



# **BREAKTHROUGH**

## **GREATER PHILADELPHIA**

**Impact Report 2020–21**



## DEAR BREAKTHROUGH FRIENDS,

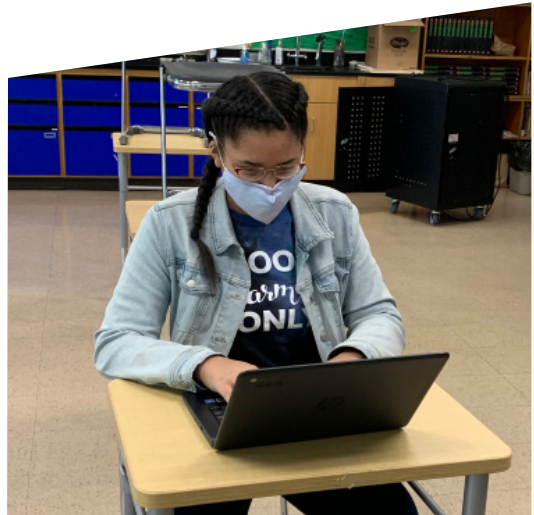
It is with deep gratitude and joy that I share this report on Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia's 2020-21 program year. In the pages that follow, you will see a snapshot of the tremendous impact the organization has made in the lives of our extraordinary students, families, teaching fellows, and friends.

As schools across the country scrambled to manage through the pandemic, Breakthrough knew it needed to find a way to provide its students in-person experiences—supporting academic success and physical and emotional wellbeing. With robust safety protocols implemented by Germantown Friends School (GFS), and the support of donors and friends, we were able to invite students back to campus for both the academic year and summer programs. The impact of being together was palpable.

With the goal of exceptional learning at the forefront—in times of crisis and for years to come—we took a pivotal strategic step for the organization and formalized our important partnership with GFS. We knew that the short and long-term operational gains would be significant given GFS' tremendous history, innovative teaching expertise, strong community, and robust systems. Please read more about this exciting news on page 3.

On top of operational advances, we made powerful programmatic changes this past year. We expanded our rigorous curriculum beyond core academics to provide opportunities for students to participate in coding, visual arts, gardening, golf, language study, and more. We hosted a series of *Career Conversations* where Breakthrough students learned from experts about a myriad of industries and professions. And we expanded our summer program to include rising 6th graders and will continue to thoughtfully add grade levels over the next few years. You can read more about our phenomenal year—including the "Top Ten Summer Memories"—throughout this report.

Together, we move forward on solid footing and in celebration of the power of the collective efforts of our Breakthrough community. This year, we will continue to make important





improvements in evaluation and metrics and systemization, and will expand relationships in our educational community and awareness of the Breakthrough program.

None of this would have been possible—especially not amidst the challenges of the pandemic—without the leadership and support of you, our supporters. Thank you for your continued dedication to Breakthrough and please reach out at any time; we would love to hear from you!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Palmer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Michelle Palmer**

## **NOW @ GFS**

After many months of careful deliberation about our future aspirations, we made our partnership official this spring, with GFS bringing Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia—still a separate 501(c)(3)--under its umbrella and fully embracing operational and strategic oversight of the organization.

The educators at GFS share our commitment to ensuring that the Breakthrough program continues to grow and improve, with the goal of providing the best possible experience to students in our region. GFS has remained by our side since our founding as Summerbridge 27 years ago, serving as our program site, forging lasting connections to some of our longest-serving volunteers, and supporting high quality instruction.

GFS' experience operating on campus during the pandemic allowed us to not only offer our program in person, but also to diversify and deepen the opportunities we provided. We look forward to sharing more about this partnership over the next year, as we expand shared programming and establish deeper relationships with more GFS educators and students.

## **BREAKTHROUGH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS**

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***We are also grateful to our Development  
and Program Committee members,  
listed on our website.***

**“BEFORE YOU CAN TEACH STUDENTS, YOU  
HAVE TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP. WE GIVE  
EVERYONE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THAT.”**

## TOP TEN SUMMER MEMORIES

**Capoeira with Mestre Kamal:** Students were introduced to the Afro-Brazilian Martial Arts form. They learned about its rich history and purpose, and performed some of the moves!

**Golf with First Tee:** Breakthrough students engaged in five weeks of golf lessons this summer with First Tee Golf. Golf is a very underrepresented sport for students of color in most colleges, and could open doors to scholarships. It is also an activity that engages both the mind and body.

**Instructional Art:** Breakthrough students joined Teacher Sonia and the Mt. Airy Arts Garage for art lessons every Friday morning. Students learned various drawing techniques and created self-portraits.



**“WHEN I GO TO HIGH SCHOOL THIS FALL,  
I WILL BE MORE PREPARED.”**





### **Coding with Vineyard Apps:**

Breakthrough students participated in hands-on computer coding lessons. Students started with the basics and created their own coding language. The students were excited to see their work come to fruition and share it with others!

### **Delicious Treats:** Teaching Fellows

reached out to local eateries to seek donations of fun snacks to energize kids during the summer program. The students loved the donuts and many other yummy options!

**Science:** This summer was filled with fun and exploration. Students learned about experimental variables, contagious diseases, viruses like COVID-19, and even made ice cream!

**Math:** This summer, our Teaching Fellows made it a priority to debunk math myths and make the topics fun and relatable to the students. Topics ranged from fractions and decimals to slopes and algebraic equations. Through engaging activities like scavenger hunts, students left with an appreciation for the subject of math.

**Library with Kate Garrity:** Breakthrough students and teachers were fortunate to have the Friends Free Library at GFS available for use this summer! Director of Library Services Kate Garrity joined us during Teaching Fellow orientation to share how the library can be used to enhance their lessons.



**Celebration Day:** At Breakthrough, we believe it's important to have fun and reward our students for all of their hard work. Celebration Day allowed students to share their accomplishments and partake in an afternoon of games, activities, fun, food—and a giant water slide!



**Wacky Wednesdays:** In true Breakthrough spirit, every Wednesday is Wacky Wednesday! Headed by the Spirit Committee, each of the six Wednesdays had a dress up theme. You could find our Teaching Fellows, students, and staff dressed in college apparel, twin day, opposite day, and pajama day!

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Q&A WITH LAILA AKINS

*Staff members Debra Stevens and Michelle Aleti sat down with eighth-grader Laila Akins to talk about her Breakthrough experience.*



### **Q: Why did you apply to Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia?**

**A:** I remember Breakthrough coming to my school, and thought it sounded really interesting. I saw a program that would not only challenge me, but would bring out a side that would get me to be more social and come out of my shell. I always want to try to learn more, so when I heard about the English, math, and science classes, it intrigued me.

### **Q: What was your favorite memory from last summer?**

**A:** In one of my classes, Literature, we read a story called *Of Mice and Men* and it was a very interesting and compelling book. At the end of the book, we had a very important conversation about the prison system and how people may not be given the respect and justice they deserve. We learned a lot about the true meaning of justice and how it differs depending on the system—prison, economics, stuff like that.

### **Q: Any favorite electives?**

**A:** I chose both the Money 101 and Crochet electives, but enjoyed crochet a little bit more. It was very therapeutic and it

was one of those places where people socialized but were also very respectful. You just felt like you could jump into the conversation at any time and they would let you in and wouldn't exclude you.

### **Q: How has Breakthrough made a difference for you as a student?**

**A:** It made me a better student and more productive, and made me feel like I was a step ahead and more involved in the work that we're currently learning at school. In my seventh-grade school year, I was all virtual and so a lot of the time I felt behind, like I couldn't catch up. It wasn't because I didn't enjoy the work, it was because I couldn't grasp fully what was being taught [virtually]. When I went to Breakthrough, a lot of the information that I didn't get to comprehend was retaught to me, and I really learned to appreciate the subject more.

### **Q: What did you think about the Teaching Fellows at Breakthrough?**

**A:** I liked them a lot. Since they were younger, they were easier to relate to and they had a lot of advice, especially my science teacher. She had a lot of advice about high school, and gave us packets and SAT books. While each class was



different, I found myself enjoying every one in a unique way.

**Q: If you were to come along with us while recruiting students, what would you tell a Breakthrough prospective student?**

**A:** A lot of people might feel like Breakthrough isn't cool because it's learning over the summer. But it really isn't that at all. I would emphasize that while you may be learning, you still get to have fun. The staff and teachers make the process as fun as it can be and if you're trying to better prepare yourself for your next school year, it's going to impact your experience that next year.

**Q: How have you grown since joining Breakthrough?**

**A:** I've changed a lot socially and academically. I've branched out a lot more. I'm more of an academic person, so now I'm getting to explore things like golf, which I thought was really interesting, and crocheting of course, which I was looking into even before the Breakthrough summer program. If I had the opportunity to play golf outside of Breakthrough, I definitely would!

**Q: Has Breakthrough made a difference in your application process and preparedness for high school?**

**A:** I do think so. I took a writing course with Teacher Chelsea and we wrote two essays with her. It really helped me improve my writing; I received feedback and a lot of what I learned at Breakthrough connects with what I'm going to have to write in these (high school) essays, like why do I want to go to a certain school or what a trait like excellence means. I'll be prepared when the time comes. I've learned a lot at Breakthrough that I can carry with me for the rest of my life past high school even. I learned about respecting other students at Breakthrough. We do daily affirmations and I think that really connects students and helps them bond more. When I get into high school, I know I won't think it's boring because of Breakthrough. If you let yourself be part of the fun, you'll definitely have a fun time.

**“IT PREPARES YOU FOR  
MORE THAN JUST SCHOOL.”**

## TEACHING FELLOW FOCUS: NICOLE LAURIA

*A fourth year Teaching Fellow, Nicole Lauria reflects on the impact of Breakthrough on her career development.*

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A critical component of Breakthrough's program and mission is to inspire up-and-coming teachers to pursue education as a career and develop important mentor relationships. This is done by recruiting Teaching Fellows and giving them an opportunity to spend the summer with Breakthrough students and seasoned educators. Often exploring a career in education, Teaching Fellows join Breakthrough to seize a rare opportunity to serve as lead classroom teachers. Nicole, a senior at La Salle University, discovered Breakthrough during her search for "real-world" teaching experiences in Philadelphia. She considered other programs and ultimately joined Breakthrough as a Teaching Fellow in 2018.

Nicole reflects on her love for her students: "It's awesome to see them grow over the years. Students come in seventh-grade shy and not knowing where they really fit in. And then over the year, they get closer to each other, and by eighth-grade, they are excited to come to Breakthrough. It's incredible to see their work."

Nicole currently teaches a creative writing class and relishes in reading her students' personal narrative stories. "I'm on the edge of my seat because the stories are so good. I want to know what happens next!" As a Teaching Fellow, Nicole especially appreciates "the ability to work with kids one-on-one due to Breakthrough's small class sizes" and "helping students to put their best foot forward." Nicole has also continued mentoring her students after they have taken her classes, sharing that one of her former students discovered a passion for writing and continues to reach out to Nicole for feedback.

Breakthrough also helped Nicole define what she sees as important qualities of a teacher in urban education, particularly classroom management skills and student connection. She appreciated the professional development and training Breakthrough provided when shifting to an online classroom during the pandemic. Nicole was grateful for access to technology platforms and curriculum advisors who helped her make "a smooth transition to remote learning" and ultimately enabled her to keep students at the forefront of her work.



“We tried to make the best of it, and I think that everyone really wanted the kids to get the best experience.”

She also credits Breakthrough with imparting the importance of building relationships with students. “As I was working with Breakthrough, I realized relationship-building is how you get the kids to connect with the material, it’s how you get them to really engage with what you’re trying to do. You have to have that groundwork done first before they can actually learn what you’re trying to teach them.”

What has left the most lasting impression on Nicole has undoubtedly been her students, who will often share with her

their educational experiences outside of Breakthrough. “I have learned through my Breakthrough kids that they need to know someone believes in them. They need to have the person standing at the front of the room support them, care about them, and genuinely want them to be successful.”

We are eager to see what awaits Nicole as she embarks on her journey as an educator after graduating from La Salle this spring. We hope she will hold her experience at Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia close; as Nicole reminds us, it was her work as a Teaching Fellow in 2018 that inspired her to become a teacher in the first place.

**“IN LITERATURE, WE USED TEXT TO CONNECT TO STUDENTS’ LIVES. IT WAS EMPOWERING FOR THEM AND FOR ME.”**

## A TEACHING AND LEARNING MOMENT

*A high school assembly inspired Matthew Greenawalt's career as an educator.*



Matthew Greenawalt remembers an inspiring assembly about Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia during his senior year at Germantown Friends School—discovering how teaching fellows learned from seasoned educators, working in collaboration to support middle school students with less access to top academic opportunities from throughout Philadelphia.

Greenawalt went on to attend Williams College, and towards the end of his freshman year, he recalled that hour in GFS' Loeb Auditorium. "I never thought as a teenager—as a senior in high school—that an assembly would truly change my life and set me on a path towards a meaningful career."

He applied and was accepted to join Breakthrough as a summer teaching fellow—an opportunity to try out the profession, build skills, and support young learners. He had no idea how meaningful that summer would be or how deep he would bond with his peers in the program.

In fact, after interning with an investment bank during a subsequent summer, Greenawalt confirmed that teaching was his calling—and solidified that decision the following summer during a work study in Western Massachusetts, where he assisted in a rural school overwhelmed by poverty.

"I saw how much school meant to the children, providing basic needs as well as structure and hope," he shares.

After graduating from Williams, Matthew went on to become a math teacher in a public school in the Bronx, where, in 2008, he received the New York City Outstanding Educator award. After 12 years as a teacher, he became an assistant principal in the same system. Just this past summer, Greenawalt returned to the Philadelphia area and began teaching math in the Middle School at GFS. In addition to being closer to family, the GFS partnership with Breakthrough was a significant factor in deciding his next career move.

"Working with novice teachers, much like my experience at Breakthrough, is one of my greatest joys," Greenawalt explains. "There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a lightbulb going off in the classroom—and this is because of teachers. It is a tragedy that there aren't more mentors to support the teaching profession.

"We need more opportunities like Breakthrough to promote this important and rewarding profession, create structure for learning, and model effective teaching," he adds. "We must continue to do more to encourage teaching. And Breakthrough is a leader in changing the future of education."

# BREAKTHROUGH OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA ANNUAL REPORT FY21

September 1, 2020, to August 31, 2021

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Drumcliff Foundation  
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Pincus Family Foundation

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Dana and William Weeks

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Edward Biester III and Carol Press  
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Susan Hall  
Jamal Hill  
Robert Kagan and Paula Sunshine  
Marnie and Alexander Kerr

**“WHEN I WAS STRUGGLING, I WAS  
TOLD BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS  
NEVER TO GIVE UP. NOW I AM A  
BREAKTHROUGH GRADUATE.”**

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Mimi and Jim McKenzie  
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Noelle Muniz  
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