

In this issue >>>

Teacher & Student Awards  
Faculty Awards & Professional Growth  
Curriculum Highlights  
PAS Equity Circle  
Family Engagement  
Sustainability Expansion  
Health & Wellness  
Afterschool Clubs & Sports  
Alumni News



# Penn Alexander

2016-2017 Highlights

## PAS Mission

*Maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful lifelong learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society.*



Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander

## Dear Penn Alexander Community:

It is my great pleasure to share with you the highlights of this school year. We certainly had some momentous achievements! These moments - big and small - when we shine as a school or as individuals are a true testament to the strength of our community, the thirst for knowledge and the curiosity for learning of our students and faculty.

These moments also provide multiple ways in which student learning and the impact of our teaching can be measured. None of it would be possible without the dedicated partners that support us each day.

Throughout this issue you will see the six areas that framed our focus this year: academics, student life, family and community engagement, teacher professional development, and planning. These areas will guide us next year as well. This framework is guided by the words of our namesake, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, who said:

*I knew well that the only way I could get that door open was to knock it down, because I knocked all of them down.*

Please join me in celebrating our moments of accomplishment - big and small. Tomorrow, growth and continuous reflection await.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Farrell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michael Farrell, principal

## Penn Alexander Named 2016 National Blue Ribbon School

The 2016-2017 school year kicked off with Penn Alexander earning national distinction as one of 329 schools named a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education.



On September 28 students and faculty, along with representatives from the school's founding partners gathered in the gym to hear if school had been selected. Secretary John R. King delivered the news nationwide via video to the nominees.

This coveted award is given each year in two categories to schools with the highest student achievement. Our school earned the award for progress in closing the achievement gap.

On November 7, Superintendent Dr. Hite joined Principal Farrell, retired Principal Sydnor and PAS representatives in Washington, DC to receive the award at a festive ceremony.



Retired principal Sheila Sydnor was also honored with six other principals from across the country with the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding Leadership. The following week, the school community celebrated with a Blue Ribbon day of activities including a scavenger hunt of facts about the school's namesake Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, service projects, a group photo, and the day was topped off with a tasty treat of homemade blue cupcakes and popsicles. Finally, parents and partners joined the faculty for an evening celebration in the PAS atrium.



### Neubauer Family Foundation Matching Grant

The Neubauer Family Foundation awarded Principal Farrell a Neubauer Fellowship in Educational Leadership matching grant of \$12,500 for classroom technology upgrades. With this funding, all classrooms now have Smartboard technology. The grant was received as part of the Foundation's Fellowship program.

As one of 23 fellows in the second cohort of the program, Mr. Farrell is receiving leadership training that is focused on leading schools to higher levels of student learning.

## Penn Alexander Earns Model Distinction on the 2015-16 School District of Philadelphia School Progress Report

Each year, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) measures school performance to gauge school progress in meeting the District's standard of excellence. Schools are evaluated in multiple areas, including overall performance, student achievement, progress and climate.

On January 31, 2017, SDP released the 2015-16 School Progress Reports (SPR). Penn Alexander ranked 3rd in overall performance for K-8 schools citywide. Among its peer group of 10 schools, Penn Alexander was ranked 1st in overall performance and in the category of academics.

PAS' SPR as well as those of all schools can be found at [Philasd.org](http://Philasd.org).



Principal Farrell (center left) with Mayor Kenney and School District of Philadelphia principals.

# Student Awards

**Mageed Abdoun** (6GR) and **Violet Fraatz** (3GR) were selected by WHYY for a 60-second WHYY I Like this Book video spot. *WHYY I Like This Book* promotes the life long love of reading by focusing on one book at a time. The program features short videos of students highlighting how they choose to read what they read in their own words. This includes explaining what motivated them to read the book, how many times they have read it, as well as character and plot features.



*Pictured left to right: Violet Fraatz, Mageed Abdoun, Betsy Okrent, Kweli Wilson.*

WHYY selected Mageed entry about Crash by Jerry Spinelli. Violet chose Ghosts by Raina Telgemeier on which to base her entry. Their interviews will be available shortly at <http://www.whyy.org/education/whythisbook.php>

**Betsy Okrent** and **Kweli Wilson** (4GR) were named semi-finalists in the contest. Betsy's entry was based on The Fourteenth Goldfish by Jennifer L. Holm and Kweli's book entry was Night of the Ninth Dragon by Mary Pope Osborne.



## Scripps Spelling Bee

**Saif Siddiquee** (8GR) once again represented Penn Alexander at the regional Scripps Spelling Bee competition. **Brendan Perner** (5GR) who also won the school bee advanced to the regional bee. for the first time. Saif has won the regional spelling bee twice times. He advanced to the national bee last year completing several rounds.

Congratulations to **Amara Okongwu** (8GR), **Zara Kelemen** (8GR), **Henry McDaniel** (8GR), **Ijenu Okongwu** (7GR) and **Elizabeth Gray** (7GR) for their accomplishments at the Student Diplomat Program/Jr. Model United Nations this year. The Student Diplomat Program / Jr. Model United Nations introduces middle school students from the Greater Philadelphia area to the world of international relations and cultural diplomacy with an emphasis on developing students' research, writing and communication skills. Students gain an understanding of the mission, structure and function of the United Nations; learn how to write and defend a policy resolution within the context of diplomacy; apply their research and critical thinking skills to specific global issues; and, develop skills in conflict resolution, problem solving and cross-cultural communication.

## GeoBee

**Zara Kelemen** (8GR) was named the PAS Geo Bee winner. She advanced to the state competition in March. The bee is sponsored by the National Geographic Society. Mr. Patrick Naughton (middle school social studies teacher serves as faculty advisor.

## ask the experts>>>

Zoe Kwasnicki (8GR) took 2nd place in the Student Showcase competition of the Pennsylvania Educational Technology Expo and Conference (PETE&C), held at the Hershey Lodge in Hershey PA on February 14. The conference is a statewide event showcasing quality programs, products and services in the educational technology field. Each year, hundreds of exhibitors showcase their latest technology products and services to the vast audience of teachers, administrators, technology directors, school board members and others. Zoe designed a wire mesh wheel to prevent trash from entering the sewer drains on city street corners. Students showcased their inventions in a Shark Tank competition in which they had to sell their design to conference participants.

## Math Counts

Under the direction of **Mr. Matt Hunn** (middle school math teacher), 10 middle school students – Amara Okongwu, Mabel Moosbrugger, Maggie Lapp, Chloe Smelser, Zoe Seida, Holland Young, Will Vieira, Alex Doroshov, Fareeha Alam, and Iris Kim participated in the annual Math Counts competition held at Temple

# Student awards continued

## PAS Student Council for 2016-17:

Zara Kelemen, president  
Mitchell Harrill Wright, vice president

Maggie Lapp, treasurer  
Chloe Smelser, secretary

Accomplishments of the council this year include collaborating with the Lea School Student Council; completing the first Change for Change campaign at PAS, which raised \$2,000 for holiday gifts for families in the community; organizing the middle school dance with the theme Neon Lights; reviewing and revising the school uniform policy; and working on the online middle school Google classroom.



Lea and PAS 2016-17 Student Councils

## Student Council for 2017-18:

President: Benjamin McIver Jenkins  
Vice President: David Kouassi  
Treasurer: Finn Brenner  
Secretary: Micah Trusty



## Music & Theatre Appreciation

**Nineteen PAS students** earned seats in the All-City Middle School Band and Orchestra. Several PAS alumni also advanced to the All-City High School Musical Festival at the Kimmel Center where they performed under the direction of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The PAS music program seeks to have students graduating from PAS who appreciate music either as a performer or as a listener.

Celine Luo (4GR)-Flute 1  
Nao Minicola (7GR)-Flute 1  
Grace Karlen (7GR)-Clarinet 1  
Jemma Salisbury (7GR)-Clarinet 3  
Sabirah Mahmud (7GR)-Clarinet 3  
Henry McDaniel (8GR)-Tenor Saxophone (also Jazz Band)  
Aviva Bock (8GR)-Violin 1  
Chloe Smelser (8GR)-Violin 1  
River Bunster (6GR)-Violin 2  
Adrian Chui (6GR)-Violin 2  
Angela Zhu (6GR)-Violin 2  
Jada Huang (6GR)-Violin 2  
Mabel Moosbrugger (8GR)-Violin 2  
Jadyn Wagner (7GR)-Violin 3  
Aliyana Banner (7GR)-Violin 3  
Emilia Thut (8GR)-Viola  
Yemisi Jones (8GR)-Viola  
Reil Abashera (8GR)-Cello  
Maggie Lapp (8GR)-Cello

## PAS Takes Semi-Final Gold

5GR team took Gold at this year's Dancing Classrooms Philly Style Semi-Final, advancing to the semester final, at which the team took Bronze. The program of 20 biweekly lessons held in the fall teaches the art and discipline of social dances such as the Merengue, Foxtrot, Rumba, Tango, Swing and the Waltz. The program teaches important life skills of how to respect classmates, to trust themselves, to stay focused and how to exercise in an enjoyable way.

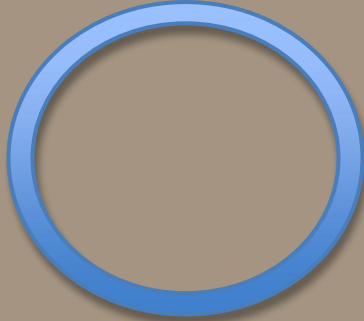


The PAS stage for 2017 featured *Little Mermaid, Jr.* Under the direction of Ms. Tia Larese, the annual play gives students the opportunity to showcase their creative side as one of the many treasured extra-curricular activities at the school led by the faculty.

# Family Engagement

## Equity Circle

Principal Farrell, along with a group of parents, concerned about the changing climate in our country, launched the PAS Equity Circle.



The group kicked off with a session on Inaugurating Our Values in January; held a workshop for adults on how to be an upstander and concluded with a celebration of sweet treats in June.



## pennalexschool.org and ePony

Under the leadership of Mr. Endriss, (technology teacher leader), PAS launched a new website this year: [www.pennalexschool.org](http://www.pennalexschool.org). The site is a complete redesign with new features including program descriptions, news, e-pony, forms, and calendar of events.

PAS launched ePONY this year. Families can opt into receiving weekly school news via e-mail or visit the new PAS website to view weekly information about upcoming activities and school news. To date, 450 parents have registered for this service. Parents can opt in at any time by signing up online at [pennalexschool.org](http://pennalexschool.org)



## AED Arrives!

Working with the School District of Philadelphia, Nurse Gornstein secured an AED (automatic external defibrillator). The device will be installed and ready for use in the fall.

## Afterschool Clubs & Middle School Sports Expansion

Under the leadership of Dean of Students Megan Wapner, PAS launched afterschool clubs this year in art, STEM, athletics, technology, cooking, and much much more. Thanks to parent, Penn and community partners, the school was able to offer a rich array of afterschool programming for all grades. In each session more than 200 students participated. Look for even more great options next year.



# 8GR TED Talk Tuesdays

Ms. Settles and Ms. Mikolajewski (middle school literacy) launched the first "Talk Like TED" 8th grade project this year. On TED Talk Tuesdays during the course of the year, students progressed through four project components:

1. Watch and Brainstorm;
2. Learn from TED "Talk Like Ted" by: Carmine Gallo;
3. Journaling and Drafting; and,
4. Revise, Practice and Present.

Classes recently held their own mock TED Conference. Topics included Islamophobia, video editing, disability acceptance (Sabirah Mahmud at right, Tomas Gray below, Chloe Smelser at bottom).



## Need in Deed at PAS

Under the direction of Ms. Mikolajewski (middle school literacy teacher), a group of 7th and 8th grade students completed a service learning project on bullying prevention for Need in Deed (NID). NID is a Philadelphia organization that supports teachers in applying academics to real world problems. Students identify social issues impacting their communities, conduct research to determine its root causes, problem solve and develop an action plan.



Katherine Johnson, Ruby Bridges, Mary Jackson, Rosa Parks



## Wax Museum

Each year, Ms. Jones and her 4<sup>th</sup> grade class culminate their biography unit on African Americans who have made contributions to our country by creating a wax museum. Students dressed in historical attire came to life as their historical figure, and gave a short description of their contributions when a button is pressed on their attire.

ask the experts >>>

Q: 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Science  
A: Fair Expert Expo

In preparation for the annual schoolwide science fair, Mrs. Kearney (middle school science) organized the first annual Science Fair Expert Expo. For an evening in the fall, students met individually with science experts in our school and community, seeking guidance and advice on their science fair project ideas. Many experts returned in the winter to serve as judges for the school fair.



# Carver Science Fair

At the 2017 George Washington Carver Science Fair, PAS entered 13 projects and earned 16 awards at the secondary fair for grades 7-12. At the elementary fair for grades 4-6, PAS entered 11 projects and won 21 awards, including two Best of Fair\*\*. Seven students\* advanced to the regional Delaware Valley Science Fair where they earned one third place and two honorable mentions\*. This is the largest number of PAS students to advance to Del Val to date. Eighth grader, Joe Leedy advanced to the Broadcom MASTERS (Math, Applied Science, Technology and Engineering Rising Stars), the premier science and engineering competition for middle school students who competed in fairs affiliated with the Society for Science and the Public.

1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Physics	Reil Abashera 8GR*
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Environmental Science	Zara Kelemen 8GR*
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Behavioral Science	Miles Menasion 7GR*
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Consumer Science	Samaha Shahnawaz 6GR***
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Life Science	Desi Nix-Kable 5GR
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Earth Science	Jesse Mullins 5GR
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Team Project	Josie Goldstein, Maya Shani Fatima Abashera 5GR
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Earth Science	Ben Carr 4GR**
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	Earth Science	Joe Leedy 8GR*
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	Engineering	Iris Kim 7GR*
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	Medicine and Health	Stephen Walicki 7GR*
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	Life Science	Laila Johnson 6GR
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	Physical Science	Brady DeGrands 6GR
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Consumer Science	Sophia DeGrands 8GR
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Earth Science	Jemma Salisbury 7GR
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Environmental Science	Abigail Harris 8GR
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Botany	David Kouassi 7GR
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Life Science	Brycinea Stratton 4G
Hon. Ment.	Earth Science	Aviva Bock 8GR
Hon. Ment.	Engineering	Maggie Lapp 8GR
Hon. Ment.	Botany	Camilla Pheulpin 7GR
Hon. Ment.	Earth Science	Kenta Bell 6GR
Hon. Ment.	Physical Science	David Discher 5GR
Hon. Ment.	Physical Science	Jillian Rhyshek 4GR

## Special Awards:

Iris Kim	Lockheed Martin Moorestown ELDP Award Runner Up Naval Science Award & PECO Excellence in Engineering Award
Samaha Shahnawaz	Office of Curriculum Award Pamela A. Goldstein Memorial Consumer Science Award
Brady DeGrands	Future Techie Award & Naval Science Award
Laila Johnson	Pamela R. McDonald Memorial Life Science Award
Brycinea Stratton	Vince Russo Award for Excellence in Data Presentation
David Discher	Vince Russo Award for Excellence in Data Presentation Future Techie Award

## PAS Gets Greener - Composting

PAS expanded its sustainability campaign by implementing composting of breakfast and lunch food waste this year. In partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, the school now has several hydration stations throughout the school as well. One of the first green projects of the school – PAS garden was named a Philadelphia Horticultural Society (PHS) 2016 Garden of Distinction.



## Computer Science Fair

Congratulations to the students listed below and PAS Technology Teacher Leader, Mr. Peter Endriss, for entering eight middle school projects and earning eight awards at the 2017 Philly TEC Showcase (School District of Philadelphia Technology Expo & Competition).

First place winners advanced to the state level competition on May 24, 2017 at Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

*1st Place Digital Video*  
Austen Cho & Mario Gugliemi (6GR)

*1st Place Webpage Design*  
Shira Mandell, Siobhan Stachelek, & Jadyen Wagner (7GR)

*1st Place Programming*  
Finn Brenner, Iris Kim, Miles Menasion (7GR)

*1st Place Animation*  
Ethan Chen & Kevin Giddings (8GR)

*1st Place Graphic Design*  
Gwen Koziara, Sabirah Mahmud & Rachael Thornton (8GR)

*3rd Place Logo Design*  
Katelyn Chen & Angela Zhu (6GR)

*3rd Place Multimedia*  
Mageed Abdoun, Jett Bolker & River Bunster, (6GR)

*Honorable Mention Digital Art*  
Fiona Fuller, Maya Mischer & Chloe To (6GR)

# Teacher Awards and Professional Growth



Ms. Robin Muse (music teacher) was named one of ten finalists for the **2017 Philadelphia Youth Orchestra's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Ovation Award** for Inspiration and Outstanding Leadership in Music Education. The award was created to honor outstanding music teachers in the Delaware Valley who not only instill an appreciation of music in their students but nurture students outside the classroom. Ms. Muse was presented with her award at the Philadelphia Orchestra Concert on June 4.

**Ms. Elsie Camp** (English as a Second Language teacher) received the **Lindback award for excellence in teaching** from the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation. This was the first year that elementary and middle school teachers were included in the award program. Ms. Camp was one of sixty School District of Philadelphia teachers selected to receive the award this year.



National Board Certified Teacher, **Ms. Darlene Schaffer** (learning support) is serving as lead trainer for the National Board Teacher Support Program to train the next cohort of Philadelphia teachers applying for national board certification, the highest honor of certification for teachers. Penn Alexander currently has eight teachers who have national board certification.



**All 13 K-3 teachers** at PAS this year continued their professional development in OGAP (Ongoing Assessment Project) with Dr. Caroline Ebby and Dr. Nicole Fletcher of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. Teachers met monthly to examine student work and make instructional decisions based on the evidence. The focus is to strengthen students' ability to make sense of number and ensure that all students develop efficient and effective strategies for addition and subtraction. For example, over time students should move from counting strategies to using properties of operations and breaking numbers apart by place value.

Prior to the start of the school year, two teachers attended professional development institutes as part of their work with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). **Ms. Tiffany Settles** (middle school literacy teacher, above left) attended the International Literacy Association Conference. The purpose of the conference was to increase teacher knowledge of literacy in preparation for her new role as the Chairperson of the Literacy Committee for the Educational Issues Department at the PFT. She also presented at this year's Health and Welfare Conference. Her workshop was titled, "Bringing Social Justice Into the Middle School Classroom." She will be teaching three courses this spring and summer: "Close Reading Introduction: Planning, Teaching and Managing," "Bringing Social Justice Into the Middle School Classroom," and "Complex Middle School Texts: Unpacking Texts and Tasks."



Ms. Anna Varano (3GR, above center) has been designated the K-5 math lead teacher for PAS. Through a grant from the William Penn Foundation to the University of Pennsylvania for support of math improvement in West Philadelphia schools, Ms. Varano and teachers from PAS, Lea, and Powel are analyzing student work to improve student success in math. Ms. Varano will provide professional development in August with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

Driven by a goal of supporting advanced teacher excellence, the School District of Philadelphia selected Mr. David DiMatties (middle school math teacher, above right) to participate in the DEEP (Dynamic, Effective, Evolving, Passionate) Practitioner's Program. Using a teacher coach model based on the New Teacher Project, Mr. DiMatties has been collaborating with a coach to focus on project based learning in his 8th grade math class. They completed projects on Bivariate Data, Systems of Linear Equations, Transformations and Tessellations, and Volumes of Solids.

Ms. Anna Varano (3GR teacher, above center) attended the American Federation of Teachers' Summer Academy at the Maritime Institute in Maryland for nine days of training prior to school opening this year. The course was titled Instructional Strategies That Work For All Disciplines. The course provided opportunities for practical applications of instructional strategies identified in the research on effective instruction. These strategies have been proven to support student learning and enable students to move from novice to expert. Ms. Varano will provide turn around training in the future to members of the local affiliate – the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.



# Professional growth continued

**Ms. Tia Larese** (3GR teacher) and **Mr. Walter Bechtold** (instrumental music teacher) have joined the ranks of Penn Alexander teachers who have participated in the Teacher Institute Program (TIP) at Penn. TIP is a professional development program started at Yale University designed to bring university faculty and K-12 teachers in a collaborative and collegial effort to advance academic content knowledge. Teachers create a curriculum unit and lesson plans during the 14-week seminar that is then shared with the national network of TIP participants.

Ms. Larese took the seminar *What is the Earth Made of?* taught by Dr. Reto Giere, Professor of Earth and Environmental Science. The seminar consisted of presentations, movies, and discussions, and provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the planet. Ms. Larese developed a unit about volcanoes that integrates myths and legends about volcanoes with informational texts about their structure.



Mr. Bechtold took the seminar *That's My Song: Musical Genre as Social Contract* taught by Dr. Guthrie Ramsey, Professor of Music. The seminar examined how various musical genres have served as “social contracts” among audiences throughout the building of our nation. By examining language (both sonic and written) students studying the how communities of listeners have asserted their convictions about social identity through music. Mr. Bechtold’s unit will have students creating their own performance repertoire based on self-identified “favorite” music genres.

## Lucy Calkins Reunion

**Ms. Kate Naughton** (1GR teacher, at left) and **Ms. Tia Larese** (3GR teacher, at right) joined hundreds of teachers for the Lucy Calkins Reunion weekend this winter. Ms. Larese enjoyed the workshop on a unity of study on mystery stories as well as the Colleen Cruz workshop on teaching figurative language in poetry.



## Towards Racially Equitable Schools

**Ms. Koplove** (KGR teacher), **Ms. Jones** (4GR teacher), **Ms. Settles** (middle school literacy teacher), **Ms. Muse** (music teacher), **Mr. Johnson** (learning support teacher), and Ann Kreidle (UPenn liaison) attended three days of training at the Race Institute for K12 Educators. The purpose of the Institute is to improve the racial competency of educators and to create racially equitable schools.

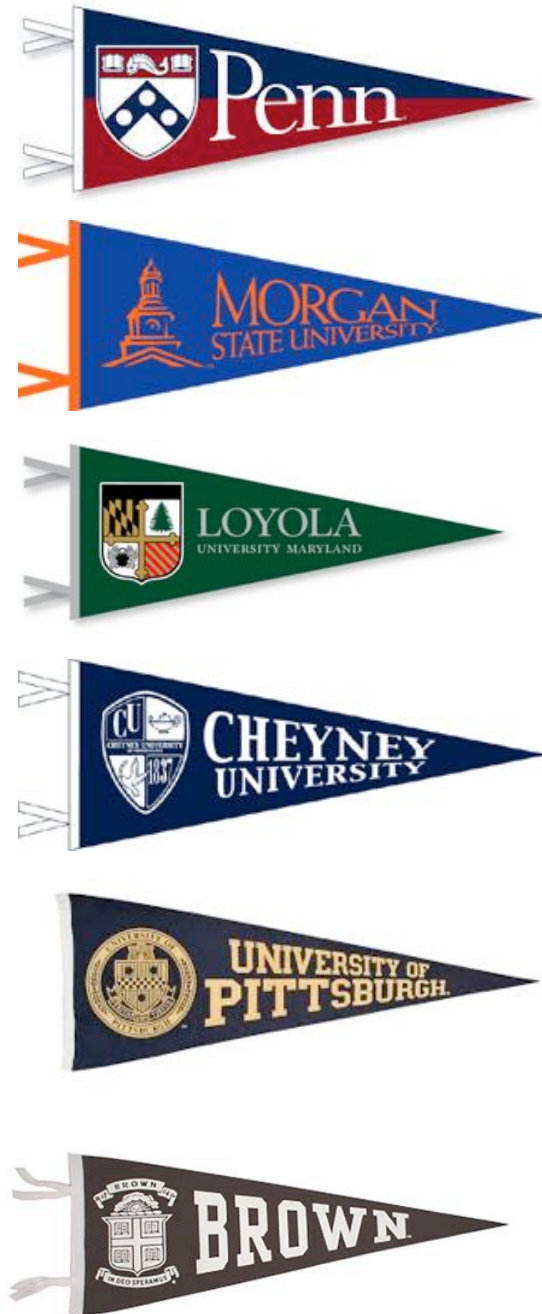
# Alumni News

*As the PAS Class of 2013 completes their last year of high school many have shared with us their plans for next year. Seventeen students in the class started PAS in Kindergarten. Watching them, and the classmates who joined them along the way, grow-up into accomplished young adults has been humbling. We congratulate them on their high school graduation and wish them the best of success as they embark on their next journey.*



At PAS since Kindergarten. Class of 2013 pictured with former Kindergarten teachers Mr. Lowe & Ms. Sliver (Spring 2013)

- Erika Baylor - Cheyney University
- Dominique Ballinger - Ursinus College
- Mira Bhayroo - University of Pittsburgh
- Rekha Dillion - Richardson - Brown University
- Chloe Epstein - Bryn Mawr College
- Delia Franklin - Loyola University Maryland
- Sam Harrison - Howard University
- Hanna Jacobs - University of Vermont
- Marcus Jones - National Guard
- Eva Karlen - University of Pennsylvania
- Dashawn McIntosh-Inniss - University of the Arts
- Ella Petersen - Temple University
- Anna Pugsley - University of Pennsylvania
- Ben Simon - Washington University
- Crystal Touch - University of Pittsburgh
- Yaseen Thomas - Morgan State University
- Jared Trusty - Montgomery County Community College
- Astrid Uhl - Temple University



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