

# ACHIEVE

SUMMER 2022



**CHRISTOPHER HOUSE**  
LEARN DREAM ACHIEVE

**CHRISTOPHER HOUSE'S TWO-GENERATION APPROACH IS CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP THROUGH A CONTINUUM OF PERSONALIZED EDUCATION WITH IMMERSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT, STARTING AT BIRTH.**

# A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

To our Christopher House Community,

***Across our family of schools, summer has been full of fun and learning.***

Our After School had full-day programming and participants explored the city with field trips all over Chicago, including taking a River boat ride and visiting the Lincoln Park Zoo. Our rising kindergarten scholars participated in our Summer Bridge program, a partnership program between our Pre-School and Elementary School to support scholars in their transition to kindergarten. Scholars learn in their new kindergarten classrooms and each scholar receives a “bridge bag” with manipulatives to learn counting and math, art supplies, and reading and writing kits.

As we turn toward fall and the new school year, I am excited to lead such a diverse organization. I know that equity and inclusion is critical to Christopher House’s future. It is important that we foster a community of belonging and inclusion that ensures that everyone at Christopher House – from our scholars and families to our staff and partners – is able to do their best work to close the opportunity gap and to thrive.

Christopher House has been intentional about our diversity, belonging, equity, and inclusion (DBEI) journey and I am committed to leading our organization’s ongoing, collaborative process that elevates our diverse voices and community members to ensure that Christopher House is a home for all.

Christopher House is uniquely positioned to close the opportunity gap by creating and fostering learning environments that encourage all members of our community – scholars, staff, and caregivers – to be active participants in the learning process. **I believe that the greatest avenue to facilitate change is in the classroom** – classrooms that affirm student identity and agency, teaching practice that values diversity as an asset to be leveraged, and family engagement that embraces home language and supports the role of parents as their child’s first teacher. I am excited to start the new school year with this commitment at the forefront of our mission.

As Chicago continues to show us some summer weather, with hints of fall in some turning leaves, I am continually grateful for our entire Christopher House community. Our sustained impact is holistic and collective. Christopher House’s success and work is made possible by every one of our Christopher House family members – scholars, their caregivers, our staff, and supporters. It is only in collective partnership that we can create an equitable future for all.

In partnership,



Libby Shortenhaus  
August 2022



## OUR VALUES

- ★ Commitment to Excellence
- ★ Achievement and Perseverance
- ★ Respect and Compassion
- ★ Equity

## OUR BELIEFS

Children and families thrive when:

- ★ They have access to a high-quality education
- ★ Education begins at birth, with parents as the first teacher, and continues through life
- ★ Parents have high standards and set high expectations for their children and themselves
- ★ Professionally trained teachers use strength-based instruction and know their students as individuals
- ★ Parents support their children financially and emotionally
- ★ Evaluations and program adjustments are data driven
- ★ Education includes developing perseverance and social intelligence
- ★ Parents and teachers work together to continuously improve programs



## Creating Equitable Classrooms

Christopher House's commitment to diversity, belonging, equity and inclusion starts at birth.

Christopher House's Infant & Pre-Schools serves 300 scholars, ages six weeks to five years old, year-round at our sites in Belmont Cragin, Logan Square, and Uptown. Christopher House delivers on its commitment to diversity, belonging, equity, and inclusion (DBEI) by placing social justice at the center of our work. We believe that every child deserves access to high-quality care and learning that will position them to achieve success in all aspects of life.

Our Early Childhood program meets every scholar and their caregiver where they are, embracing an educational pedagogy that is child-centered, social justice motivated, and Reggio-inspired. Together, we work to create classrooms that incorporate and respect each child's identity as a participating member of the community and continuously facilitate a renewed sense of wonder.

We partner with caregivers to create learning communities where our families' diverse backgrounds and identities are represented and valued in our schools. In fact, **92% of caregivers felt that their family's background and identity were valued at Christopher House and our parents are committed to our DBEI journey.**

We know that to create a community of belonging we must celebrate our diversity. Year-round our schools distribute books to build each scholar's home library that showcases diverse and inclusive stories and we begin each year with age-appropriate learning units on identity. We nurture a positive sense of identity in order to create confident, self-assured learners, who are aware and respectful of differences around them.

This year, our Early Childhood staff are focused on holistic wellness and social-emotional learning (SEL) to support our DBEI commitment. Meeting students where they are socially and emotionally is critical to ensuring academic success. Christopher House partnered with Fontenelle Art to provide monthly learning communities and discussion sessions during the workday to encourage self-care and promote specific mindfulness strategies. Each month focused on a different reflective theme while also providing modeling of specific practices such as deep breathing, introductory chair stretches and seated yoga, guided meditation sessions, and art therapy. Outside of work there were optional physical self-care offerings each month like Zumba, Yoga, and

Meditation. Fontenelle Art also offered a virtual parent workshop on mindfulness and self-care.

Together, teachers and caregivers collaborate to foster more inclusive classrooms that will pave the way for our youngest learners to be advocates in creating a brighter, more diverse, inclusive, and equitable future for themselves, their peers, families, and communities.





Kartika Sujdak



## Christopher House Voices

### DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Meet Kartika Sujdak

For over ten years, Kartika Sujdak and her family have supported Christopher House through a number of our programs, but Family-to-Family is probably her and her family's favorite. Family-to-Family is Christopher House's holiday program that matches community members with Christopher House scholars and families to ensure that everyone in our community receives some holiday joy – from a holiday meal to gifts. Kartika's impact knows no bounds and her energetic "yes!" makes her such a wonderful partner.

Christopher House reached out and asked Kartika some questions about her volunteering and we are thrilled to share her "Christopher House Story" with you.

#### How did you find Christopher House?

Google! I was on my child's school's Parent Teacher Organization, and we had extra school supplies from a Back-to-School event we hosted and I wanted to make sure that nothing went to waste, and saw this as an opportunity to pay-it-forward. It was only as a parent that I realized how expensive completing school supply lists could be – from

pencil, binders, notebooks. So, I started getting in the habit of collecting these items year-round and especially when they went on sale. This practice morphed into buying all the supplies I could get my hands on each year, and dropping off the extras at Christopher House for their scholars.

I also started to reach out to my network – family, school friends, and even my company – to ask if they had school and office supplies they could pay-forward. Word spread, and I now have people and companies reaching out to me to donate their unused or extra items, which I still go and pick up, sort in my basement, and my first call is always Christopher House.

#### What are some of the programs you participate in?

From school supplies, an obvious, natural progression for me and my family was participating in the Family-to-Family program. I was born and raised in a Hindu family in India. We moved to the US when I was in high school, and I always found the holiday season fascinating! It's hard not to get enthralled with the spirit of the holiday, especially in Chicago with the snow, festive music, and decorations. The

## Program Highlight

### PARENT SCHOOL: Our Two-Generational Model

Christopher House's two-generation model ensures that we provide scholars with high-quality, personalized education with family immersive supports, starting at birth. Our Parent School supports every caregiver at Christopher House in building a stable and healthy home environment so that families can thrive. Key supports include our Family Advocates, individual and group counseling, on-site food pantries, parent education workshops, and emergency financial assistance.

At the heart of our Parent School are our Family

Advocates, who build strong, trusting relationships with our caregivers. Said best by our [Director of Family & Community Engagement, Juan Villalobos](#), "our work starts with a conversation. The ability to build a strong relationship with parents and caregivers, helps them in turn, come to us, engage, be really open and honestly and ask for what they need."

Our Family Advocates are full-time Christopher House staff, who work to break down barriers and remove the stigma surrounding asking for support. They act as connectors between caregivers, scholars, teachers, staff, and other





## Donors to Christopher House - \$1,000+ July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

city always has this beautiful cozy vibe during the winter holidays. When I heard about the Family-to-Family program, its purpose and spirit, it was a no brainer to sign up.

Being matched with a Christopher House family and getting their wish list and shopping for it with my children is really special. I'm grateful for the opportunity to demonstrate generosity and the holiday spirit of giving with my children – to share the shopping and wrapping excitement. It's become a staple in my family's holiday tradition. Over the years our family's commitment has grown – last year we supported twenty-six Christopher House families through the Family-to-Family program, and we hope to grow from there. It's a beautiful way of getting involved and giving back to the community – and selfishly I'm grateful for this program for my own family. It has taught us to open our eyes and really look around us, to see where we can roll up our sleeves and help if it is within our abilities to do so.

***I am so happy I found Christopher House all those years ago, they have become a part of my own family.***

stakeholders to support families to receive the resources they need, when they need them. By working to remove barriers to support, Christopher House has been able to distribute emergency financial assistance to over **520** families since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and our holiday programs have supported over **3,200** individuals receive meals and gifts.

Parent School delivers on Christopher House's community of care standards – and elevates inclusive practices by ensuring that especially at critical points in the year – like holidays – every family can celebrate.

To learn more about how you can support our Parent School, including our food pantries or sign up for our upcoming volunteer events, visit:  
**[ChristopherHouse.org/get-involved](https://christopherhouse.org/get-involved)**

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|--|--|--|
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# Around the House

## Family of Schools



### INFANT & PRESCHOOL

prepares 300+ children, ages six weeks to five years, for kindergarten through full-day education that stimulates cognitive growth and develops emotional intelligence.

We are thrilled to share that each of our sites are accredited by the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – a distinction awarded to only 10% of schools across the country – and our Uptown site received its re-accreditation this Spring with an 92% overall rating!



### AFTER SCHOOL

works with 200+ scholars, ages six – eighteen, to explore new opportunities, achieve academic excellence, and develop healthy behaviors and skills needed to be successful in school, home, college, and the workplace.

Our scholars enjoyed full-day programming during the summer that included STEAM focused activities and field trips throughout Chicago! Uptown Youth Leadership students participated in the Graceland Wall Project as part of Uptown Art Week. Together, scholars collaboratively designed and painted a 4x4 canvas along with other local artists.

**Christopher House closes the opportunity gap through a continuum of personalized education with immersive family support starting at birth.**



### ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL

provides over 480 scholars K-8th grade with a personalized education in a college-going culture.

92% of our second graduating class of JoAnne L. Cicchelli Middle School students were accepted to their top five best fit high school – and many are attending CPS Selective Enrollment High Schools, including Lane Tech, Jones College Prep, Whitney Young, and Northside Prep.



### PARENT SCHOOL

engages every parent of each school in order to create a stable, healthy home environment that advances their child's academic and social-emotional development.

In addition to bi-weekly food pantries and community events like mobile Dental bus, the Parent School had two interns this summer through our partnership with Origami Works Foundation. The interns summer project was a community resource assessment and mapping project.



## The Class of 2022

### Christopher House Graduates its Second 8th Grade Class

*“Christopher House has made me who I am today and that is because of my classmates, my teachers, and the school environment that I am comfortable being myself.” - Noemi, attending Lincoln Park High School*

On June 10, Christopher House graduated its second 8th grade class. The Class of 2022 includes many students who have attended our continuum of education model since kindergarten.

Among the graduating class, we are pleased to share that for the second year in a row three students were awarded the Daniel Murphy Scholarship, a prestigious scholarship awarded to only 150 Chicago students to attend college preparatory schools. Nine students are attending CPS Selective Enrollment High Schools, including Lane Tech College Preparatory High School, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, Jones College Prep, Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, and Northside College Preparatory High School. This is a 25% increase from the year before and 92% of students are attending their top five best-fit high school.

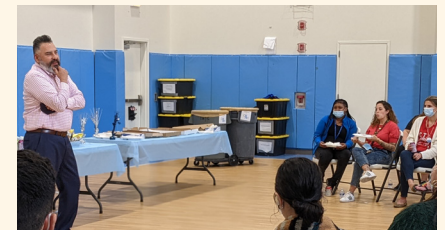
Christopher House has been a profound place in our scholars’ lives – a second home and a place where they grew up. Many students learned English at Christopher House, it’s where students recognize they developed their sense of self and character. For Jason, who attended Christopher House since Pre-School at our Logan Square campus, Christopher House is *“like a second family. I’ve gone here my whole life.”* Melanie, who will be attending Prosser High School, reflected, *“Christopher House means a lot to me because I’ve been here since Kindergarten, and I grew up here. It also means a lot because this is where I met my friends.”*

This eighth grade class is success bound! Christopher House is humbled by our scholars’ achievements and grateful to all the caregivers, who have partnered with us to build a supportive, collaborative, community to nurture and educate these future leaders. We can’t wait to see what the Class of 2022 achieves in high school and beyond.

*“Christopher House has impacted my life by becoming a place I can look forward to seeing friends and familiar faces. Not only that but academically I have grown so much because of the amazing teachers.”*  
- Jocelyn, attending Lane Tech College Prep High School

## Welcome

### Dr. Arturo Abergo



Christopher House is excited to welcome Dr. Arturo Abergo as Christopher Elementary & Middle School’s new Principal for the start of the 2022-23 academic year.

Dr. Abergo brings over 25 years of experience in public education as a Speech-Language Pathologist, Assistant Principal, Principal, and Assistant Superintendent for Student Services and Director of Language Services, most recently at Hawthorn School District 73.

*“Christopher House is a wonderful community and school and I look forward to working in partnership with our families, teachers, students and our community partners to create an educational experience for our scholars that is rigorous, relevant, and respectful to who they are as learners.”*

Join the mission to help families in need thrive.



GIING  
TUESDAY

November  
29, 2022

Save the  
Date

