



# GRACE ACADEMY





# A MESSAGE FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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## **Grace Academy**

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Dear Grace Academy Community,

As we come to the close of another incredible academic year, I am filled with immense pride and a profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of serving as the Executive Director and Head of School at Grace Academy, especially after celebrating the graduation of The Aretha Franklin class this year.

This first year has been an extraordinary journey, marked by countless achievements, remarkable growth, and inspiring moments of collaboration and empowerment. I am humbled by the dedication and resilience demonstrated by our exceptional students. Each and every one of our students have shown resilience and great progress in and out of the classroom.

We appreciate our faculty and staff for their tireless efforts and unwavering dedication to ensuring that our students have access to exploratory field trips, robust academic instruction and advisory guidance throughout the year. It is incredibly important for our students to learn and grow in a nurturing and empowering environment to foster a love for learning and provide the tools they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

To our families, community partners and supporters, I extend my deepest appreciation for your unwavering support and partnership. Thank you for helping us create a vibrant, fun and inclusive learning environment for our school community. THANK YOU!

Looking ahead, I am so optimistic about what is in store for our school in the 2023-2024 academic school year. As we strive for continuous improvement, I am confident that Grace Academy will remain at the forefront of educational excellence, empowering the next generation of young women to make a positive impact on the world.

It has been an absolute privilege to be part of this special community during my first year and hoping for many more years of growth, learning, and success together.

With gratitude and grace,

Princess Hyatt

Executive Director & Head of School

# GRACE ACADEMY GRADUATES

Grace Academy celebrates our 13th class of graduates, The Aretha Franklin Class of 2023. Every year, our graduating 8th grade students are asked to reflect on their time at Grace Academy and share their advice with current students...



Malia shared the following guidance with the Hypatia class as they move up to 8th grade:

"You are now an 8th grader and that is a big role to these younger kids. Try your best to stay out of drama, learn time management skills, and be helpful to your future self. Speak up when you see something not right. Learn from your mistakes and improve from them next time as failure will lead you to better success in the future. Remember at this school you will have support from your sisters and your teachers...we were not just a school but a family."

Mary Rose shared this advice with our Katherine Johnson class as they wrap up 5th grade:

"Make sure to work as a team and have that sisterly bond. When tough times come make sure to tell your teacher or ask your peers; remember there is always a sister nearby. Here at Grace you will have so many memories, and you will be proud of your growth and your accomplishments. My advice is to try new things and never be scared. Speak up for yourself or when you see something not right."



Kionne encouraged our Frida Kahlo class as they step into 7th grade:

"7th grade will pass quicker than what you'd expect so make sure you make the best of it. Some advice that I have for you all is to work hard, and if it seems difficult, make sure you at least try. While working hard make sure that you squeeze in time for your friends and family. Make sure to positively engage yourself into sports and activities. Make sure you are a good example for the younger classes."

Nyasia shared this warm welcome with our incoming Shirley Chisolm 5th grade class:

"Welcome to Grace Academy! Grace Academy is a sisterhood where you can build special bonds that stay strong even when you grow old! Here at Grace Academy we are a big team that boost each other up when one feels down and all of the teachers participate in this support team that let you know that they are here for you whenever you're struggling and need help."



## Aretha Franklin Class of 2023

Anna Alphonso - Millbrook School  
Jade Antoine - The Loomis Chaffee School  
Malia Jean - Cheshire Academy  
Jenell Karikari - Choate Rosemary Hall  
Kennedi Knight - Glastonbury High School AgSci Program  
Kionne Knight - Glastonbury High School AgSci Program  
Nyasia Martinez - Prince Technical High School  
Mary Rose Moo - Northwest Catholic High School  
Messiah Price - Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Isabel Shumpert - East Catholic High School

## The Maya Angelou Class of 2019

*is graduating high school this year and heading to:*

Citrya Lee - Liberty University  
Ingrid Garcia - Capitol Community College  
Ayanna Kiser - UConn Hartford  
Epephanie LaBoy - Union College  
Rhaili-Em Lowe - Howard University  
Jackie Ordaya - UConn Hartford  
Zianne Ormsby - Undecided



# THE POWER OF GRACE 2023

On May 3rd, over 250 supporters came together at the Delamar with the common mission to support the education of girls in Hartford. The 13th annual Power of Grace campaign, presented by founding sponsor, the Hartford, was a true celebration of the Grace Academy community and successfully surpassed all fundraising goals. The campaign is spearheaded by a dedicated team of 24 volunteers who give their time, energy, and resources to ensure the event is a success.

The event theme, Full Circle, reflected the incredible journeys of students from their time as fifth graders through graduating high school and college, some even returning to Grace to work and teach. Supporters had the opportunity to meet many Grace students and alumnae who were present at the event.

Guests were treated to an energetic performance by the step team, "Stepping with Grace". Alumna speaker Kyoee Paw (Grace Academy '15, Northwest Catholic '19, Springfield College '23) shared her inspiring journey and the hurdles she overcame surrounded by the support of the Grace Academy community.

Princess Hyatt, Grace Academy's new Executive Director and Head of School, expressed her gratitude for the incredible support of our community throughout this transitional year. GA founders Matthew Fitzsimons, Sarah Lahr Fitzsimons, and Lindsey McPhee were all in attendance to show their support.

The Master of Ceremonies, Leslie Mayes of NBC Connecticut, led a silent auction and paddle raise. The generosity of those in attendance was overwhelming, and we are incredibly grateful for everyone who contributed to the event.

Overall, the Power of Grace was a testament to the power of community and the importance of supporting education for girls. The support of the organizers, sponsors, donors, and attendees all play a crucial role in making Grace Academy possible, and we couldn't be more appreciative for another successful and inspiring event.



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## The Power of Grace Committee

**Co-chairs: Shea Kinney & Julie Sanderson**

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*Photography by Dan Simeone*

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# STUDENT & ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT



## Rhaili-em Lowe

*Grace Academy '19  
Connecticut IB Academy '23  
Howard University '27*

Rhaili recently joined Grace Academy at the Power of Grace to share her accomplishments with our community. This fall, Rhaili will be heading to Howard University, with so much to celebrate and look forward to.

Rhaili will be the first Grace Academy alumna to attend an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). As she prepares to head to DC this fall, she reflected on one of her proudest moments in high school, earning her Girl Scouts Gold Award.

Rhaili learned about the lack of diverse books in Hartford School's libraries, and felt an immediate call to action. She teamed up with local organizations such as SHOPBLACKCT and a black owned bookstore, Key Bookstore, to donate books to Hartford students, including those at Grace Academy. As she thought back on her Gold Award Project, she shared:

**"The Gold Award project allowed me to get out of my comfort zone and learn a lot about myself and the need to advocate for our communities because there are always people that care to hear your stories."**

Rhaili is planning to be a full time entrepreneur. She already has a thriving business, Dazzling Designs By Rhaili, where she provides graphic design services and creates custom party favors.

Rhaili will be studying business & marketing at Howard to help further her business and prepare herself to thrive in the business field.

*To learn more about Rhaili's business visit her Instagram @dazzlingdesignsbyrhaili*

**Hypatia Class of 2024 student, Dallas, is a leader at Grace Academy and in our community. Another business-minded student, she is making waves in and outside of school:**

As a class representative, multi-sport athlete, and member of many clubs, Dallas stays busy during the week. Dallas co-founded a small business club at Grace, Ms. CEO Academy. The club provided education on small business ownership and brought in guest speakers to share their journeys in entrepreneurship. At the end of the club, there were opportunities for students and their families to be paired with mentors in their areas of interest.

This idea was sparked because Dallas is a small business owner herself. In April of 2020, she opened an all-natural bath and body company, Gossip Girls Cosmetics.

**Since then, her products have sold all over the US and her shop has been rated by Shopify as one of the top 20 new companies in 2020. In March of 2023, she was featured in CT Fashion Magazine to celebrate three successful years of business.**

Outside of school, Dallas participates in both print and runway modeling and enjoys film and photography. She has created over five videos for paid marketing campaigns. Her success has not gone unnoticed, as Alonzo Beckett of NE Video Production recognized her skills and awarded her free enrollment in his Summer 2023 film and photography course.

*To learn more about Dallas' business visit [www.shopgossipgirls.com](http://www.shopgossipgirls.com)*



## Dallas Mills

*Hypatia Class  
Grace Academy '24*

# COMMUNITY PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Grace Academy is made stronger through partnerships with many Hartford based organizations. The following are a few partners from this year, both long-time and new, that contributed to our students' growth and development.

Grace Academy partnered with **Girls on the Run Greater Hartford**, a program that empowers young girls to develop life skills and confidence while also promoting a healthy lifestyle. Girls on the Run is committed to inclusivity and works to ensure that all girls have access to the program regardless of financial barriers. The program is led by trained volunteer coaches who serve as role models and mentors for the girls. Lessons cover topics such as positive self-talk, goal-setting, teamwork, and community service. The program culminates in a 5k run that serves as a celebratory event, which took place in May. We are proud of all our students who participated in their first 5k!



Grace Academy partnered with **Covenant Prep, Hartford Stage, and the Hartford Yard Goats Foundation** to put on a production of the Lion King this past March. In the words of our amazing director, Nick Palazzo, *"What an honor it has been to direct both Covenant Prep and Grace Academy together for the first time since all our worlds were turned upside down. To feel the electricity of collaboration again and getting to see so many mask-free faces as been a true joy...We have had plenty of bumps in the road on this journey however, we continue to breathe life into our storytelling. Just like a circle, there is no end. As we take our final bows, I hope that these students continue on their journeys as performers and future leaders with no worries, Hakuna Matata. May they continuously reflect on Rafiki's words and discover the many versions of who they are and who they will be with the support of their family, friends, and teachers."*

**Capitol Squash** is a youth development program based at Trinity College that empowers Hartford youth to reach their full potential as students, athletes, and engaged citizens. Capitol Squash has partnered with Grace Academy for many years and has had 11 student-athletes graduate from Grace Academy. Three Grace Academy and Capitol Squash alumni have gone on to play varsity squash in college. Currently, three Grace Academy students are members of Capitol Squash. Though they are still young and are in their early years of the program, Pa Lae, Hser Paw, and Aryanna have already shown some of the greatest leadership in their middle school cohort. They consistently demonstrate great effort, enthusiasm, and focus on and off the court, making them great role models for all members of the program.

*by Coach Denise Bonilla*



In alignment with our commitment to providing students with a well-rounded education that includes physical fitness and health education, Grace Academy partnered with **YMCA Downtown Hartford** to provide free swimming lessons in a program launched by the State of CT's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Students had the opportunity to build their confidence in the water while learning important safety skills in a fun and collaborative environment.

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

## Ways to Give

*The following are a few of the many ways you can make an impact on a girls life during her time at Grace Academy. Thank you for supporting bright futures for girls in Hartford!*

**Mail** to Grace Academy at 457 Main Street Hartford, CT 06103

**By Phone** at 860-263-7535 Ext. 114

**Online** at [www.GraceAcademyHartford.org](http://www.GraceAcademyHartford.org)



[www.GraceAcademyHartford.org/  
waystogive](http://www.GraceAcademyHartford.org/waystogive)



**Endow Hartford 21** is a first-of-its-kind endowment matching program for Greater Hartford, initiated by the Zachs Family Foundation and supported by many community-minded lead donors. These donors stepped forward because they believe in endowment and the future of Greater Hartford. Grace Academy is one of 54 organizations selected to participate. The program will match gifts to our endowment 1:2 through August 31 to inspire donors to give generously to support the long-term future of Grace Academy.

**To make an endowment gift to Grace Academy visit [www.EndowHartford21.com](http://www.EndowHartford21.com)**