the high school graduation rate for low-income students in 2014-15 was 75.9% (*the latest available statistics from the Federal Education Department*). While schools like Grace Academy were successful in other urban locations, the founders wanted to make sure Grace Academy would succeed in Hartford. The current success of



Our first class of graduates, the Maria Sanchez Class of 2013, celebrating at the graduation ceremony



Ceanna, works with her mother and a GA volunteer to complete the college FAFSA application for the upcoming year

ALUMINAE

(Continued from Cover Page)

Grace's program can be attributed to the right chemistry of teachers, staff, coaches and volunteers who have brought their personal gifts and energy to help prepare and inspire the students to pursue college, placing them on a path that will transform their lives.

Ximena Franco's personal story is indicative of many of girls' journeys at Grace Academy. Franco was invited to speak at this year's *The Power of Grace* event, held at The Bushnell on May 11, and these

excerpts provide insight into the real "power" of the Grace Academy model:

"From the start, my journey to get here today has not been easy...I was born in Peru, and moved to the United States at the age of 7...I didn't know how to speak English, I had left my extended family behind, I didn't have any friends, and I had to start third grade at a new school...Two years later, my mom read in the newspaper about a new all-girls school...my parents and I decided to take a chance, so I signed up and I started there in September of 2010. During my time at Grace Academy, I learned how to play the piano, I was given the chance to express myself through singing and theater, and I joined the cooking club which I loved. From the small class size, to the structured day, I began to see all of the opportunities that lay ahead for me. With the guidance of teachers who were very caring and willing to take the time to teach me, I began to grow, and it was fun! To this day, I remember strug-

gling in Science and Ms. Bray patiently sitting with me and going over it again and again until I understood it...Because I felt comfortable with my teachers, I wasn't afraid to ask for help when I needed it, which proved to be valuable when I got to high school. At

Ethel Walker, I have been a school tour guide and a member of the Student Council for four years. I am also in charge of the weekend activities as part of the Big 7, a school wide leadership role. When I was a Freshman, I tried out for the tennis team which was a new sport

for me. I am proud to say that I am now the Captain of the Tennis team. As I look back at everything I learned at Grace Academy, I am so grateful that I got the foundation I needed to succeed at Walkers. This September I will be heading off to Providence College where I hope to get a degree in Finance. I am the first in my family to attend college! I am so grateful to Grace Academy for seeing my potential and giving me the support system that I have needed all these years. "

While Grace Academy exists first and foremost to provide an exceptional educational opportunity to girls from families of limited economic means, the development of valuable character traits such as integrity, positive self-esteem, compassion and respect have allowed our graduates to excel socially. The following profiles of our Maria Sanchez Class of 2013 students highlight their successes.

Graduates at a Glance

45 Grace Academy Graduates in Grades 9-12

*During 2016-2017 Academic Year

- **69%** attending the following private high schools:
 - Northwest Catholic (13),
 - East Catholic HS (9),
 - Mercy HS (3),
 - Ethel Walker (2),
 - Loomis Chaffee (1),
 - Watkinson School (1),
 - Concord Academy (1),
 - The Master's School (1)
- **24%** attending Hartford magnet high schools
- **7%** attending Greater Hartford public high schools

High School GPAs: Fourth Quarter Results

*From the 2016-17 Academic Year

Grade	0.0-1.99	2.0 - 2.99	3.0 - 4.0
Seniors	1	3	5
Juniors	1	4	4
Sophomores	1	3	10
Freshman	1	1	11



Meet the Maria Sanchez Class of 2013



Ceanna Diaz: At East Catholic High School, Ceanna was a Honor Roll student. She was a member of the softball team and participated in karate. In her free time, she volunteered at Grace

Academy and Alfred E. Burr Elementary School. Ceanna will be attending Southern New Hampshire University, where she will study Game Art and Development.

News Update



Zaire Edwards: Zaire graduated from Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, where she was an Advisory Mentor to underclassmen and a member of the Technical Theater and Design Department. In her free time, she participated in the YMCA Achievers Program. Zaire will attend Capital Community College this Fall.



Ximena Franco: Ximena graduated with Honors from The Ethel Walker School, where she has achieved much success. Apart from being bilingual, Ximena learned Chinese, was a member of the *Big 7*, Ethel Walker's Student Government, and a *Cicerone*, Walker's tour guide for prospective students and families. She was a member of the volleyball team as well as the captain of the tennis team for the past three years. Ximena will be attending Providence College in September and plans to major in Finance.



Joeliz Gonzalez: Joeliz graduated as an honor roll student at the Connecticut River Academy. During Joeliz's four years, she served as the Treasurer of the Student Council, volunteered at *Bridge to Success*, an after-school program, participated in the Prom Committee and played on the volleyball team. She also participated in *Girlcott*, which raises awareness about the issues facing women and girls. Joeliz will be attending Central Connecticut State University in September.



Jessica Hariprasad: Jessica graduated from The Ethel Walker School with Honors, where she was the Vice President of her class, head of the school literary magazine, *The Daemon*, a member of the A Capella group, *Grapes*, and head of the Multicultural Society. She was a cast member in the school musicals and a member of the Dance Ensemble. In her free time, she volunteered for the *Horizons* program serving underprivileged girls, and was a group leader for the Church of the Nazarene's Mission Rally for Kids. Jessica will be attending Hobart and William Smith Colleges in September.



Paola Ocasio-LaBoy: During Paola's four years at East Catholic High School, she has been on the Honor Roll and a member of the *Society of High School Scholars*. Paola was also a Connecticut delegate for the UCC General Synod, as well as a member of the Human Rights Club and the Culture and Language Club. Additionally, she played volleyball and danced. In her free time, she volunteered at Grace Academy and Alfred E. Burr Elementary School. Paola will be attending the University of Connecticut in September.



Destiny Padro: Destiny graduated from Conard High School in West Hartford, CT. She worked diligently toward her degree and managed many additional responsibilities throughout her high school years. She was a positive presence in the Conard community and was well liked by both peers and faculty. Destiny plans on attending Goodwin College and hopes to major in Health Science.



ThiRi Soe: ThiRi graduated with High Honors from Northwest Catholic High School, where she was involved in performance and fine arts. She was an ensemble dancer in the school's musical productions and excelled in art, taking Advanced Placement Studio Art. Outside of school, she devoted ten hours each week as a UConn Health Center volunteer and dreams of working in the medical field. She also tutored second grade students in Hartford through the *ConnectiKids* program, and taught religious education classes for sixth graders at the Cathedral of St. Joseph. At Northwest Catholic's graduation ceremony, ThiRi was chosen to deliver the intercessions before hundreds of guests and also received the prestigious Richard Rice Award (for her service to the community, acting as a peacemaker, and dedication to the church and the arts). ThiRi will be attending University of Connecticut this Fall.



Kayla Walton: At Northwest Catholic High School, Kayla was on the High Honor Roll and a member of the National Society of High School Scholars. She was a member of several clubs, including Yearbook Club, Global Awareness Club, Theater Club, and Sewing Club. She also performed in several school musicals and dramas. In her free time, Kayla volunteered at *ConnectiKids*, where she tutored second graders in Hartford and participated in selective religious leadership group, *ACTS* (A Chance To Serve). Kayla will be attending Assumption College this Fall.



Alumnae from the Maria Sanchez Class of 2013 gather at this year's *The Power of Grace* event to celebrate their educational accomplishments (See page 7 for more information on *The Power of Grace* event)

GRACE

Attendance Matters

25% of Hartford Public School students meet the definition of “chronic absentee-ism” (missing 10% or 18 days of school) and 22% of ninth through eleventh grade high school students meet the definition of severe “chronic absentee-ism” (absent 20% or 36 days of the school year). In contrast, Grace Academy students have a 96% attendance rate. The magnetic forces that draw students to Grace include: athletics led by 2-4-1 Sports, club activities, music, art, dance, robotics, Saturday field trips, expeditionary learning adventures at the University of St. Joseph in the summer, and over 80 volunteers who visit to care, nurture, and inspire our students to persevere in their studies. Showing up to school each day is an essential factor to a student's potential academic success. Grace Academy creates an environment where students *want* to be in school.

Grace Academy Ranks #1 in Reading

Grace Academy is one of 70 *NativityMiguel* schools serving low-income students in urban areas across the U.S. The cohort of schools shares MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) assessment data to determine best practices. This year, GA was recognized among the *NativityMiguel* schools for its students' achievement in exceeding growth projections in reading – 74% of the students exceeded the MAP growth projections.

Robotics is Jammin'



The Robotics Team stands proudly with coach Corey Pace, holding their trophies at the robotics competition

Grace Academy's robotics team competed in Robo Jam, a special robotics competition as a tune-up for the fall's FIRST Lego League statewide competition. Teams were given eight weeks to design a robot that would have to accomplish four challenging tasks. The four challenges included: Autonomous Mode (Automated Tasks), where each team's robot had to gather four game objects and place the objects over a wall into their scoring zone. The task had to be completed in one minute or less, and the robot had to do it via software programming only. The second difficult task was the Assisted Mode (remote control) where each team's robot had to cross over a bridge onto the opposing teams side of the play field and gather game objects from the opposing side and from the bridge itself, and place them in their scoring zone. Teams were allowed to control their robots with a remote control (Tablet/phone app) or via software. The other two tasks included King of the Hill and a race called Robo Race. On Satur-

Sports Recap: A Home Run Year!

Basketball

Shantel Hanniford, Athletic Director at Grace is a native of Nantucket, MA. She graduated from Trinity College with a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Educational Studies, and during her college years, Shantel played on the women's varsity basketball team, serving as captain of the team her senior year. Through her warmth and positive spirit, she has developed the talents, skills and competitive na-

ture of our students, taking the travel soccer and travel basketball teams to the playoffs. The following is Shantel Hanniford's exciting recap of the semi-final basketball game:

day, June 3, robotics teams from the greater Hartford region converged at ParaDYM Academy in New Britain to put their robot through the paces. True drama ensued when Grace Academy's robot, called “noodles”, broke down in the first round. As the Grace girls worked feverishly against the clock to get their robot ready for round two, the judges sensed that the team would not be ready in time and asked the Grace girls to forfeit. Destiny Navarro buckled down, made a final adjustment, brought the robot to the “field” table and let “noodles” rip. To everyone's amazement, noodles won the round and the succeeding rounds as well. The Grace Academy team won first prize in the robotics competition and second place overall in the tournament.

To build a successful robot, teams must use code and programming, mechanical, automation and robotics engineering. The FIRST Lego League competition is not just about the robot. Teams learn project management, leadership skills, public speaking skills, deductive reasoning, business planning, marketing, community service and the importance of working as a team. The Grace Academy students have done well in all other aspects of the statewide competitions, except in the area of the robot design and performance. The ParaDYM competition focused primarily on how well the students could design a robot, complete tasks, and compete against other robots.

...30.1 seconds left in the game...Grace Academy is down by two points. Our starting point guard, Paw Shee, gains possession of the ball, driving right towards the

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happenings

net. Quickly, she fakes left and shoots a lay-up. The ball bounces on the rim for what seems like an eternity, finally bouncing out. Grace Academy's *North Stars* are out of timeouts, so it's a scramble to get everyone on the same page. The point guard for our opponent, MD Fox, strategically dribbles the ball away from the pressure in hopes to run the clock out. Coach Hanniford shouts from the sidelines, directing the *North Stars* to foul the ball handler in order to stop the clock. The crowd is roaring, the tension in the gym is at its peak... In an instant, one of GA's girls follows Coach Hanniford's command and makes the foul. MD Fox walks to the free throw line, calmly setting herself up, making one of the two shots. Grace is down three points. With fractions of a second left to spare, eighth grader, Nary Oo, shoots a three-pointer... Looking back on the final nail-biting moment, Hanniford recounts, "I heard the regulation clock expire, but I could not muster up the courage to check if the shot went in. When I finally caught my breath, I saw the disappointment on the faces of the *North Stars* and knew, in that moment, that we had lost." She went on to say, "It was a very exhilarating game and every player gave it all they had. You could not ask for a better semi-final game for the Hartford Middle School Sports League."

The last thirty seconds of the semi-final basketball game summarizes the athletics at Grace Academy during the 2016-2017 school year. Hanniford commented, "There were many ups and downs in sports throughout the year. We began the school year unsure of whether the Hartford Middle School League would even continue. Despite the lack of clarity, we held soccer tryouts anyways in order to prepare for the possibility that the league would still organize games for the season. Unfortunately, the league organizers faltered and it was not until late October that our soccer team played its first official game. Although the late start was unfortunate, we were luckily able to organize four recreational games and our soccer team managed to finish the season with a successful run."



The North Stars visit Trinity College and practice with the basketball team during the season

Softball

Thanks to the help from the coaches at 2-4-1 Sports, Grace Academy was able to form its first competitive softball team. In late winter, St. Timothy's Middle School invited Grace Academy to play a softball game in West Hartford. At the time, there was no intention of having a softball team. However, due to student interest and equipment donations, Hanniford was able to organize the school's first softball team. For the first month, members of the team practiced on the lawn of Bushnell Park before traveling to West Hartford to play their first game on a real field. To Coach Hanniford's amazement (and the amazement of all the teachers and staff), Grace Academy's team triumphed over St. Tim's, 9 runs to 5. Hanniford exclaimed, "As a coach, I could not have been more proud of every single girl. At the start of the season, no one knew how to hold or throw a softball, which hand to put their gloves on, the roles of the outfield positions, or even how to run the bases... But because of the girls' dedication and excitement for the game, they came out victorious against a much more experienced team." A second game was organized against another very experienced public school in Bloomfield. Once again, the *North Stars* performed with true passion and had the game tied at the end of seven innings, only to lose by one run in extra innings.

Grace Academy athletics have developed a strong presence among the other middle schools in Hartford. In looking ahead, Hanniford confidently stated, "We are ready to continue our success into the next school year!"



Paola receives help on her financial aid application from a GSP volunteer

Call for Volunteers!

Graduate Support Program

Experience the "power of Grace" for yourself! The *Graduate Support Program* at Grace Academy is continuing to grow, and we are in need of volunteers. We have 14 bright 8th graders applying to high school and 9 accomplished seniors beginning the college application process this upcoming year. Please consider becoming a mentor to one of them or helping with the financial aid process. Whether you want to volunteer for one evening, one month or one year, there are many opportunities available for you to help!

If interested, please contact Maricele Riemann at mriemann@GraceAcademyHartford.org.

Quarterly Club Leader

The search is on for quarterly club volunteers! Do you have a skill, hobby or talent you would like to share? Interested in leading yoga, Pilates, drawing, public speaking or maybe a drum circle? We look to bring new experiences to our students through *quarterly clubs*. Clubs meet quarterly on Tuesdays from 4:30-5:30 pm. Please contact Principal, Joy Chlus at jchlus@GraceAcademyHartford.org for more info.

With help from her club leader, Eden learns the art of basket weaving



With Grace

The Power of Grace Highlights Alumnae and the Culmination of Our Mission



(From left to right: Ximena, GA Alumna, speaks about her education; Ashley Gengras, Joeliz's GSP volunteer while at GA, proudly hugs Joeliz; ThiRi talks to one of our guests about her experience at Northwest Catholic High School; fifth grader, Eh Wah greets guest at this year's The Power of Grace event)

Throughout the years, *The Power of Grace* has grown to become our biggest fundraising event of the year, hosting hundreds of guests at The Bushnell for a two-hour cocktail party—a popular night for fun and mingling. This year's fifth annual event was no different; thanks to all of our supporters and friends who partook in the night's activities, we managed to hit record-breaking heights, raising over \$260,000! More impressively, 95% of the proceeds went directly back to the school and the students we serve.

The Power of Grace event was originally created to coincide with the graduation of our first class of graduates, with the intent to raise awareness of our school and its mission to *break the cycle of urban poverty through education*. Five years later, we are excited to celebrate the realization of our ultimate mission culminating in our first class of graduates heading off to college in the fall! As part of the *NativityMiguel* model, Grace Academy not only strives to prepare and place its current eighth grade students into selective college preparatory private and magnet high schools, but also aims to support each student and their family through the high school years to en-

sure they are on track to go to college. As we continue to establish our presence within the city of Hartford and create a safe, inspiring and community-oriented environment built for student success, *The Power of Grace's* volunteer-run committee, led by co-chairs Kathy Binder and Carolyn Norris, strove to highlight our successes to date by inviting the Grace Academy Maria Sanchez class of 2013 back to speak with and meet all of our wonderful supporters, some of whom have been loyal to us since our earliest years of existence. Meeting our current students and graduates was a welcomed addition to our event and brought an extra element of excitement and livelihood for our guests as they saw first-hand the impact Grace Academy has made on the lives of its students...the real power of Grace.

If you, your family, or your company or organization would like to make an impact on our school and help transform the lives of girls in Hartford by sponsoring The Power of Grace event next year, please contact our Development & Communications office at (860) 263-7535, or email Tess Wilson at tewilson@graceacademyhartford.org. Thank you for your commitment and continued generosity.

Guiding Star Student Sponsorship Program



Pictured on left: Guiding Star Student Sponsors pose with some of our students as they visit the school in March for our annual Guiding Star Student Sponsorship Program luncheon in the Stanley Room

+ Gratitude

Grace Academy's *Guiding Star Student Sponsorship* program provides girls with the opportunity to attend our independent, tuition-free middle school. Sponsoring a student over four years allows girls with promise and potential to succeed in school, and ultimately break the cycle of poverty through education. We expect to have sixty students enrolled at Grace Academy this fall, all on the path to a future full of opportunity and hope. Our goal is to have each student funded by generous sponsors, whose commitments provide a tuition-free education. Generous sponsors, dedicated teachers, committed

volunteers, and parents who want the best for their daughters, is the perfect recipe for producing successful results – a Grace Academy girl on her way to changing the world.

If you, your friend, and/or your company are interested in sponsoring a student for the upcoming year and would like more information regarding the *Guiding Star Student Sponsorship* program, feel free to call us at (860) 263-7535 or email Tess Wilson, *Development & Communications*, at tewilson@GraceAcademyHartford.org, or Matthew Fitzsimons, *Head of School*, at mfitzsimons@GraceAcademyHartford.org.

Brad and Kathy Hoffman Fund 2-4-1 Sports' Physical Literacy Program to Students



Brad and Kathy Hoffman visit GA on May 15 to present a gift of \$15,000 to fund 2-4-1 Sports' physical literacy program

Brad and Kathy Hoffman, owners of Hoffman Auto Group, committed \$35,000 to Grace Academy to run physical literacy programming for all students and teachers over the next three years. Physical literacy infuses basic movement, nutrition and mindfulness skills into the school day to improve academic and health outcomes.

The physical literacy program, which is being implemented by The National Association of Physical Literacy (NAPL) and 2-4-1 Sports, includes sport-sampling based fitness programs, nutrition education through STEAM, gardening, healthy cooking classes and self-regulation skills through mindfulness. Through participation, students learn lifelong skills for healthy living and are better equipped to stay active for life.

Three days each week, coaches and chefs from 2-4-1 Sports lead training sessions to develop students' athletic abilities and skills and teach overall nutritional and lifelong wellness. Athletic coaches teach both students and teachers how to master the fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that permit a person to read their environment and make appropriate decisions, allowing them to move confidently and with control in a wide range of physical activity

situations. The comprehensive program includes instruction in how to cook nutritional meals, engage in mindful meditation, develop a confident mental attitude, and use one's skills to catch, jump, run, swim, and throw.

Brad and Kathy Hoffman are committed to the concept of a comprehensive and holistic education for students of limited economic means from Hartford. They had a desire to bring the power of the 2-4-1 Sports program to Grace Academy and made a three-year commitment to fully immerse the students and teachers in this unique experience. "Thanks to the generosity of the Hoffman family who made the NAPL physical literacy program possible, we are witnessing growth in confidence and skills among each of our girls," said Matt Fitzsimons, Head of Grace Academy. "They especially love the cooking classes where they make nutritious meals with a real chef and the positive mental attitude techniques the coaches interweave into their physical skills training."

"Our entire family is thrilled to have the opportunity to change and improve the lives of young women in the City of Hartford" said Kathy Hoffman. "This program has a proven track record and will expose the students of Grace Academy to better lifestyle choices" added Bradley Hoffman.



Students participate in 2-4-1 Sports' physical literacy program, learning how to cook healthy meals and participating in group physical activities

• **Respect** • **Leadership** • **Courage** • **Hospitality** • **Joy** • **Grace** •

100 Women Who Can Make a Difference at Grace Academy



A new form of philanthropy is sweeping the country...and the world. Groups of conscientious people are forming *100+ Chapters* (490 to date) of women, men, people, kids, and teens who join together to make a real impact in their community. The organizers of the chapters see people for their strengths and realize that when 100 or more people come together in a room, each person becomes a powerful force for doing good work while lifting up their community. Three dynamic ladies, Eileen Carroll, Erin Devine, and Eleni DeGraw, initiated the *100 Women Who Can - Farmington Valley* chapter earlier this year. They convened their first meeting on Thursday, February 23 comprised of women from Farmington, Avon, Canton, Granby, Southington, Glastonbury and West Hartford. Allison Swain and Carolyn Norris, volunteers at Grace, made a presentation on behalf of Grace Academy which resulted in the chapter's first philanthropic gift.

On March 8th, the three founding representatives of *100 Women Who Can - Farmington Valley* presented Grace Academy with 104 checks totaling \$11,300. "We were overwhelmed with the news of this amazing gift and are blessed to be the recipient of their first giving event," said Matt Fitzsimons. The arrival of their gift just happened to coincide with International Women's Day. Fitzsimons added, "It seems so fitting that this group of 100+ educated and generous women have chosen to support a school that is educating and giving hope to young women in Hartford." Eileen Carroll, Erin Devine, and Eleni DeGraw were delighted to present the gift to Grace Academy students and remarked, "Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future."

The purpose of *100 Women Who Can - Farmington Valley* is to make an immediate, direct and positive effect on the lives of their neighbors in Hartford County. Each quarter, the women are presented with three different organizations that have been nominated by the individual members. The group of women then vote for the organization where their donation will be directed. Each of the 100+ women agree to contribute a minimum of \$100 to the organization selected. The very first recipient of the newly formed group was Grace Academy in Hartford.