

## **Congratulations to the Malala Yousafzai Class of 2018!**



“When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.” Leanne Edwards shared the importance of Malala Yousafzai’s quote with graduates and guests in her introductory remarks at this year’s graduation ceremony. The thirteen members of the Malala Yousafzai Class of 2018 developed their own unique voices at Grace these past four years and as Destiny Navarro stated in her keynote address, “We are proud to graduate as the Malala Yousafzai class and will continue to look to her accomplishments as future motivation as we move on to high school.”

Grace Academy honored its sixth class of graduates with the traditional graduation exercises held at South Congregational Church on Tuesday, June 12, 2018. The thirteen girls of the Malala Yousafzai class processed into the Hall, confident for what their future holds while bidding farewell to their fellow classmates. Pastor Adam Soderberg, carrying a woolly lamb to honor the anniversary, provided a beautiful blessing upon the graduates and their families. The Malala Yousafzai class achieved another milestone in Grace Academy’s history: five of the 13 graduates will attend private independent schools (two of the five will attend as boarding students). Over the past three years, two members of each class moved on to private schools. The fact that five students were admitted on near full scholarships is a testament to the academic program and the students own academic and social worthiness. The five will attend: Ethel Walker (2),

Watkinson (2) and Taft. A sixth member of the class will attend East Catholic on a near full scholarship.

The graduation ceremony also marks an occasion to present special awards to students who excelled in academics, the arts, athletics, or service to others. Matthew Fitzsimons, Head of School, concluded the graduation ceremony by reminding students and their parents of the commitment Grace Academy makes to each girl as they progress through high school and college: “You have grown and matured in this Sisterhood of Grace Academy. We are committed to you and we are here for you through high school and college... When you get to senior year in high school, we will help you with your college essay, take you on college tours, and help your mom or dad with the financial aid forms that colleges require. And, when you get to college, we will work to arrange a summer job for you.” Fitzsimons reaffirmed a statement that is often times repeated to the students during the daily Circle of Peace: “Grace Academy will know it has succeeded when one of you comes back here to teach. Perhaps, one of you will come back to work with Ms. Riemann in our Graduate Support Program, so that you can help the next generation of sisters as they progress through high school and college.”



*Anna Alferi, 8th grade co-Advisor, presents Julissa Mota with her graduation gift.*

# ALUMNAE



Samantha, De'Geal & Leanne applaud as their classmates receive their diplomas.

## Graduates at a Glance

**53 Graduates in Grades 9-12**  
**9 College Freshman**

*\*During 2017-2018 Academic Year*

- **60%** attending the following private high schools:

Northwest Catholic (13),  
 East Catholic HS (6),  
 Mercy HS (6),  
 Watkinson School (2),  
 Christian Acad. of A&T (1),  
 Concord Academy (1)  
 Loomis Chaffee (1),  
 Master's School (1),  
 Westminster (1),

- **21%** attending Hartford magnet high schools
- **13%** attending Greater Hartford public high schools
- **6%** attending public high schools out of state

## High School GPAs: Fourth Quarter Results

*\*From the 2017-18 Academic Year*

Grade	0.0-1.99	2.0-2.99	3.0-4.0
Seniors	0	2	6
Juniors	1	5	8
Sophomores	1	1	11
Freshman	0	3	14

## Summer Internships at Stanley, Black & Decker

Two of Grace Academy's graduates were accepted into Stanley, Black & Decker's summer internship program. Ximena Franco (Class of 2013), a rising sophomore at Providence College, is working in the Communication department. Natalia Allen, Class of 2014, an entering freshman at Manchester Community College, is working in the Corporate Human Resources department. Securing summer employment at major corporations is an important aspect of our Graduate Support Program. Thanks to Jo Yarranton, Board member, our graduates are enjoying paid internships that are teaching them valuable life skills that will prepare them for life after college. Please contact Maricele Riemann, Director of Graduate Support if you can help place a graduate in an internship program.

## Klein Family establishes pipeline to Watkinson

Jan and David Klein, 30-plus year residents of the West End of Hartford, learned of Grace Academy during the early planning phase to open the school. The Kleins have a long time and passionate commitment to education and to the city of Hartford. Their daughter graduated from Watkinson School which inspired them to continue their dedication to and involvement with Watkinson, both having served on the Board of Trustees (Jan is currently serving) among other non-profits in the Hartford area. After experiencing and witnessing countless success stories of students at Watkinson and seeing the successful placement of Grace Academy graduates into private high schools like Watkinson, the Kleins were inspired to announce in April that they would create a fund to allow a Grace girl to attend Watkinson each year.

Watkinson School has developed a collaborative relationship with, and commitment to, Grace Academy. Over the past three years, Watkinson has funded two Grace Academy graduates (Thalia Ortiz and Nary Oo) and is providing financial aid for two more incoming freshman for the 2018-19 academic year. For the year ahead, Watkinson is happily committing \$270,000 of financial aid to the four Grace girls.

Watkinson School is expanding its partnership through the creation of the *Grace Scholars at Watkinson Fund*, of which Janice and David Klein are founding donors. This partnership is an extension of Watkinson's strong commitment to the city of Hartford, to Grace Academy and to the natural alignment of the two schools in terms of ethos and program. Watkinson School embraces the Graduate Support Program concept and the two schools will work to ensure that Grace graduates complete high school and attend college, along with guiding them into rewarding careers. If you are interested in helping to build the *Grace Scholars at Watkinson Fund*, please contact us or Jen Destefani, Watkinson's development director, at [Jennifer\\_Destefani@watkinson.org](mailto:Jennifer_Destefani@watkinson.org).

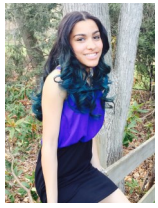


# News Update

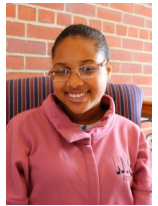
## Meet the Sojourner Truth Class of 2014



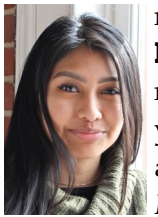
**Natalia Allen:** Natalia Allen completed her four years at East Catholic High School. She was a member of the soccer team, she won the MVP (most valuable player). She was also a member of the Tri-M National Music Honor Society. In her free time, she volunteered at *Foodshare* and *Manchester Manor*. Natalia will be attending Manchester Community College in the fall.



**Edialliz "Lisa" Caraballo:** Lisa graduated from Pathways Academy of the Arts, where she was on the basketball and softball team. Lisa won the Most Improved Player award for basketball. Lisa participated in cooking club, sewing club and dance club. In her free time, she volunteered at the *Newington Special Olympics*. Lisa will attend Manchester Community College in the fall.



**Laura Cordero:** Laura graduated from The Connecticut River Academy, where she achieved much success. She was a frequent Honor Roll Student. Laura was the Captain of the Cheerleading squad, she also played on the volleyball team. Also Laura participated in Knitting Club, Crochet Club, Makeup Club, and Prom Committee. Not only did Laura come back and volunteer at Grace Academy she also spent time helping: *St. John's Episcopal Church, Rebuilding Manchester Together, Walk for Hunger, Source to Sea Cleanup, and Mutual Housing Association of Greater Hartford*. Laura will be attending Manchester Community College in September.

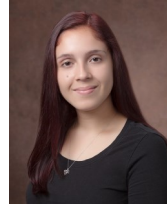


**Lesly Davila:** Lesly graduated from the Connecticut River Academy. During Lesly's four years, she played on the soccer team. Lesly also volunteered her time at the *Walk Against Hunger 2017, House of Bread, The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House*, and planted flowers in Downtown Hartford. Lesly will be attending Manchester Community College in September.

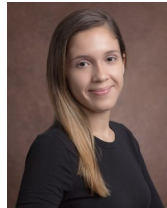


**Kierrah Harris:** Kierrah graduated from East Catholic High School with a high distinction "First Honors" in 2015-2017. Kierrah received the Academic Award for Accomplishment in United States History 2017. She was also awarded the William and Mary

Kearns Scholarship. She was involved in many extracurricular activities. She is multi-talented, not only did she play in the String Orchestra, she also danced on the dance team. She played two sports, Track and Field and the Soccer. Kierrah will be attending Loyola University Maryland in September.



**Marilyn Vazquez:** Marilyn excelled in her four years at Mercy High School. Marilyn was on the Honor Roll and a member of the *National Honor Society*. Marilyn was honored to serve as the *French National Honor Society* President. Furthermore, she served as a Student Ambassador. In addition, she worked as the Volleyball Team Manager. In her free time she volunteered at: *Violinist and Vocalist in W.O.W. Youth Ministry Band, Member of the House of Restoration Church Dance Ministry, Children's Ministry Leader at the House of Restoration Church, and Youth Disciple for W.O.W. Youth Discipleship Leadership Program*. In the fall Marilyn will attend Springfield College in Massachusetts.

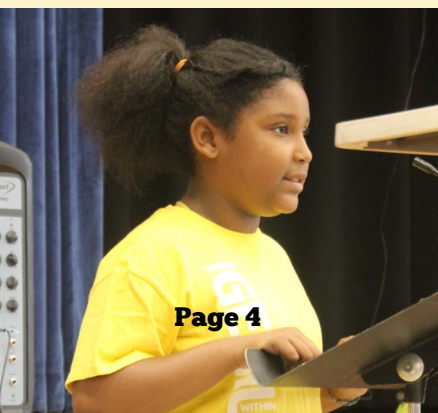


**Marisol Vazquez:** Marisol also excelled in her four years at Mercy High School. Marisol was a member of the *National Honor Society*, as well as a member of the *French National Honor Society*. Furthermore, she served as a Member of the Medical Minds Club, and a Member of the Fight Against Cancer Club. In her free time she volunteered at: *Violinist and Vocalist in W.O.W. Youth Ministry Band, Member of the House of Restoration Church Dance Ministry, and Youth Disciple for W.O.W. Youth Discipleship Leadership Program*. In the fall Marisol will attend University of Saint Joseph.



**Sabrina Williams:** At East Catholic High School, Sabrina was the Senior Class Vice President and a member of the *Tri-M Music Honor Society*. Sabrina is also a talented Violinist, she was a part of the ECHS Orchestra. She also participated in events on the Track and Field team. In her free time, Sabrina volunteered at many different places such as: *Grace Academy, Tutor for Burr School in Hartford, Served meals at Immaculate Conception Shelter, and STRETCH Leader—Community Service leader for Burr School*. Sabrina will be attending Springfield College in the fall.

In March of 2010, Sarah Lahr Fitzsimons made the suggestion to invite a guest to read a poem to the students in celebration of National Poetry Month, held in April. Thus began a tradition that is now in its eighth year. Over the years, guests have included: First Lady Cathy Malloy, Liam and Lori McGee, Oz Griebel, two mayors (Pedro Segarra and Luke Bronin), Sara Bronin, Rebecca Corbin-Loree, Miss Connecticut and many others. Sarah Fitzsimons often kicks off the program by telling teachers and students that, "When poetry is read aloud, it calls for a special, intense kind of listening. And, when we're listening in this way, we form mental pictures in our imaginations which then rumble around inside us throughout the day and manifest themselves in untold ways...often times in unexplained moments of grace." The students love to hear from and participate in the daily experience. Poetry Month concludes with a school-wide Poetry Palooza event where students and teachers come together to recite or read poetry.



## Robotics is Jammin'



*The Robotics team competed in States in December.*

On May 19, the *Short Circuits*, Grace's robotics team, participated in the second annual RoboJam held at Rawson STEAM School in Hartford. Led by coach Corey Pace, the *Short Circuits* competed with teams composed of all boys from Hartford, Simsbury and Avon, and only one other team had a female member. To prepare for the competition, the teams had to program their robots to perform different and unique tasks in this year's theme "the Robo Space Race" which was comprised of different competitions which included: King of the Hill, RoboPit, and several team building competitions that asked students how humans could safely land on Mars. Grace Academy won first place in King of the Hill, first place in RoboPit, and received awards for Best Autonomous Robot and the Connecticut Robotics Society Award for

## Sports Recap

*Athletics, physical literacy, good nutrition (which includes gardening and healthy meals in cooking classes), along with self-regulation skills and mindfulness play a vital role in our holistic education model. Girls also compete in competitive sports and, unlike their suburban counterparts, most Grace girls have never run in a track meet or played a team sport.*

Excellence. They also took home the RoboJam Overall Grand Champions Award. Epephanie LaBoy, seventh grader, exclaimed, "Our new robotics teacher is a big part of why we were able to win every competition we entered. His name is Mr. Corey Pace and he knows so much about robotics." Keysey Lopez added, "I am proud that I was a part of the all-female winning team. Most of my competitors were male. This shows how strong and smart females are."



*Eno Kissi (6th) and Destiny Navarro (8) racking up points against the boys in the Robotics tournament.*

## Basketball

The Grace Academy Girls' Basketball team went 7-2 for the season competing in the Harford Public School (HPS) Middle School Girl's League. Team captains Paw Shee (8th grade) and Moo Paw (6th grade) led their teammates to the playoffs, losing in the quarter finals to Capital Preparatory Magnet School who would go on to win it all.

# ppenings

Coach Alferi also organized games with private schools and competed in an invitational hosted by The Master's School in Simsbury. Grace lost to St. Timothy's Middle School (West Hartford), a team with many players who are involved in travel basketball. In the second game, the Grace girls lost by 2 points to St. Mary's Middle School (Newington) in a hard fought 'neck-to-neck' game. Grace Academy basketball players contended with tenacity and determination, and coaches Bryan Cote and Anna Alferi praised the ladies for their hard work and determination.



At the season ending awards banquet, Coach Alferi recognized the sportsmanship, positivity

and hard work of all the players before the entire school community. Awards were presented to: Moo Paw and Karina Ntoni (6<sup>th</sup> graders) for Sportsmanship; Leanne Edwards (8<sup>th</sup>) and Cityra Lee (7<sup>th</sup>) received the Most Improved Player award; and team captain, Paw Shee, received the Most Valuable Player Award.

## Track and Field

As the 2-4-1 Sports program continued for all students at Grace Academy, Coach Alferi organized interested students onto a travel team. Grace's *North Stars* joined the Connecticut Jaguar's Track and Field Program at Bloomfield High School that brought students together from around Connecticut along with students from New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The Jaguar's program organized three meets, the first two were considered developmental allowing middle school age stu-

dents the opportunity to understand the events and how to compete in them.

The first meet was held on April 14 and each athlete performed beyond all expectations with sixth grader, Eno-Yaa Kissi, placing third in the 100 Meter Dash - her first track and field meet ever. Coach Alferi recruited some additional students for the second meet and Eno-Yaa Kissi placed third in the 80 meter hurdles, this being the first time she had even jumped over a hurdle! Eighth grader, Paw Shee, placed third in the Long Jump, propelling herself into the sand over 13 feet.

The third and final meet was an invitational with 100s of participants. The top five winners in each event and age group would receive medals and be eligible for the state competition. The Grace athletes brought home four medals: Eno-Yaa Kissi (6<sup>th</sup> grade) earned two medals - 5<sup>th</sup> in the 100-Meter Dash and 4<sup>th</sup> in the 80-Meter Hurdles; seventh grader Cityra Lee placed fourth in the 100-Meter Dash, and eighth grader Paw Shee placed fourth in the long jump. Overall, the invitational was a great success, and something for the team could take pride in!

## Golf with First Tee

Thanks again to the *First Tee* program, Grace girls formed a golf team and went to Goodwin Park one day per week to receive lessons on the game of golf from the educators from First Tee. Not only do the First Tee coaches teach the skills to play the game of golf, but they also instill important life skills around nine core values that align with the principles Grace Academy teaches its girls, values such as: honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, respect, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, courtesy, and judgment. Thanks are owed to Judy Salm and Matt Fox for getting the team to Goodwin Park each week.



## Guiding Students!

Grace Academy attracts many donors and volunteers to its program: the Guiding Star Sponsors financially support one student through her four-year education; Graduate Support volunteers help students and their families with high school and college placement. The assistance provided by both groups of committed individuals ranges from the informal, e.g. offering "life advice" and academic help, to more formal hands-on meetings and workshops on high school and college applications along with the financial aid applications that would allow a student to attend a private school. As a way of exhibiting the school's appreciation for these services, Grace Academy hosts annual lunches with the students for the Guiding Star sponsors and Graduate Support volunteers.

*Guiding Star sponsors enjoy an annual lunch gathering with their sponsored student(s).*



# With Grace

## Solomon Schechter students host Grace girls to an authentic Seder



Jenessie experiencing her first Seder meal with classmates and girls from Solomon Schechter.

The girls from Solomon Schechter's fifth, sixth and seventh grade classes hosted Grace's fifth and sixth graders to a special Seder meal on March 26 at Solomon Schechter School.

Over the years, students from the two schools have competed in various athletic competitions. When Andrea Kasper, Head of Solomon Schechter, and Matt Fitzsimons met at a conference in November, they explored ideas that would allow their students to develop deeper, more meaningful relationships. Kasper suggested a Seder and the idea was born.

The girls at Solomon Schechter created their own, unique Haggadah for our girls. The Haggadah, the text recited at the Seder, which includes a narrative of the Exodus, fully engaged the students in various interactive activities with performance skits that involved the Grace girls in the interactive activities. The Seder, held on the first two nights of Passover, includes readings, telling stories, eating special foods, singing, and other Passover traditions. Students at Grace Academy are taught scripture beginning with Abraham and continuing to Moses and the prophets. Students at both schools love learning about the exodus of the Israelites while connecting the Exodus story with meaning and applications in today's world.

Grace Academy students experienced first-hand the tastes, sounds, sensations and smells that have been part of the Schechter students' tradition, including drinking four cups of grape juice (a substitute for wine); veggies dipped in salt

water; matzah; bitter herbs (horseradish) and romaine lettuce, dipped into charoset (a paste of nuts, apples, pears and juice); and chicken soup. Grace Academy plans to reciprocate the warm hospitality with a Tikkum Olam (repairing our world) activity at Grace Academy this coming fall.



Carletha Texidor, assistant Attorney General and Zumba instructor, and Kitty Horigan, teacher and marathon runner, playing Blokus with their mentors, Hannah Mundell-Webb and Nadisha Chowdury.

## Mentoring

Wednesday afternoons have taken on a special meaning for the Maya Angelou (7<sup>th</sup> grade) class. With assistance from the Governor's Prevention Partnership, Grace Academy piloted a school-based mentoring program with the seventh graders. Each Wednesday, from 12:00

-12:45, mentors meet with their assigned students to have lunch, talk about the week, review homework, draw, play Uno or shoot baskets in the gym.

"Someone was there just for me!" remarked one student as she reflected on the time spent with her mentor. One-to-one mentoring relationships assure young people that someone cares about them while promoting positive academic and social-emotional outcomes. Studies have shown that students with mentors are 55% more likely to attend college despite opportunity gaps, have better attendance and attitudes towards school and are more likely to hold leadership positions.

Mentors are matched with students based on a combination of shared interests, career goals, background and personality. "I love my mentor! She's always trying to make me laugh!" exclaimed seventh grader Ayanna Kiser. Mentors include actuaries, paralegals, lawyers, educators, therapists, homemakers and health care workers. They have diverse interests ranging from ballroom dancing to physics, but what they all have in common is the desire to guide and support a student through her middle school and high school years. Many mentors extend their commitment beyond the Wednesday lunches and attend their student's track meets or robotics competitions on the weekends.

# + Gratitude

## Those who help Grace!

Grace Academy has been blessed to have many corporate employees join our school for an afternoon, full day or weekly visits to perform community service that benefit the students' lives and our school. The occasions help build relationships between students and adults, improve communication skills, provide opportunities to apply academic learning to real human needs, and inspire Grace students to consider the world beyond their frame of reference.

### PwC

Each spring, PwC hosts a financial literacy program for seventh graders from Grace and Covenant Prep (the all-boys counterpart). PwC also invited a small team of students to work with the firm's interns to build Lego robots. Students were integrated with college age adults who were required to solve problems that would allow them to add pieces to their robot in a competitive race to see which team could complete their robot first.



*PwC interns solve puzzles to attain pieces to build robots with Grace girls in a race against other PwC-Grace teams.*

### Voya Financial

On May 15, Voya employees visited Grace and transformed the grounds into beautiful gardens, along with adding vegetables and herbs to the raised beds that students can harvest and bring home to their families. The Voya team purchased the flowers and lots of

mulch to make the place look great! They also helped Grace Academy with many cleaning, organizing and painting projects in the library, storage rooms and classrooms.



*Voya team members take a break from gardening for a photo-op.*

### The Hartford

Each spring, The Hartford invites the Grace girls and Covenant Prep boys to a concert series held in Liam McGee Park. Students have the opportunity to hear wonderful jazz and classical music performances.



*Enjoying The Hartford's concert series in Liam McGee park.*

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

## Power of Grace 2018—Most Successful Ever!

Guests at the sixth annual *The Power of Grace* event were captivated by a young sixth grader who ‘stole the show’ with a powerful speech that had everyone in awe; her name (fittingly) is Charisma. “I think Grace is the citadel of middle school education here in Hartford,” is how she opened her talk. With a touch of humor, she added, “Citadel, by the way, is a new word I learned at school recently.” In her brief remarks, Charisma captured the essence of a Grace Academy education told through her own personal experience.

*The Power of Grace 2018* benefit was the most successful yet, raising over \$333,000 with 94% of the funds returning directly to Grace Academy’s mission to educate low income girls from Hartford. All accolades go to Kathy Binder, who led the planning committee, along with the 20 women on the committee who devoted many volunteer hours to secure sponsors and auction items, along with Donna Colliton, Direct of Development and event co-chair.

After five wonderful years at The Bushnell, the women who serve on the organizing committee, opted to move to a larger venue for the 2018 event and chose Infinity Music Hall, a concert hall in Hartford. Over 330 guests joined the fun and excitement to honor, meet, and celebrate Grace Academy’s second class of graduates (Class of 2014) who graduated from high



school and will enter college this August. Newcomers at the event were able to witness the journey the Class of 2014 students followed from their days at Grace, through high school, and on to acceptance at such colleges as Loyola-Maryland, Springfield College and the University of St. Joseph (see article on page 3). Delthy Velazquez, mother of Marilyn and Marisol Valezquez, and Latoya Richards, mother of Natalia Allen, beamed with pride and stayed to the

end to tell stories about how life at Grace Academy altered the lives of their daughters.

A Grace Academy education begins at the fifth grade and doesn’t stop until graduates have begun their careers following college. The community of educators and volunteers do everything they can to ensure that each young lady experiences success. The corporate community with The Hartford as a lead sponsor, along with Pratt & Whitney, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Stanley, Black & Decker, Voya and many other businesses, individual donors and volunteers has embraced our “Little Miracle on Main Street”. Charisma summed up her experience this way, “For me, Grace Academy has been a very transformative and life changing experience. For starters, I’m standing here in front of you right now - something I couldn’t have imagined a year ago.” The Grace Academy community acknowledges and thanks all those who stand with us in its mission to educate the girls served here.