Advancing Educational Equity

HORIZONS GFA
2023 ANNUAL REPORT
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We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to Vani Bettegowda, Jim Busterud, and Jordan Smith for their dedication and commitment to Horizons GFA during the tenure of their board service.

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Cover Photo by Katharine Calderwood, Calderwood Photography
Dear Friends of Horizons GFA,

What I loved about Horizons when I first joined as a high school volunteer almost 20 years ago, and what kept bringing me back for years afterward, is the positive, supportive culture that allows our students to dream big and achieve those dreams. Horizons GFA advances educational equity by initiating long-term partnerships with families from Bridgeport to create more opportunities for our 330+ students to lead purposeful, choice-filled lives.

Our 17+ year commitment to families and the deeply individualized support we offer our students are what make Horizons GFA truly unique. Most students join us when they are in PreK or Kindergarten and stay with us all the way until they’ve graduated from a post-secondary program and begun their career. Because students are with us for so long, we really get to know them, their families, and their specific needs. This allows us to offer customized support during pivotal transition times such as PreK to Kindergarten, middle school to high school, high school to college, and college to career.

The partnerships we build with families is key to our ability to achieve student success and advance educational equity, as evidenced by our 100% high school graduation rate, 100% post-secondary enrollment rate, and a 92% college persistence rate. Horizons GFA helps students navigate around and through the financial and cultural obstacles facing first-gen students and students impacted by educational inequities. Of our college students, 82% graduate within six years, compared to 16% of Bridgeport students. Further, 100% of our students have secured full-time employment or enrolled in graduate school within one year of graduation. Our incredible numbers are a testament to the strength of our organization and the hard work of our students and families.

Our ambitious five-year strategic plan includes expanding our PreK-8 program by 25% and deepening our high school and college and career offerings. We hope to increase the scope of our career success program and increase the financial support we offer our college students to cover the cost of books and other expenses not covered by traditional scholarships, realities that delay or even extinguish a student’s post-secondary dreams. Each of these changes will bring us even closer to closing the opportunity gap for more students.

Horizons GFA programming is tuition-free, and we do not receive public funding. The support we receive from individuals, foundations, community organizations, and corporations is essential and has a meaningful and lasting impact.

No other organization in Bridgeport makes such a long-term commitment to its students. I encourage you to visit to see our program in action, it is a remarkable experience! Thank you for being a friend of Horizons GFA.

Best wishes,

Christina Whittaker, Executive Director
The PreK–8 Program had another amazing summer of academic and social–emotional growth during six weeks on the GFA campus. Student and faculty retention was high, and we were thrilled to have 10 PreK–8 Program graduates as enthusiastic and insightful volunteers and interns this summer!

Thanks to our dedicated teaching staff, student academic progress was strong. Over only six weeks, students grew an average of **four months** in reading and **three months** of growth in math. Below grade–level learners improved even more during the six–week session: **six months** in reading and **five months** in math.

Students had enrichment classes every afternoon, including swim lessons, art, science, life skills, sports, tumbling, and cooking. Field trips were the highlight of the week, destinations included the American Museum of Natural History, Maritime Aquarium, Wolf Conservation Center, Discovery Adventure Park, Urban Air, and on–campus visits from the Connecticut Science Museum and Birds of Prey.

After graduating from our PreK–8 Program, our students enter the Horizons GFA High School Program where they receive one–on–one academic support, career planning, college prep, and more, to prepare and motivate them to achieve in high school so they can successfully transition to a post–secondary program of their choice.

2023 High School Program Accomplishments

- **79** students are actively participating in high school programming
- Over **1,500** one–on–one coaching & tutoring sessions held during the 2022–23 school year
- On–going activities: career exploration, financial aid workshops, college visits, student council, SAT/PSAT prep, social events, community service, and a social action project, an intensive examination of issues of importance and student presentations on solutions
- **100%** high school seniors graduated on time in June, three students were salutatorians
- **100%** of seniors were admitted and enrolled in a post–secondary program
- **1** student spent six weeks in Eleuthera at the Island School learning about native ecosystems and environmental sustainability
- **8** SAT prep sessions for 11th graders
- **9** career exploration workshops for 10th graders
The College & Career Success Program ensures that every HGFA student has a robust support system after they graduate from high school. Students receive year-round one-on-one check-ins, academic and career coaching, subject-specific tutoring, connections with mentors, and numerous events to promote career readiness including job shadowing days, mock interviews, workshops, and career panels.

There are currently 76 students in the College & Career Success Program studying a wide variety of subjects, preparing to join other Horizons students in careers as business owners, accountants, bankers, lawyers, teachers, electricians, health care workers, psychologists, social workers, and more! All college graduates who participated in the Career Success Program are currently employed or in graduate school.

New in 2023:

• Horizons Honor Society, an academic society for HGFA students currently enrolled full-time in an academic program
• Horizons Scholarship Program, a $20,000 scholarship over four years for an academically promising student who embodies the Horizons mission
• Partnership with CareerSpring, a broad networking & job placement platform for first-generation and/or limited income students

Challenges:

Funding the indirect costs of college attendance that are not covered by scholarships or financial aid, such as books, supplies, transportation, food, health care, medications, etc. Inability to fund these costs can cause significant disruptions or even an insurmountable obstacle to our students’ education. To address this, we offer small book scholarships to help defray extra expenses. Our hope is to be able to increase the size of book scholarships in the coming years.
Program Snapshot

2023 HORIZONS GFA QUICK FACTS

- PreK-8 Student Retention Rate, 2022-2023: 98%
- PreK-8 Summer Attendance Rate: 96%
- PreK-8 Summer Academic Growth:
  - Reading: 4-6 months
  - Math: 3-5 months
- High School Program Graduation Rate: 100%
- HS Post-Secondary Acceptance Rate: 100%
- Post-Secondary Matriculation Rate: 100%
- Post-Secondary Persistence Rate: 92%
- Post-Secondary 6-year Graduation Rate: 82%
- Number of 2023 College Graduates: 6
- Expected number of 2024 College Graduates: 15

Total Enrollment: 332 Students

- PreK-8 Program: 186
- High School Program: 79
- College & Career Readiness Program: 76

2023 Student Racial Identity:

- Hispanic/Latino: 65%
- Black/African American: 33%
- Other: 2%
JESSY GERSH WYLIE

Jessy grew up in Weston, Connecticut and began volunteering at Horizons GFA as a 9th grader at Weston High School. After three years as a volunteer, Jessy was hired after her senior year to be a teaching intern. She then attended Tulane University and returned to Horizons during each of her three college summers. This experience was instrumental in solidifying her desire to go into education by giving her a deep, firsthand view of what being a classroom teacher involved. Her parents, however, were set on her majoring in finance, so that's what she did. She kept working with students impacted by educational inequities though, participating for all four years in Tulane’s well-known service-learning program working in New Orleans public schools. Her dedication to the Horizons program extended to her even lobbying Horizons National to start an affiliate site in New Orleans, still in the works.

She graduated from Tulane with a degree and a job in finance, but in a moment of clarity said “I can’t do this, it isn’t me, I should have trusted my gut,” and instead of taking the finance job she applied to Teach for America. She was accepted and taught in New Orleans for two years. She was immediately identified as an emerging leader with great potential for school leadership and was entrusted with a hybrid role working in the classroom and working to improve what she terms a “culture of frustration and unhappiness” by offering support to classroom teachers. She then moved to New York City and taught in Harlem as a 4th grade teacher, director of mathematics, and earned her M.Ed. During this time, Jessy continued working seasonally at Horizons GFA. In all, she has spent over a decade of summers at Horizons GFA, as a volunteer, teaching intern, assistant teacher, head teacher, and assistant academic director!

Jessy credits her career ambitions 100% to Horizons GFA, where she discovered that her heart was in the classroom. She is deeply dedicated to advancing educational equity for students in marginalized districts. While she never wants to be too far from a classroom, she wants to amplify her impact on larger numbers of students, whether in a school leadership role or a district-wide position.

As a teenager, Jessy was heavily influenced by the Horizons GFA classroom teacher she worked under, Lisa Moore, currently HGFA’s PreK-8 Director of Academics. “Lisa had such a calm and joyful way of operating her classroom. She created a culture where every student felt part of the larger group,” she said. “I learned that whether you’re working with a group of students or teachers, building community leads to learning, striving for personal and community growth, and ultimately joy. It made such a mark on me. It’s what I do now and is the key to my success. It all came from Lisa.”
The operations of Horizons GFA are entirely self-funded, with 100% of revenue coming from charitable giving by individuals, foundations, family trusts, community organizations and corporations. In addition, we receive, and greatly benefit from, educational expertise and in-kind administrative services provided by Greens Farms Academy.

We continually strive to diversify our fundraising portfolio to ensure a stable funding base. We pursue new funding sources from foundations, community organizations, and individuals with the capacity to ensure multi-year sustainability.

One of the goals in our new strategic plan is to expand grades 1-8 by 25%, from 20 students to 25 students. This growth will require additional funding and staff, and over the next few years we will explore strategies to achieve this goal while maintaining fiscal sustainability and program integrity. We have begun initiatives such as multi-year giving and expanded corporate support as best practices to maintain consistent, predictable revenue.
Pledge Giving

Thank you to our supporters who have committed to sustaining the future of Horizons GFA through multi-year giving.

We welcome the following donors to our

FOUNDERS CIRCLE
Jim & Roberta Conroy
Hoby & Sally Kreitler
Dave & Molly McGrath
Andrew & Stephani Whittaker

We welcome the following donors to our

OPPORTUNITY CIRCLE
John & Heather Kreitler
Victor & Deni Nesi

Community Partnerships

Horizons GFA is fortunate to partner with a variety of organizations that provide valuable preparation, experiences, and instruction to students at all levels of our program.

These positive interactions make a huge difference in the growth and development of our students. We are very grateful! It takes a village.
These individuals and organizations supported our students during the period of December 1, 2022 through November 30, 2023.

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