

# suburbanlife

*Kylie Kelce*  
**TAKES THE  
LEAD**  
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dentistry,  
real estate,  
and more

A new program at  
**La Salle College High  
School** helps students  
develop new skills in  
real-world situations,  
guided by professionals  
who excel in their  
respective fields.

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Rob Johnson, shown here advising a student, previously worked as a producer at Comcast Sportsnet. He's now La Salle's director of digital strategy and leader of the school's award-winning media program.

# Expanding the Horizon

**F**or as long as he can remember, it was Matt Hersch's goal to play baseball in high school and beyond. In his wildest dreams, he even thought about an MLB career. He still may make it to the World Series someday, though it would likely be in a different role than he first imagined.

Hersch, a junior at La Salle College High School in Wyndmoor, was crushed when he got cut from the baseball team on the last day of tryouts as a freshman. The encouragement of his friends and the La Salle faculty helped him discover a passion for sports photography. Now, thanks to a new progressive program at the Catholic, all-boys college preparatory school, he can't envision a future without it.

High schools have long relied on guest speakers to visit a class or club and talk to students about their experiences in a par-

A new program at **La Salle College High School** helps students develop new skills in real-world situations, guided by professionals who excel in their respective fields.

ticular industry, but the Professionals in Residence program at La Salle takes the idea to a whole other level. Professionals from various fields—photography, for example—are teaching elective courses through the program, offering their knowledge and then giving the students a chance to develop their skills through real-world experience.

"We have a lot of opportunities for experiential learning," says Rob Johnson, director of digital strategy at La Salle and the leader of the school's award-winning media program. "The boys are learning the skills in class, whether it's from me or other professionals that we have, and then they're going out and applying those skills. The students learning photography are taking pictures at Mass or during our football games. We have students writing articles





and then posting them on our website. The program has really taken off with the courses we've added and the extra manpower."

Now in his 18th year at La Salle, Johnson is a veteran of the television industry who previously worked as a producer at Comcast Sportsnet. With his oversight, the media program has evolved into a digital marketing and content creation club in which the students do all of the work themselves, not only building their portfolios for college applications or future careers, but also helping to promote La Salle and inform the community. In a similar fashion, the IT department and Lab Manager Program give students the chance to help run the network and troubleshoot any issues while taking relevant courses.

The Professionals in Residence program was developed as a companion to La Salle's flourishing Concentrations program, which is similar to a college major; it allows students to choose among six study areas and take core courses and electives in that field while also participating in related clubs and completing senior capstone projects. Johnson helped to recruit

various professionals with ties to the school to act as the teachers, including a digital artist and a journalist.

Ryan Warrender, a La Salle alumnus and a product manager at Google for the past 10 years, is also on board.

"I've spoken in the past at a few classes down in the lab at La Salle, and I was basically looking for more ways to pay it forward," Warrender says. "When I was learning more about these paths at La Salle, which they didn't have when I was there, I really identified with it. Like most 18-year-olds, I didn't know what I wanted to do and I switched my major a lot in college. So when I found out they were doing a concentration that was technology-focused, which is where my career ended up, I was super excited. I wanted to be on the ground floor and help build the program and curriculum as a way to help these young men."

His flexible schedule at Google will allow him to teach in person early in the morning several days a week in addition to doing a portion of instruction virtually. In his class, titled "Intro to Mobile App Development," he plans to show students how things are actually done in the tech industry, with a focus on collaboration and identifying real-world problems that need solutions. At the same time, he will emphasize the importance of both the user interface and the end-to-end experience.

"I want to help high school students develop a passion for building, innovating, and ultimately creating products that people enjoy and find useful," he adds. "I had amazing mentors and coaches early in my career, so even if I can just get a few sparks going for some of the students in the class, that would be a huge win for me personally."

Hersh has certainly had a spark for photography ignited through classes such as "Mobile Video Production with Adobe" and "Foundations of Photography." He



Through La Salle's Professionals in Residence, students hone their interests and build their skills under the guidance of leaders in various areas of expertise.

has even started his own sports photography business in which he shoots local games and posts the pictures on his website for purchase.

"I came from a public school background in which we didn't get a ton of opportunities like this," he says. "When I was told that I could choose a class and have a professional teaching me, it really showed how much La Salle cares for us and how far they're willing to go for the students just based on what they like. I think it's incredible what they've done, because they've turned people like me, who had a rough situation, and helped me make the most of it. For that, I'm really grateful."

"This is what I want to do for the rest of my life," he continues. "I would really love to continue with sports photography, but honestly, I'm having so much fun just taking pictures of anything. La Salle has really helped me with getting out and having diversity with my work, so as long as I'm able to stay with this, that's all I care about."

Johnson credits the La Salle administration for having the vision to develop a program like this. Furthermore, he believes it will expand to include even more fields, perhaps with the possibility of a doctor acting as a professional in residence for science courses. Hersh encourages current and future students to take advantage of anything that piques their interest, because it might just change their path for the better, like it did for him.

"Obviously, in my perfect world from when I was a kid, I would still be playing baseball," he says. "But I think there's a reason God opened this door for me and allowed me to pursue this. As much as I miss baseball, I think this is the plan he has for me." ■



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