



Maleah Whyte and Maya Tardif proudly present their science project at our first Science Fair

Providing a Holistic Education

Throughout the implementation phase and in our first year, the Grace Academy Team has developed a *holistic* educational model for its students. Our objective was to create a school that would cultivate the moral, emotional, physical, social, creative and spiritual dimensions of the developing child. Our philosophy is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. The naming of each class – Sojourner Truth (5th grade) and Maria Sanchez (6th grade) –

represents just one example of how we nurture the connections between notable luminaries and our students. This issue highlights our *holistic* approach to education.

Pay a visit to Grace Academy and you will find that the teaching Fellows, staff, volunteers, activity moderators, and coaches inspire in our young people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning. By interweaving academics with real world experiences (provided through afternoon activities and weekend excursions), we directly engage students with “others” and their environment.

This winter students were involved in: writing persuasive essays delivering speeches, and receiving advice from executive coach Kay Wilson in the Advocacy Club; creating the school’s first newspaper, *The North Star*; producing the school’s first feature video; learning about nutrition and food advocacy (Hartford Food Systems); dancing complicated drill steps (coached by a dancer from Trinity College); and learning how to prepare exciting, delicious meals. Our *holistic* education enlivens the spirit and nurtures the all-important sense of wonder in each person.

East Catholic High School Community Hosts Retreat

By Mary Casey, East Catholic '11

On Tuesday, February 22, 2011, the girls of Grace Academy took a break from their usual rigorous school routines to spend the day at East Catholic High School in Manchester. A select group of female leaders from the East Catholic community were chosen to organize and lead a motivational retreat.

The purpose of the retreat was to raise self-esteem, build community and deepen friendships. The day started with a communal breakfast followed by ice-breaker games to get the energy flowing. A prayer service focusing on Micah 6:8 followed in the chapel. At the end of the prayer service, the GA girls were given large paper glasses and were asked to create

unique designs that reflected how they wanted to see the world and others. The glasses represented a judgment-free view of the day that was ahead of them.

The day was filled with many helpful, motivational activities such as: self-assessment, self-improvement and self-confidence exercises. At lunchtime, students

and adults gathered into teams to make a meal with appetizers, main course and desserts. To conclude the day, East Catholic's dance team taught the girls some moves to the inspirational song, "Firework," followed by a scarf making activity which the girls were able to take home as memorabilia.



On retreat with their handmade scarves.

The girls had the same fervor and energy ending the day as they did at the beginning. They learned valuable life lessons, bonded as a group, but most importantly, had fun while doing it. This day could not have happened without Laurie Jancko, the leader and supervisor of the retreat. East

Catholic students visit Grace Academy every Thursday to assist with tutoring and other needs. "As an East Catholic student, I can say that East Catholic looks forward to strengthening bonds with the Grace girls while creating lasting friendships and developing role models for them," said Mary Casey.

Always do right. This will gratify some and astonish the rest. - Mark Twain

A field trip to the Mark Twain House on Saturday, February 12, included private tours, two movies, and lots of time to read pithy quotes on the wall of the Center, such as the one above. Other winter field trips included: Wadsworth Atheneum, Science Center, Trinity College, University of Hartford (athletics clinic), craft making (Soroptomists), folk dancing part 1 & 2 (Soroptomists), and self-defense (Soroptomists).



Melanie Mejias-Wasyl as Mark Twain

A Collaborative trip with Girl Scouts to the LOB

Grace Academy has worked collaboratively with Girl Scouts of Connecticut since the start of school. Our science classes have benefited from Girl Scouts' Curriculum Kits and every GA student is registered as a Girl Scout. On March 2, 2011, GA students joined the Girl Scouts for a tour of the Legislative Office Building. Students attended a press conference on the topic of cyber-bullying with Secretary of the State Denise Merrill and met Gov. Dannel Malloy. Two of our students, Melanie Mejias-Wasyl and Shanelle Sanchez, read pre-prepared persuasive essays to State Representative Kelvin Roldan in another special session. Melanie and Shanelle appealed to Rep. Roldan for his help in transforming Hartford from a "food desert" into a thriving metropolis with healthy food choices.



In the Legislative Office Building with Jennifer Smith Turner, CEO of Girl Scouts of CT

English Language Arts Infused with Dramatic Arts

Two dynamic instructors from the Hartford Stage led a stimulating discussion of the book, *Number the Stars*. Using dramatic voice, props, and tableau, the instructors brought to life a story about the Holocaust as told through the eyes



Jayla and Shanelle discuss the leadership quali-

ties of a Jewish girl who is protected by families in Denmark. Grace Academy students were active participants throughout the week long process. After the Hartford Stage's departure, our students eagerly dove into the book!

Thi Ri Soe learns African drum during the Diverse Cultures, Diverse Friendships program at Ethel Walker School)



Shenel Johns performs works by Marian Anderson before GA and Ethel Walker students.



Meet the Staff



**Molly Martel -
Librarian and NWEA
Coordinator**

**When did you join
Grace Academy's
Staff?**

I started working at Grace in early August. On my first day, I painted a wall in the library and helped assemble the shelves for the Library.

How did you hear about Grace?

I was finishing my second year as a Jesuit Volunteer (JVC) in Hartford, when a close friend (a Notre Dame Volunteer) told me there was an all-girls Natividad Miguel school opening and I knew I had to stop by!

What is your role on the Team?

Well, each day I come ready to do anything the students and staff need. I am cataloging the brand new library collection and working closely with teachers to assess student learning using the NWEA's MAP assessment tool. However, my room (the library) is open to any child who needs to talk, or wants to water my plants. I also love when I am called upon to substitute

for a Language Arts or Music class.

What do you love about Grace Academy?

I love the staff's passion and unwavering belief that our students are the future leaders of Hartford. We focus on empowering them to know this too.

What has been your Saving Grace at the School?

I try to live a life of faith and for me that means working toward social justice. St. Ignatius calls us to be contemplative in action. I bring the idea of being a well-informed citizen to the library classes and then try to empower the students to "be the change they want to see in the world."

Molly Martel served for two years as a JVC volunteer, teaching the underserved in Arizona for a year, then relocated to Hartford to work for Hands On Hartford. Molly brings a high level of professionalism, unbridled joy, and a deep sense of self to the students and adults. Throughout the year, Molly has eagerly stepped in to teach a class, coordinate activities and field trips, or assist a student through a personal rough patch. Molly is becoming the resident expert for our computerized MAP assessment, a nationally renowned adaptive testing tool that measures each student's level of understanding in language usage, reading and math. Using the results of the tests, Molly is working with the Team to develop detailed instruction guides, specific for each student.

Film Club

Everyone loves movies and one of the most exciting clubs was the Film Club, led by the energetic Lori McGee. Lori brought her talents as a documentary film maker to fifth and sixth grade students interested in the medium of film and video. Over ten weeks, students learned about point of view, angles, framing shots, setting, lighting, sound, music as a character, and much more. For the final weeks of the Club, Ms. McGee recruited a videographer and, working with the students, a parent, and board member, created the school's first video.

You can find it on our website –
www.GraceAcademyHartford.org.



Film Club members made the first Grace video with moderator, Lori McGee

Hoop Dreams Begin for 17 Students

The following are excerpts from a book that Coach Bryan Cote is writing. Bryan is a professional writer; his wife, Janine, is our 6th Grade religion teacher. Bryan Cote coached basketball, is currently coaching softball, and is organizing a tennis team. The GA girls would meet Coach Cote in an old gym located in the basement of Central Baptist Church on Main Street, two blocks north of GA's site.

The girls begin grabbing balls, some flat, some newly pumped, and none of them seem to complain. I let them shoot and laugh and run for a minute or two. Most of them play like you'd expect from a 10 or 11 year old beginner – with lots of energy, laughter, but not a whole lot of grace. One student slaps at the ball, another dribbles it so high the ball ricochets off her nose; one student takes an underhand shot that lands over the backboard. Oddly, they're all smiling with each attempt and watching them I realize I was wrong. This damp basement gym with its chipped paint and tattered nets is almost invisible to these girls. They're just thrilled to bounce a ball. They are free.

“Hey Mista”

I learned two truths very early on : that my name was Mista, not coach, and that dribbling was optional.

Most of the kids hadn't played basketball before, at least not in an organized way. Just one had played on an elementary school rec team and none of them, admittedly, had ever passed the ball before. But they were eager to learn. Eagerness is usually a good ingredient for teaching defense although for most of them defense meant bear-hugging the other player. “I love your tenacity Natalia – just play with your feet, not your hands.” Over a 2-month period, 15 practices and countless balls landing on heads, the team began to raise their basketball IQ. By December most of them knew how to demonstrate the Triple Threat position and more than half had learned the power of a ball fake and bounce pass. They started dribbling with their head up and

eyes open. Balls weren't going in the hoop yet, but they were landing near the basket. ...

“When are we going to play”

By January the kids were tired of hearing me yell at them to dribble low or deliver a bounce pass with thumbs down. They were itching to play a competitive game or scrimmage. To prepare them, we played 2-on-2 and 3-on-3 games at practice, taught them how to pick and roll, give and go, and go backdoor. The idea was to teach the fundamentals of movement and passing and dribbling before introducing the congestion of 5-on-5 basketball.



Game 1 – January 19

After a team meal in Grace's Gray Hall, we departed for St. Timothy Middle School in West Hartford. The gym was much larger than our Grace practice gym. Our opponents wore snazzy costumes made of blue and white uniforms with their team logo and a number. Admittedly, our team felt overmatched at tip off. None of them wanted to play. A chat from the ref calmed nerves. Mine too.

About midway through the final quarter the sweat and fear of three quarters began to wear off. The score was 25 to 0, St. Timothy, and we had not taken a single shot yet but the Grace Academy bench was clapping, cheering, trying to inspire their teammates. ThiRi Soe, a 6th grader, leaped high to steal a pass. Fifth-grader, Victoria Vazquez, dribbled some 20 feet and hoisted our first shot. Natalia Allen guarded St. Tim's best player with the tenacity of a lion. Despite the 25 point deficit the girls were finding a way to show effort and spirit at the same time. Kayla Walton scored the school's first point with 3 minutes remaining, a foul shot swish that led the Grace bench to erupt. Kayla missed the second but it didn't seem to matter tonight.

The Grace girls went on to play two more games and showed remarkable improvement. Editor's note: Grace

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Academy's Middle School Team will play a full 8 game schedule beginning in the late fall of 2011. The team would like to thank donations from West Hartford's All Star "Magic" Team, Ed Connors of West Hartford, the University of Hartford, the Grace faculty and staff, Assistant Coach Caitlin Clark, and a special thanks to the Central Baptist Church.

Budding Musicians

Each week, gifted students from Loomis Chaffee and Miss Porter's provide private music lessons in violin, viola, clarinet, piano and guitar.



Christine Huong and Jay Kim of Loomis Chaffee visit Mondays to teach piano and violin.

Sponsorship Program

You can play an important role in the life of a child through our sponsorship program.

Teaching Fellow - \$10,000

Grace Academy Teaching Fellows volunteer two years of their lives to serve our students. These energetic college graduates are trained in August, bring tremendous energy, warmth, and understanding to each student throughout the year, and receive ongoing professional development during the year.

Student - \$5,000

Sponsor one or more students through our *Scholarship Program*. Sponsorships can take many forms: you can finance a scholarship yourself, or team up with co-workers and friends to create a scholarship.

Call KittyJo Reynolds at 860-236-7535 for more information about how you can make Grace Academy possible for deserving students.