



# 4 Years Later

CHICAGO JESUIT ACADEMY

CELEBRATES ITS FIRST GRADUATES

From its founding, *Chicago Jesuit Academy* was designed to be an oasis of hope, stability, and educational opportunity on Chicago's far West Side.

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*by Kevin L. McKeough*

**iaquan King** arrived at Chicago Jesuit Academy (CJA) in the middle of the 2005-2006 school year, a shy 11-year-old boy understandably nervous about transferring to a new school halfway through fifth grade. What King found was unexpected. "When I first came here, everyone shook my hand and they welcomed me, instead of when you come into a room in a new school and everyone stares at you," King recalls.

In addition to the welcoming reception, King found an intellectual foundation at CJA. Barely able to divide, unfamiliar with fractions and decimals, he began to thrive with the help of extensive one-on-one tutoring from his teachers.

"The tutoring program helped me care about my work and become more intellectual," King says. "I proved that even though I'm challenged a lot I can get good grades."

Now in 8th grade, King has earned straight A's, putting him at the head of his class. His intellectual transformation has opened a new world, providing him with educational opportunities away from the violence of his Garfield Park neighborhood. He was accepted at Loyola Academy and Culver Military Academy in Indiana, and has chosen to attend Culver next fall. Eventually, he hopes to become an astronomer or a philosopher. "I like to think about things for a long time," he says.

King is one of the 15 students in the first class graduating from Chicago Jesuit Academy—a ministry of the Chicago Province Jesuits—since the middle school for young men from modest economic backgrounds began teaching fifth graders in the fall of 2005. All of King's classmates also will be attending college prep schools (see sidebar, page 10).



Mike and Maralyn Reilly enjoy visiting with Fr. Patrick E. McGrath, SJ, the provincial assistant for secondary education and a board member of CJA. The Reillys have been an essential source of leadership and support for Chicago Jesuit Academy.

Kendall reviews a problem on the board during his eighth-grade algebra class.

**Chicago Jesuit Academy**  
Class of 2009  
**High School Acceptance**

Chicago Waldorf School      Loyola Academy  
Culver Academy              Saint Ignatius College Prep  
Holy Trinity High School      The Thatcher School  
Latin School of Chicago      Walter Payton College Prep

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“The Chicago Province Jesuits are very proud to see one of our newest schools graduating its first class, and I congratulate the faculty, administration, and especially the students of Chicago Jesuit Academy on their accomplishment,” says Fr. Provincial Edward Schmidt, SJ. “This event is particularly gratifying, since the partnership between lay professionals and the Jesuits to start and operate the school represents a new model of fulfilling God’s call to service to the young and the poor. I also am enormously grateful for the immense generosity of the school’s donors, whose support has made it possible to provide these promising young men with a quality Jesuit education in a modern facility that’s conducive to learning.”

From its founding, Chicago Jesuit Academy was designed to be an oasis of hope, stability, and educational opportunity on Chicago’s far West Side, which includes not only the most violent neighborhoods in the city, but the homes of 85 percent of the school’s students (most of the rest make the long trip every day from the South Side). Most of CJA’s students are from single-parent families living below the poverty line who could never afford a private Jesuit education if the school did not provide full scholarships for each student.

Chicago Jesuit Academy values these scholarships at \$12,000 a year, but their ultimate worth may be exponentially greater. The heads of Fenwick High School, Loyola Academy, and Saint Ignatius College Prep have all committed to providing full scholarships or financial aid to CJA students who earn admission to their schools. “If you make a \$48,000 investment, our students can turn it into more than a quarter million dollars of education in 12 years,” Matthew Lynch, CJA’s president, says of the chain reaction of scholarships that he expects will ultimately include college financial aid.



CJA President Matthew Lynch talks with eighth-grade parents, Mrs. Angel Womack and Ms. Valerie Townsend, at parent-teacher conferences.

**National Percentage of Students Who Graduate from High School 2007–08**

<b>Alumni of Jesuit Nativity Middle Schools</b>	National	Hispanic	African American
<b>94%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>50%</b>

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—Fr. Edward W. Schmidt, SJ, Provincial



**Only 3%** of African American and Latino boys attending Chicago Public Schools earn a **college degree** by age 25.



**89%** of those who graduate from Jesuit Nativity-Model schools enroll in two- or four-year universities and colleges.

—2004 study



**Eighth graders Maurice and Jaquan with Mr. Adam L. DeLeon, S.J. Maurice has earned admission to Holy Trinity High School. Jaquan plans to attend Loyola Academy.**

“If you make this investment, a young man is going to earn his way into a great high school and he’s going to get into a great college.”

These results run directly counter to the dire educational trends for African American boys in Chicago (CJA’s student body is 97 percent African American and three percent Latino). A study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago found that only 38 percent of African American boys in the Chicago Public Schools graduated high school by age 19; virtually all of the rest dropped out of school. The consortium’s research also found that only three in 100 African American and Latino boys attending Chicago Public Schools earn a college degree by age 25.

**T**he students at Chicago Jesuit Academy start fifth grade at the school already showing signs of being at risk, testing at an early third grade level in reading and math. Fortunately, they make great strides upon arriving. After their first year at CJA, students in the class of 2009 had made 2.2 years of progress in reading and 2.6 years improvement in math as measured by standardized tests. Last academic year, the class tested at their grade level on average and a grade level ahead in social studies and language arts.

Chicago Jesuit Academy accomplishes these results with a combination of small classes of between 12 and 20 students that allow for lots of individualized attention; a school day that starts at 7:30 in the morning, ends at 6:00 in the evening, and includes breakfast, lunch, and an evening snack; an 11-month school year (school days are shortened in the summer); and the involvement of a parent or other caregiver in each student’s education.

This program is the academic blueprint of the 16 Jesuit Nativity-Model middle schools nationwide that include CJA (see sidebar, page 14). “It’s an elegantly simple model,” Lynch says. “Your starting point is a deep and abiding faith in the potential of every student

# Nativity Schools Nationwide

**Chicago Jesuit Academy** traces its origins to a small school started by the Jesuits on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In 1971, the Jesuits expanded their Nativity Mission Center, an after-school program, into a year-round school. Starting in 1990, additional Nativity schools have been opened across the country, serving students from low-income families in urban communities by providing rigorous academic programs and individualized support to help them achieve enrollment and success in college preparatory schools.

## There now are 16 Jesuit Nativity schools in the US

### **Nativity Mission Center**

New York, New York (founded in 1971)

### **Nativity Preparatory School of Boston**

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts (1991)

### **St. Aloysius School**

New York, New York (1991)

### **Nativity Jesuit Middle School**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1993)

### **St. Ignatius Loyola Academy**

Baltimore, Maryland (1993)

### **St. Ignatius School**

Bronx, New York (1995)

### **Jesuit Middle School of Omaha**

Omaha, Nebraska (1995)

### **Loyola Academy of St. Louis**

St. Louis, Missouri (1999)

### **Nativity Preparatory School of New Bedford**

New Bedford, Massachusetts (2000)

### **Good Shepherd Nativity School**

New Orleans, Louisiana (2001)

### **Sacred Heart Nativity School**

San Jose, California (2001)

### **St. Andrew Nativity School**

Portland, Oregon (2001)

### **Washington Jesuit Academy**

Washington, DC (2002)

### **Brooklyn Jesuit Prep, Brooklyn**

New York (2003)

### **Nativity School of Worcester**

Worcester, Massachusetts (2003)

### **Chicago Jesuit Academy**

Chicago, IL (2005)



that you serve. If you give that child a small classroom setting where he's known and loved and held to the highest expectations, good things are going to happen."

A graduate of Saint Ignatius College Prep and Georgetown University, Lynch witnessed the effectiveness of this educational model during the two years after college he spent teaching at St. Ignatius Loyola Academy, a Nativity school in Baltimore. After returning to Chicago to teach at Saint Ignatius College Prep, Lynch became determined to open a Nativity school in the city. He earned an MBA from Washington University in St. Louis in order to give himself the business acumen he needed. He also recruited Catherine Cassidy, a former classmate from Saint Ignatius College Prep who had just returned from a volunteer project building schools in Guatemala, to work with him as a business partner.

Lynch initiated a dialogue with the Chicago Province about the project midway through his MBA program. "I asked the Jesuits I knew to trust that they had done a good job in forming me and people like me who had attended Jesuit high schools and colleges. I asked them to have confidence that even in this time of limited



Mr. Christopher Dwyer invites his science class to think and be amazed.

old building with the help of a \$1 million grant from the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus. To date, the school's capital campaign has raised \$4 million towards a goal of \$5 million, which will pay off the remainder of the debt on the renovation and cover expenses including landscaping and the replacement of the school's boilers.

Today, Chicago Jesuit Academy has a staff of 16, all but three of whom have some teaching responsibility, an enrollment of 75 students, and an annual operating budget that comes out to about \$12,000 per student. This sum must be raised from donors each year. "It's been done with the help of a lot of people, a lot of generous benefactors," says Matthew Botica, the chair of Chicago Jesuit Academy's board. "Looking at our board, you see a group of people many of whom have a Jesuit educational background or have children who attended Jesuit schools, so they came with a real willingness to support a Jesuit cause."

Denise Taylor credits CJA for the transformation in her son Deon, a member of the school's first graduating class (her son Samuel, a fifth grader, also attends the school). "When Deon started there, he was goofing off a lot. It seemed as if he was in trouble

resources and limited Jesuit personnel they could entrust the day-to-day operations of a new Jesuit school to the laity and that we would be faithful to and inspired by our shared Jesuit tradition and the Ignatian charism. Fr. Schmidt was able to see this as a re-imagining of what a Jesuit school could be." Lynch speaks as he sits in his office at CJA, where the wall above his large desk is covered with a set of paintings by his students depicting an ocean scene of fish in deep blue water. "They have a fascination with fish with big sharp teeth, which is a middle school boy if I ever heard of one," he says.

**C**hicago Jesuit Academy began with 19 students, 6 teachers and three classrooms, which doubled as faculty workspace and tutoring area, in Marillac Social Center, a Daughters of Charity mission on Chicago's West Side. In August of 2007, the school moved into the former location of Resurrection Parish Grade School, later St. Martin de Porres Grade School, at 5058 W. Jackson Boulevard, having first completed a \$4.2 million renovation of the 83-year-



**Tommie (right) helps his sixth-grade classmates Julian, Kenneth, and Mark plan their strategy for a group project.**



Rashaan carefully revises an essay in his seventh-grade language arts class.

with one of his teachers every day,” says Taylor, a personnel coordinator at Resurrection Health Care. In addition to seeing her son’s grades improve to the point that he’s made the school’s honor roll the first two quarters of the current school year, she’s also seen a big change in how Deon conducts himself.

“His demeanor has changed. He’s very respectful. He carries himself like a gentleman,” she says. “I have great expectations for Deon.”

Deon also has come to have high expectations for himself. He’s taken the entrance examination for Loyola Academy and hopes to attend the University of Notre Dame. “I want to become a doctor. I know that to do that I have to keep up my grades and show that I can do it,” he says as he sits in Matthew Lynch’s office wearing his 8th grade uniform of khaki pants, blue shirt, and tie.

Both Deon and his mother credit the dedication of Chicago Jesuit Academy’s teachers for his intellectual and personal maturity. “At first, it was pretty hard,” Deon admits. “The standards are much higher than other schools. I had trouble, and sometimes I let my frustration get to me.” “But,” he quickly adds, “the teachers always had time for us if we had a problem, and over time I saw how lucky I am to be here.” *(continued on page 18)*



Chicago Jesuit Academy Principal Dr. Kevin Zajdel greets fifth grader Christopher prior to the start of the first semester honors assembly.



Jim and Marie Gallagher generously support two student scholarships at Chicago Jesuit Academy. They introduced their children to CJA so that they can pass on their legacy of support for Chicago Jesuit Academy. Pictured: Colleen, Terry, Jim, Marie, Kevin, Jay, and Linda.



Eighth graders Johnnie and Jerrod take a moment to smile for the camera.



Seventh grader, Maurice, enjoys his silent reading time with a good book. All CJA students read for a minimum of 20 minutes a day; Maurice, an avid reader, regularly exceeds this goal.

**T**hat kind of personal attention is evident in Deon's 8th grade algebra class, which he shares with Diaquan King and the rest of Chicago Jesuit Academy's class of 2009. Like all CJA's classes, it begins with the teacher welcoming the students at the door with a handshake. "Good afternoon, Mr. Taylor, good afternoon Mr. Jones," says Dave Diehl, a math teacher who also is CJA's dean of students.

Later, when a student appears a bit unkempt, Diehl stops his explanation of a math problem to address him. "Would you tuck in your shirt, please," asks Diehl politely but firmly. The dress code, greetings, and addressing students by their last names are all part of how CJA nurtures the students' respect for themselves and for others.

After reviewing the days' homework problems, which asked the students to solve for  $x$  and  $y$  in algebraic functions, Diehl gives his students a quiz. "Your test probably will be in a week. This is just to see if we can move forward," he tells them. "You may use your notes, you may use your book, you may use your brains, but you cannot use your neighbor."

Instead of leaving his students on their own, though, Diehl roams the four rows of desks, answering questions, punctuating his

points with waves of the green graphing ruler in his hand. "Everything so far is correct except you have to be careful about the negative," he cautions one. "You wrote  $X$ , not negative  $X$ . That's going to mess you up, but you're doing it right."

Diehl offers other students some tips on how to plot their answers on a graph and advises another student to use substitution rather than elimination to solve a problem. Above all, he offers encouragement. "Thank you for working on these," he says as class comes to an end. "Just from walking around it looks as if we're getting better."

These students are plotting more than just lines on graphing paper. Lynch notes that there's a high correlation between a student's ability to pass freshman algebra and the likelihood of his receiving a college degree. The same students who arrived at Chicago Jesuit Academy three and a half years ago with third grade level math skills are now on the verge of graduating from the school having already attained that critical level of intellectual competency.

"Our mission is to make certain that every young man we serve has a clear path to a college degree," Lynch says. "We're not miracle workers. We're merely offering kids what is justly theirs: a safe place to learn and grow." ■

For additional information about Chicago Jesuit Academy, please visit [www.cjacademy.org](http://www.cjacademy.org) or call Catherine Cassidy at (773) 638-6123.

