



# Finding Their Voice

**W**hen her daughter Olivia first broached the subject of transferring from public school to Germantown Academy (GA) for her middle school years, Christin Krey, like any invested parent would, wanted to make sure the family did its due diligence in researching the renowned institution.

Krey was already aware of GA's impeccable academic reputation. She went on to learn about the school's commitment to community service, the strong bonds forged between students and faculty, and the ways in which the school encourages students to excel in the classroom and also become confident, honorable individuals.

The exact moment when Krey realized that GA was the perfect fit came after Olivia had an opportunity to shadow a student for the day.

"At the end of her shadow day I asked her how she felt, and the word she used was *uplifted*," recalls Krey, a resident of Lower Gwynedd. "I will never forget that, coming from a fifth-grader at the time. I knew then that GA was the right place for her. She is now in her second year there; she is taking

advanced classes and in her last semester she received all A's. She is definitely where she needs to be."

Founded prior to the American Revolution, Germantown Academy has a long and distinguished history of impacting young people such as Olivia. It is open to students from pre-K through 12th grade, and the values espoused by its middle school can have a profound influence on children in their formative years during sixth, seventh, and eighth grade.

"The middle school journey is intense because so much happens in three years; the students undergo physical and emotional change," says Head of Middle School Jonas Jeswald. "During this rollercoaster ride, we help our kids learn who they are. Our mission is to help inspire students to be independent in thought, confident in expression, compassionate in spirit, collaborative in action, and honorable in deed."

While some students, like Olivia, come to GA to receive an academic challenge found only at a select few schools, the learning experience extends beyond the walls of the classroom. Children

→ **PROFILE** by **Matt Cosentino**

***During the critical years of middle school, Germantown Academy students learn to take ownership of their education and become confident, successful leaders.***

are inspired to become active participants in their education through hallmark programs such as Advisory, in which students are assigned an advisor (faculty member) with 10 to 12 classmates, with peers providing support and guidance to each other throughout the school year.

During Lead Lab, a required course in seventh grade, students learn the importance of leadership and teamwork. "It gets kids to learn about their strengths, how they can leverage those assets as a leader, and what their interests are," Jeswald says. "They then use those attributes for a group project that supports an organization in the local community."

Along the same lines, each April the student body participates in a student-led conference attended by their teachers and parents. Students work on a portfolio presentation all year demonstrating their academic progress, their proudest accomplishments, moments in which they could have done better, goals they have set, and the impact they have had on the community.

"I really enjoy that because it allows the students to use their voice and talk about how they feel they are doing," Krey says. "It's great hearing my daughter's perspective about how she thinks she's doing, things she's enjoying and things that are challenging, instead of just hearing it from the teacher."

Clubs are prominent as well, and provide students with the opportunity to explore their varied curiosities. Coding Club, Ethical Dilemmas, Sports Psychology, and Media Club are just a few of the options, with new ones being formed every year based on students' interests.

Of course, sports represent a central part of the GA experience, too. Varying levels within 17 programs allow all students to participate whether they are beginners or longtime participants. Olivia has



developed a passion for field hockey, and the friendships she built have helped her adjust to a new school.

"There are plenty of students who start at GA in kindergarten and go all the way through 12th grade, so I was a little concerned about her transition as the new kid," her mother says. "But the kids who had been there were all very welcoming, and there was never an issue about being left out, which is very important at the middle school age."

Jeswald, a Massachusetts native, had a similar experience when he came to GA six years ago. He recalls the middle school students welcoming him and making him feel at home.

"They just blew me away with their thoughtfulness, their curiosity, and their confidence," he says. "I realized the kids here are awesome, and they sold me on this place. Students at GA feel like their opinions are heard and respected, and that the expectations are fair. We strive to help our students become leaders of their own learning by giving them a voice, and it shows. The goal is for the middle school journey to provide students with experiences and a foundation that helps them be successful in upper school and beyond." ■

Photography courtesy of Germantown Academy

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