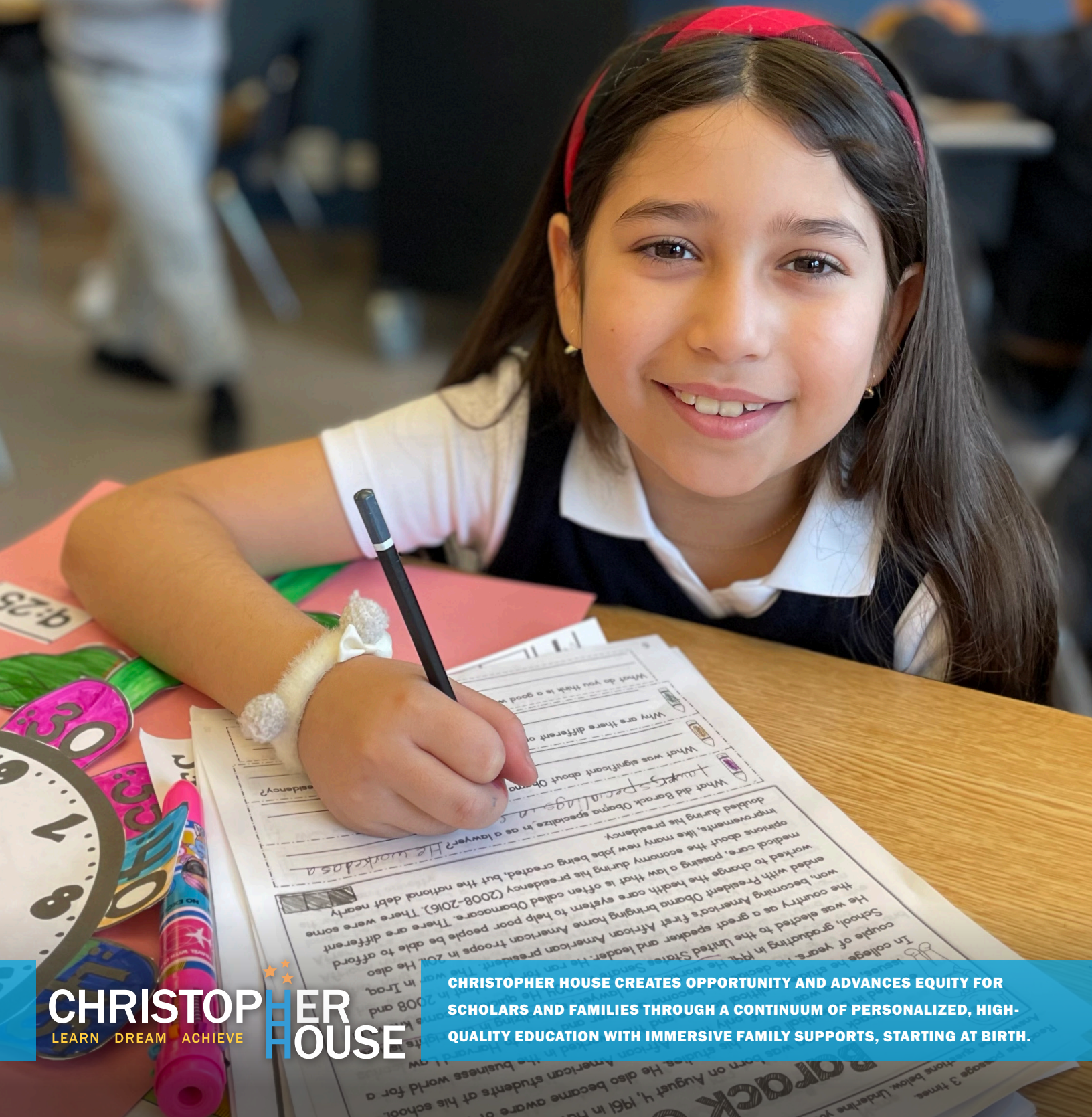


ACHIEVE

SPRING 2024



CHRISTOPHER HOUSE
LEARN DREAM ACHIEVE

CHRISTOPHER HOUSE CREATES OPPORTUNITY AND ADVANCES EQUITY FOR SCHOLARS AND FAMILIES THROUGH A CONTINUUM OF PERSONALIZED, HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION WITH IMMERSIVE FAMILY SUPPORTS, STARTING AT BIRTH.

A LETTER FROM OUR CEO & BOARD CHAIR

This February, Christopher House hosted our annual All-Staff Professional Development Day at our James & Jean Stewart Campus for a full day of training, learning, and fun.

With the theme of *Building Community through New and Thoughtful Engagement*, our entire staff came together to learn with and from each other. It was special to pop into sessions and watch Christopher House staff facilitate workshops that ranged in topics from Supporting Early Literacy and Instructional Best Practices for Dual Language Learners to Health & Wellness sessions including Mindfulness Yoga and Meditation and Vision Boards.

At lunch, we celebrated Christopher House staff with tenure of five or more years and presented this group of 96 staff members with accolades for their immense service to Christopher House. Celebrating these significant milestones for our staff included Carmen Velez, who has worked at Christopher House for 40+ years. She began her career at Christopher House's Greenview site as a Teacher Aide in an Early Head Start classroom and is now our Logan Square Site Director. Also, a part of the group were current staff who are program alumni, like Brandon Adjei-Boateng, a member of our Uptown staff. He's literally grown up with us having been at Christopher House since he was three months old and in an Infant classroom!

Christopher House grows their own. And with a new \$300,000 3-year grant from the Opus Foundation, Christopher House will be formalizing a recruitment and retention program to grow our Early Childhood workforce that combines mentorship and supportive onboarding of new, early career staff. We look forward to sharing success stories and know that with results like Carmen, Brandon, and so many other Christopher House staff, we will be able to make incredible impact for our scholars and community.

Another exciting update is that as we grow and continue to grow our own, the Christopher House Board of Directors has created a new leadership role of President of Christopher House and Julie Dakers has been approved as Interim President. Together, Libby, as CEO, and Julie, as President, will be co-leading Christopher House as a collaborative team to ensure we are thriving and delivering on our commitments to our scholars, families, staff, teachers, and community. Sharing Julie's promotion is a pleasure as she has given Christopher House more than 20 years of service, including various leadership roles, most recently as our Chief Human Resources Officer. During her tenure, Julie will continue to focus on strengthening our culture and most notably, our DBEI commitment, supporting Christopher House's efforts to continue to become a place of belonging; DBEI initiatives that have flourished under her leadership already. Congratulations, Julie!

Impact and growth are only possible with strong shared values and commitments. To everyone that is a part of the Christopher House family – including you – *thank you!*



Libby Shortenhaus
CEO



Dee Dee Chesley
Board President

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

DBEI at Christopher House

Christopher House is pleased to share some program updates that feature how our Diversity, Belonging, Equity, and Inclusion (DBEI) commitments are showing up around the House.

SEED (Seeking Education, Equity, and Diversity): Last year, Christopher House planted our “SEEDs” with our first cohort which included all our Leadership and a group of rising leaders. Our rising leaders also participated in a national summer SEED training program. Taking their experience one step further upon their return, these leaders facilitated the second SEED cohort that just recently concluded. In reflecting on her recent experiences, Jennifer Mejia, Stewardship and Special Events Manager and SEED Cohort 2 participant, shared:

“I’ve truly enjoyed this experience over the past 6 months. Not only did it give me the opportunity to grow closer with and learn more about my coworkers and team members, but also helped me explore different parts of myself - from my childhood experiences to who I identify as now. More importantly, this experience has taught me that there is power in embracing our identities to create change.”



RIDE: This fall, in addition to our thriving DBEI RIDE (Race Inclusion Diversity and Equity) spaces, Christopher House launched two affinity spaces: a BIPOC Affinity Group and a White Anti-Racism and Allyship Group. RIDE is a staff-led space that promotes inclusion, equity, and diversity across the organization. As a leader of the health equity subcommittee, Carmen Velez, Logan Square Site Director, said:

“RIDE provides a safe space for staff from all departments to have necessary sensitive conversations surrounding race, health, and equity. As a health equity sub-committee chair, it is my goal to make mental health a priority across the organization, and for me to personally prioritize this more in my life. I want us to explore how we can do this not just for all staff, but for our scholars as well.”

All Staff: Together as an organization, we kicked off Black History Month (February 1st - 29th, 2024) and had a special opportunity to hear from Elizabeth Akinbusuyi, Christopher House alumna and recent Law School graduate. She shared her leadership journey and how pivotal Christopher House has been in her life:

“When I think of schools like Christopher House, the phrase “educational equity” comes to mind. Here, we understand that to ensure that we all have a chance to succeed, our differences must be taken into account. Understanding educational equity is understanding that in order for all children to have an opportunity to thrive, time, money and resources must be allocated not equally, but based on what is needed. I wonder where I would be had I not had access to a world-class, high-quality Christopher House education when my family didn’t have the world-class funds to pay for one.”





Corporate Partner Spotlight

William Blair

Christopher House is extremely lucky to have partners like Kenny Langston, Partner, National Sales Director, Private Wealth Management at William Blair and longtime member of our Board, whose ethos of community engagement is central to their employee-inspired philanthropic approach.

"My team and I look forward to our Family-to-Family volunteering and I am grateful that William Blair actively supports me in my leadership here at Christopher House and helps increase the impact of my investments. From its phenomenal matching gift program to allowing employees to volunteer their time, William Blair aligns with my own philanthropic values and helps me make incredible impact for my community."

For Kenny and his team at William Blair, they give their talent, treasure, and testimony to support Christopher House and our mission. We are grateful to count on William Blair volunteers showing up every December to ensure more than **450 families** receive holiday meals and gifts through our Family-to-Family Program. Since 2018, Kenny has served on our Board and has been an active member on various Committees including the Strategy and Finance Committees. And throughout the years, William Blair colleagues have answered the call for program needs – from supporting Book Drives to being an Annual Benefit sponsor.

One special way that Christopher House receives support from William Blair and its foundation is through its matching gift program. William Blair matches its employee's personal philanthropy, doubling the impact they have in their choice of supporting Christopher House. Christopher House is grateful for William Blair's long-term commitment to us and its employees, like Kenny, who are helping Christopher House deliver on our mission – and for that we say: *thank you!*

Program Spotlight

Family-to-Family

It's a wrap on another successful Family-to-Family program! Our annual holiday giving program matched Christopher House families with generous community donors and fulfilled over **450 Christopher House families'** holiday wish lists. The program brings together families, staff, and members of the community, all bonded through the joy and spirit of the holiday season – and this year was no exception.

This past December, **262 community donors** – individuals and companies both locally and as far away as California – were matched with families and delivered on the kindness and generosity of the season. We are deeply grateful to each and every one of you who made this all possible.

This program's impact is felt in so many ways – from community building for both our families and community partners to the generous donation of over **\$115,000** worth of items gifted by our donors. Family-to-Family brought comfort, joy, and smiles to hundreds of faces this holiday season, and we could not have done it without YOU!



Teacher Spotlight

Julia Corsini, 3rd Grade Teacher

Driven by her passion for teaching and deep connection to the mission and vision of Christopher House, Julia Corsini, third grade teacher, first joined our Elementary School in 2016. After completing her college observation hours here, she knew she wanted to return to our classrooms, bringing her excitement and commitment to providing a high-quality, personalized education with her.

From morning social emotional learning time to afternoon phonics exercises and science experiments, Julia brings joy to each and every lesson, hoping to instill a life-long love of learning in her students. Julia shared with us some of her teaching reflections:

Q. What drives you as a teacher?

A. My students! My role as a teacher is important for the Christopher House community because I am able to be a positive role model to my students. I enjoy being with my class every day and being able to teach them new things. It's so rewarding to see all of the growth and progress they make throughout the year, not only academically but also socially and personally as well. I also feel like I learn so much from each of them and it motivates me to continue to become a better teacher.

Q. How is Christopher House unique?

A. Our continuum of education model is so unique and beneficial to children's education. I think this really helps families and staff work together to be able to support the whole child and support their individual needs and strengths. I have had the pleasure of getting to know many families and creating positive relationships in our community. This is beneficial because children and families creating relationships with teachers and staff helps foster a community where they feel valued and creates an environment where they can reach their full potential.

Q. What is your favorite part of teaching at Christopher House?

A. I value building relationships with students and families. I get excited when I have siblings of former students in my class. I think this really helps to develop meaningful relationships with our community. I enjoy seeing all the smiling faces each morning in the hallway. It's also fun when former students come back and visit my classroom and I enjoy watching their growth throughout their educational experience here at Christopher House.

Donors to Christopher House - \$1,000+

July 1, 2023 – January 31, 2024

INDIVIDUALS

Maria and Kevin Adam	Roger and Anina McCarron
Anonymous x 2	Kevin and Nicole McCormack
Gwendolyn and Zeb Barnes	Joyce McGlade
Anastasia and Harrison Bernbaum	Patrick McGovern
Jim and Mimi Brault	Peter and Christine Neely
Alan Brody	Jill Nolte
Bill Carr	Naomi O'Dell
Lisa Centone and Joe Curci	Liam O'Kane
Elizabeth and Tarun Chandran	Michael & Maria O'Toole
Rick and Dee Dee Chesley	Dani Petrie
Martha and John Diener	Gretchen Rakowicz
Nikki Drevich	John Ratnaswamy
William and December Gladden Family Fund	John and Ellen Riggs
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Christopher Family Foundation	Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
CIBC Bank USA	Peoples Gas
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Ellis Goodman Family Foundation	VNA Foundation
First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights	
Harley-Davidson Financial Services	
Illinois Tool Works Foundation	

**includes in-kind donations*

Around the House

Our Family of Schools

INFANT & PRESCHOOL

Enrolls over **300** children, ages 0 – 5 years old. All three preschools are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and each school has received the highest Gold Circle of Quality ranking from ExceleRate Illinois. We meet every scholar and their caregiver where they are, embracing an educational pedagogy that is child-centered, social justice motivated, and Reggio Emilia inspired.



UPDATE: Our Early Childhood team is excited to continue its partnership with Fontenelle Arts, who is working with our teaching staff to deliver trauma-informed social-emotional learning professional development centered on mental health, creative arts, and healthy movement.

AFTER SCHOOL



Works with 220+ students – including our Elementary School scholars and graduates – from age six to fourteen, to explore new opportunities, achieve academic excellence, and develop healthy behaviors and the soft skills needed for success in school, home, college, and the workplace. We offer after school and full-day programming for scholars to encourage ongoing positive development, academic support, and social-emotional learning through interactive activities and engaging field trips.

UPDATE: In honor of Lights On After School (October 26, 2023) – a national celebration of Afterschool programs and the vital impact they have on the lives of scholars and families all across the country – our school-age scholars decorated light bulbs and reflected on their favorite memories from Christopher House After School.

Christopher House creates opportunity and advances equity for scholars and families through a continuum of personalized, high-quality education with immersive family support, starting at birth.

ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL

Creates a college-going culture that ensures every scholar is prepared for their bright future ahead and provides ~ **440** scholars annually – including graduates of our Pre-School – with personalized education, including a STEAM curriculum.



UPDATE: We are excited to announce that we are incorporating a new STEAM curriculum for our Middle School scholars, grades 6th through 8th, which includes hands-on exploratory activities. Gabriela De Loof, Middle School STEAM Teacher, shared, *“From building rollercoasters to cooking in the lab, students build community, solidify feelings of belonging and can make connections with one another, displaying their contributions to the overall community of learners.”*

PARENT SCHOOL



Supports the caregivers and parents of all Christopher House scholars by providing the resources and knowledge needed to promote stable, healthy home environments that advance each child's academic, social, and emotional development. Parent School supports families year-round through our family advocates, parent education workshops, counseling services, on-site food pantries and emergency financial assistance.

UPDATE: Our Family Support Services team is excited to welcome parents back into our building as we continue to prioritize the building of relationships between our advocates, families, and community. This year, we have offered new and continued opportunities for parents to engage and connect – from a thriving Cafecito (Mom's Club) to a new monthly workshop series facilitated by University of Illinois Chicago's (UIC) Center for Literacy that focus on topics like employment readiness, resume building, financial literacy, and community resources.

Classroom Spotlight

STEAM in Early Childhood

Christopher House serves scholars from birth through 8th grade, and at every level – Infant and Pre-School, Elementary and Middle School, and After School – we integrate an age-appropriate STEAM-based (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) education to foster creativity, support problem solving skills, and prepare scholars for their academic and professional futures.

Classrooms explore STEAM in many different ways – guided lessons, interactive experiments, colorful projects. One example is Ms. Margo and her Room 13 Pre-School scholars, ages three to five. From studying silkworms and their habitats, to playing with light and colorful reflections, Ms. Margo's scholars are STEAM explorers!

“Young children are naturally curious. They are experiencing new things and ideas in the world every day. Their thinking is magical. They are not sure why things happen, and they are not sure what effect they have on the world. We talk about using our “scientist senses” – what do we directly see, hear, smell, touch, and taste that teaches us what is happening in the world? And when we interact or experiment with objects or living things, what impacts do we have?”

In Ms. Margo's classroom, like all our Early Childhood classrooms, she incorporates a Reggio-Emilia approach, a pedagogy that is student-centered and founded on the principles of respect, responsibility, and community through exploration, discovery, and play. Through this approach, we recognize one's environment as the “third teacher” that encourages creativity, problem solving, relationship building, and positive play.

“Our classroom is divided into centers to help organize and challenge scholars' thinking and learning: block play, dramatic play, table toys and puzzles, art area, library, etc. We call our science center “The Laboratory.” In the Laboratory, we rotate different specimens of natural samples like a bird's nest or even a jar or cicada skins. We try to incorporate as many elements from our natural environment as possible. We also rotate different tools and toys to foster learning about physics – items like magnets, gears, flashlights, and mirrors. We study chemistry by experimenting with matter, often through cooking projects or using sand, water, snow, and ice in our sensory table. We want to keep things engaging so the class is excited about learning and exploring new things.”

The warm and supportive environment that Ms. Margo facilitates in her classroom helps her scholars feel comfortable and find joy in experimenting and exploring new subjects. It is her hope that by creating a welcoming and creative learning environment and prioritizing a STEAM-focused education for her scholars, she can help prepare them to take the next steps in their educational journeys and excite them about the possibility of exploring STEAM careers in the future.

“In the short term, I hope our Pre-School scholars develop a habit of exploring bravely – touch that moth, pound that lever, plop that rock into water, see what happens. Try changing what you're doing, predict what will happen, then see if it does! In the long term, I hope our scholars' preschool experiences build a strong, visceral foundation of scientific concepts that they can think back on when they are expected to build abstract models of scientific ideas in high school or college. I hope these experiences will spur some of them to work in STEAM fields someday and use science to improve the world.”

STEAM learning is critical at all ages and levels because it teaches scholars important and valuable life skills through critical thinking, problem solving, negotiating, and analytical concepts. These are real world soft skills that are needed in the 21st Century both academically and professionally.
Karen Ross-Williams, Director of Early Childhood and Youth Development



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