

NATIVITY JESUIT

A C A D E M Y

FALL 2023

CELEBRATING



PLUS:

**Nativity's Founders
Reflect on 30 Years**

**Narrowing the Gap:
Nativity's Advocacy for Equal School Funding**

YEARS of Nativity's Impact

EDUCATING YOUTH FOR A LIFE OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE



This school year ushers in a monumental year for Nativity. We are celebrating thirty years of excellence and transforming students' lives from the southside of Milwaukee. We pride ourselves in our "mission that does more," which is so distinctly different from other K-8 schools. Our unique model of education is unlike any other school in the state of Wisconsin.

Just like St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, Nativity has not remained content with being "good enough." Instead, we continue to push ourselves to further serve our community.

As a school that is always striving for excellence, we know that we must keep growing, learning and evolving to meet the needs of our students and families. Now more than ever our world needs creative, smart and caring individuals.

But, what we keep coming back to is this: Our model of education works, and when you have something that works you must keep doing it! We continue to teach our kids the "magis," to not be content with how the world is, but to do more to make our world a better place.

For the past thirty years, there has been a shared commitment — from our parents, to our faculty and staff, to our supporters — to work diligently to see through the formation of students from the southside of Milwaukee into men and women for others.

Thank you for helping us achieve this milestone of thirty years and for your incredible generosity that has enabled us to transform our students' lives! We can't wait to see how Nativity will continue to shape the lives of students for the next thirty years and beyond!

Vanessa Solis
President, Nativity Jesuit Academy

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NATIVITY JESUIT ACADEMY
1515 SOUTH 29TH ST.
MILWAUKEE, WI 53215

Nativity Jesuit by the Numbers

OUR STUDENTS

98%

Students qualifying
for a Choice voucher

98%

Families self-identifying
as Catholic

100%

Students self-identifying
as Latino

256

Total enrollment in
K4–8th grade

OUR MODEL

100%

Parent participation
in school conferences

4

Weeks of summer instruction
for students in 1–5 grade

74

Middle school students
attending Camp Thunderhead,
our academic residential summer
program in Iron County, WI

97

high school-aged alumni served
through our Graduate
Support Program

OUR RESULTS

#1

School in the state of Wisconsin
serving a student population
that is 75%+ Latino*

#3

K–8 school
in the state of Wisconsin*

93%

Recent graduates enroll
in post-secondary education **

22

Average ACT score
for recent graduates—
compared to national average
of 20 for all students
and 18 for Latino students

* Academic ranking based on student achievement when controlling for significant school characteristics on 2022 Forward Exam

** Based on a 5-year rolling average

Make a Nativity Education Possible!

Nativity's unique model of education is made possible by care and commitment from generous people like you. Thank you for considering one of the following items from our current school wish list:

- \$70 funds a week of snacks for Nativity's after-school program
- \$150 funds a month of coffee for Nativity's faculty and staff
- \$392 funds mass supplies for the year
- \$1,808 funds art class materials for the year

Any amount toward these wish list items is greatly appreciated!



Please give today through the enclosed envelope or at nativityjesuit.org/support

Thank you for making a Nativity education possible!

THIRTY YEARS

1971



The Nativty Mission Center was founded by the Jesuits as an all-boy, tuition-free middle school in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It primarily served Dominican and Puerto Rican immigrants.

This started the unique Nativty model of education, which is explicitly faith-based, has an extended school day and year and walks alongside alumni with graduate support services.

While Nativty model schools do not share governance, they form a collaborative network of 50 schools across the United States and Canada.

Inspired by the Nativty model of education, the Jesuits founded Nativty Jesuit Middle School (NJMS) in Milwaukee under the leadership of Fr. Bill Johnson S.J. and Larry Siewert.



1993



Nativity sought to serve Milwaukee's rapidly growing Latino population. According to *Latino Milwaukee: A Statistical Portrait* compiled by University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, metro Milwaukee's Latino population increased by 213% between 1990 and 2014.



Housed in St. Patrick's school building on 7th and Washington, the first class enrolled fourteen sixth graders. Students' first experience with Nativty was driving five hours north to Camp Thunderhead, Nativty's academic residential summer program. This unique model of education, which included a year-round instructional program, was unlike any other school in the city.



Alongside Fr. Bill and Larry, many additional people were integral in the founding of NJMS including the academic leadership of Sr. Jean Ellman, SSND, Anne Otto and Rosario Sanchez. Tremendous dedication of faculty, staff and community volunteers provided a holistic and intensive model of education that our city had never before seen. Over the next three years, Nativty added a grade level each year to become a 6th-8th grade middle school.



OF NATIVITY'S IMPACT

Nativity moved to 1515 S. 29th St, which is just south of Greenfield Ave. This building was formerly 'Marian Hall,' a dormitory for the School Sisters of St. Francis, whose U.S. Province is headquartered across the street.

Over the years Nativity students have volunteered their time with the Sisters. The partnership continues in small and big ways.



2008

Nativity expanded to add 5th grade.

2004



1996



Nativity graduated its first class.

Nearly all graduates went on to area Catholic high schools, having mentors who helped guide them during those formative years. Four years later, Juan Martin '96 was Nativity's first college graduate from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa.



1999

Nativity founded its Graduate Support Program with the goal of helping alumni persist and find success during their high school careers. This program paired alumni with community volunteers who served as mentors. To this day, Nativity provides academic, social-emotional, college and career readiness and tuition support to its high school-aged alumni.

Historical photos of the School Sisters of St. Francis in their dormitory before it became Nativity



A LEGACY OF

2014



To address the needs of our families, Nativity began expanding to add an elementary program starting with our first 'trailblazing' co-ed K4 class. Vanessa Solis, Nativity's president, served as the inaugural K4 teacher. Parents appreciated the ability to send their children to the same school from K4–8th grade.

With this shift, Nativity Jesuit Middle School changed its name to Nativity Jesuit Academy. In the following years, the addition of subsequent grades was carefully stewarded to ensure both curricular and cultural cohesion between the elementary and middle school programs.

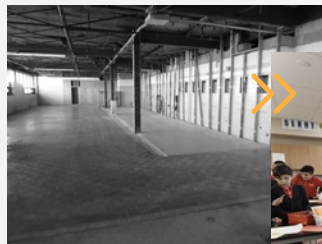


During this same year, Nativity joined the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, a city-wide voucher program where eligibility is based on residency and family income.



2016 –2020

This expansion included a complete renovation of the third floor of our Milwaukee campus which included four new classrooms, an upgraded library, STEM lab, new lockers and meeting space. Our basement was enhanced with the creation of beautiful and developmentally appropriate K4 and K5 classrooms.



Nativity underwent its *Transforming Lives Capital Campaign*, raising \$5 million to expand and modernize its Milwaukee and Northwoods campuses. The expansions accommodated Nativity's growth from 80 middle school students to the nearly 260 students we serve today.

Other spaces in the building received cosmetic enhancements of new carpet, furniture and freshly painted walls. Main hubs of the building, including the chapel and the cafeteria, underwent significant upgrades. Additional houses were purchased to expand the parking lot.

Nativity's Northwoods campus, Camp Thunderhead, also received a number of renovations to upgrade learning spaces and lodging for students and staff.



LEADERSHIP & SERVICE



Our “trailblazers,” the inaugural K4 class in 2014, will achieve two distinct milestones: being the first graduating co-ed class, as well as the first group of female alumni in Nativity’s history. This class has many “family connections” at Nativity as many of their siblings have also gone through our program.

MAY 2024



Nativity currently enrolls 256 K4–8th grade students, and serves 97 high school-aged alumni through our Graduate Support Program. 99% of Nativity students identify as Latino and 100% qualify for a School Choice voucher.

2023

The 2023–24 school year marks Nativity’s 30th anniversary. Over the past thirty years, Nativity has remained steadfast in its mission of educating youth for lives of Christian leadership and service.



Forming a “Gang for Good:”

A Reflection on Nativity’s 30th Anniversary with Founding President, Fr. Bill Johnson, SJ

What is one story from Nativity’s history that you will never forget?

Back in 1991, our Jesuit Province found a property outside of Mercer, Wisconsin. In true northwoods fashion it was both a fur farm and a resort. When I first visited the property, it was the middle of winter so it took a creative eye to see past the 3-foot snow drifts and old mink cages to envision the sprawling property of cabins, classrooms and chapel that it would become. The price was right but it took considerable efforts of many volunteers and neighbors to get the property into shape for kids.

Subsequently, recruiting our first class took a lot of trust and faith from all involved. We’re talking to parents about taking their 11-year-old sons on a trip five hours north for five weeks in the summer. From the students to parents to our faculty and staff, we learned a lot together and felt like we were inventing it day by day. Seeing the first graduating class in 1996 who were going on to Catholic high schools was evidence of the first fruits of our mission.

What Nativity accomplishment brings you the most pride?

There is a depth of camaraderie and companionship that exists among the Nativity family. This is seen not only among the boys, but also among the parents, faculty and staff, volunteers and benefactors. It is beautiful to witness lifelong friendships and bonds that sustain us to this day.

At our founding, gangs actively touched the lives of our students and their neighborhoods. Nativity

had a different narrative. We taught that we are made in the image and likeness of God, so we are inherently good. We must share our goodness with those around us. We talked a lot about being a “gang for good” for the southside of Milwaukee.

As Nativity celebrates this historic year, what stands out to you?

Nativity is blessed with strong leaders who fiercely believe in what is possible for students from the southside of Milwaukee. The school enjoys financial stability that is bolstered by Choice funding and from generous benefactors who truly care. Now that Nativity is fully co-ed from K4 to 8th grade, it has unlocked equal access to high-quality Catholic, Jesuit education for both boys and girls. The outstanding academic success, including consistently strong performance on standardized tests, is well known in the broader educational community.

What are your hopes and dreams for Nativity students and alumni?

I wish that Nativity students and alumni find continued academic and professional success, but ultimately use their rich experiences to give back and work for the common good and the glory of God. That is our mission in action. There is so much to be grateful for in terms of the opportunities provided. Whether in their families, places of work, parishes or broader

communities, Nativity alumni should use their voices for positive change. They have an important role to play in building the reign of God.



Surpassing our Wildest Dreams:

A Reflection on Nativity's 30th Anniversary with Founding Principal, Larry Siewert

What is one story from Nativity's history that you will never forget?

There were many times in Nativity's history where we were blessed by things that we had no right to be blessed by. For example, facilitating that first summer at Camp Thunderhead in 1993. Neither Bill nor I had any experience with being at camp or running a camp, but we took fourteen kids and promised their parents that it would all work out. We never went to bed before midnight, as we met every night to debrief and confirm our plans for the next day.

What Nativity accomplishment brings you the most pride?

I made it a point to go to as many graduation ceremonies, whether from high school, college or otherwise, for our graduates. Getting to be there with the kids and their families, getting to hug them and take photos together felt very personal to me. It was clearly seeing our mission in action and proof of what we worked so hard for. Staying in touch with alumni and seeing what they are personally and professionally accomplishing has surpassed our wildest dreams.

Moving from the old St. Patrick's school building to the current space on 29th Street, which used to be the Marian Hall dormitory for the School Sisters of St. Francis, was a big deal for me and I feel very proud of it. I received statistics from the city to research the student population of the neighborhood to prove why it was an important move for Nativity's future.

During my time at Nativity I was also instrumental in helping the high schools develop their Spanish for native speaker programs which I know was responsive to meet our students' needs. I absolutely loved my time teaching at Nativity

and being in the classroom. I had the opportunity to teach alongside my daughter, Sandy, which is a really special memory for me.

As Nativity celebrates this historic year, what stands out to you?

The year-round model of education and extended school day is incredible. The possibilities for anyone's child are greatly enhanced by being part of Nativity. Latino families bring cohesiveness, care and concern which has made a huge difference in what Nativity has been able to accomplish. I often witnessed the success of the oldest child carry over to the younger siblings and the families overall. Nativity hasn't just impacted an individual student's life, but the entire family. Seeing Lucy Beltran and Reyna Ibarra, Nativity parents from my era, now leading in the classrooms is really something special.

While great accomplishments have happened to this point, the work is never over. Nativity remains on a path that we need to stay focused on and committed to. This community still has needs, and we need to keep working to serve them.



What are your hopes and dreams for Nativity students and alumni?

This has never changed over the thirty years of Nativity's existence. I wish for our students and alumni to be well educated, work to make a difference by being "men and women for others," and to simply be good people. I've seen Nativity grads be examples for their families and communities, inspiring others to pursue more. Being a good person is the key to success. If they do that, their families and communities will thrive.

NARROWING THE GAP:

Nativity's Advocacy for Equal School Funding

Education is key to unlocking an individual's potential and creating a better future. In Milwaukee, the educational landscape is rich with options, allowing parents to choose the school that best fits their child's needs, whether it be a private Choice school, a charter school or a traditional public school. **However, this freedom of choice comes with a significant caveat: the funding allocated to these schools varies dramatically.**

Nativity believes that each student should be valued the same, and in turn have access to equal resources, regardless of what school they attend. Our caring and committed Nativity community knows this as well, as so many people have generously invested in Nativity's students and unique model of education over the past thirty years.

Funding plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience a school can offer its students. From curricular resources to teacher salaries and extracurricular activities to maintenance, funding is the lifeblood of a school's operations.

For Nativity, 98% of students qualify for a Choice voucher based on residency and family income. During the past school year (2022–23), Choice-eligible K5–8 grade students received a voucher of \$8,399. K4 Choice students receive half that amount. However, Nativity's true cost of education per student amounted to \$17,397. This meant that Nativity had to raise an additional \$8,998 per student to bridge the gap between voucher funding and actual costs.

Despite Wisconsin's reputation for providing parents with educational options, per-pupil funding remains inconsistent across school sectors. In Milwaukee, 27% of students attend a private school and 14% attend a charter school. These students receive only 57%–63% of the funding their public school peers enjoy. This is not a Milwaukee specific issue; across the state, this funding gap affects more than 500 schools and over 66,000 students, creating a disparity in the resources available to schools and ultimately affecting the quality of education these schools can provide.¹



The Coalition for Equal Funding for K–12 Students: Bridging the Gap

Recognizing the need for improved educational funding to bolster our city's future, the Coalition for Equal Funding for K–12 Students emerged. Vanessa Solis, Nativity's president, joined as co-chair alongside influential Milwaukee figures Tim Sheehy, president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) and Dr. Howard Fuller, renowned Wisconsin educational leader and member of Wisconsin Charter School Advocates. This coalition partnered with City Forward Collective



and rallied schools, parents, business leaders and community-based organizations to narrow the educational funding gap through advocacy with state lawmakers and the governor's office throughout the 2023–35 state biennial budget process.

The ultimate goal of the coalition was true equal funding, where dollars would follow the student regardless of what school sector they enrolled, whether it be public, charter or Choice. However, any meaningful increase in closing the funding gap would be a welcomed relief for charter and Choice schools.

In addition to the coalition's persistent advocacy, constituent voices proved especially powerful as they engaged in conversations with elected officials via phone calls, emails and attending a local listening session of the Joint Finance Committee.

A major bipartisan deal, passed by both state legislative chambers and ultimately signed into law by Governor Tony Evers in July, led to historic funding increase for Wisconsin students. This included the passing of Act 11, where Choice and charter schools saw per pupil increases ranging from 18%–40%. This increase varied however, with charter

and 9–12 grade Choice funding outpacing the K5–8 grade Choice increase.

Passed separately — but in conjunction with the above increases — was the state budget, which resulted in a base increase of \$325 per student per year across all school sectors. This annual increase will continue for the next 400 years due to Governor Evers' newsmaking partial veto but could be modified in future state budgets (2025 onward).

For the current school year (2023–24), this amounts to a \$1,494, or 18% year-over-year increase for K5–8 grade Nativity students who qualify for a Choice voucher. The following school year will see an additional \$344 increase. In subsequent years, all school sectors will receive a blanket \$325 increase per year. Over time, however, this blanket increase will diminish in value.

While an 18% year-over-year increase is substantial, the average annual Choice voucher increase over the past five years has only been 2.2%, with one year seeing as little as a \$36, or 0.43% increase. As the last five years has averaged an inflation rate of 3.48% according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,² these meager voucher increases have not kept pace with what is needed to fund a high quality, responsive education.

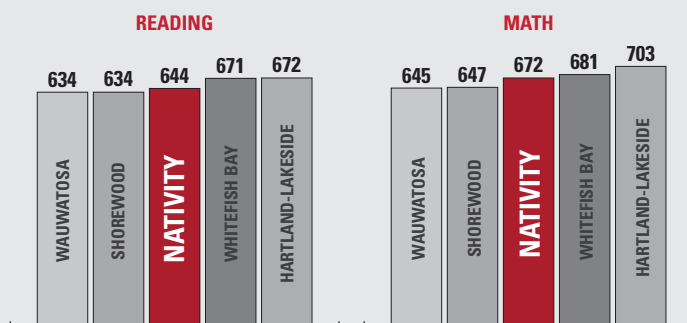
The Road Ahead

While this is a significant and historic win, it falls short of truly equal funding for all students. Even if equal funding was achieved in comparison to our public school peers, it would not entirely cover the true cost of a Nativity education as our model is so different from a typical K–8 experience. Community support has led to the success of our students and mission over the past thirty years.

Between our extended school day, year-round instruction including Camp Thunderhead, and graduate support services, we rely on philanthropic support to make the Nativity experience possible for students from the southside of Milwaukee.

Because of your generosity, students have access to a high quality education that they might not otherwise get to experience. In Milwaukee, only 1 in 7 Hispanic students are on grade level in reading and math.¹ This is not the reality for Nativity students. According to the most recently published Wisconsin Forward Exam results, Nativity 8th graders scored higher than the average of their peers across the state, Latinos across the state, and other southside of Milwaukee private and charter schools. In addition, Nativity 8th graders' scores are competitive with their peers from surrounding, more affluent Milwaukee suburbs. The 2023 Forward Exam results will be publicly released after time of publication.

Average 8th Grade Scores on the 2022 Statewide Forward Exam



TOTAL COST OF NATIVITY EDUCATION:

\$18,988

\$9,893

Choice Voucher per student

\$9,095

Funding gap per student

These results are not possible on Choice dollars alone. For all schools, the cost of education continues to rise. Schools face the challenge of inflation, recruiting and retaining teachers in an increasingly sparse talent pool, meeting individual student needs and providing comprehensive wraparound support. Nativity's commitment to our mission is reflected in teacher retention efforts, bolstering of academic intervention and social emotional support, unique programming including Camp Thunderhead and our Graduate Support Program and competitive compensation and benefit packages. Intentionality for all of these facets of the work add up in terms of costs, but when it comes to a student's future, we believe it is of the utmost importance.

The fight for equal funding, and in turn high quality educational experiences, is ongoing. We are so grateful for the tireless, dedicated efforts of many individuals and coalitions to provide every child with the opportunities they deserve. While the funding disparities continue to exist, we are honored to witness the generosity of the Nativity community who believe in our students and support their growth and success. Together, we are providing transformational educational opportunities that foster a supportive environment where students can thrive and realize their full potential. Thank you for championing high quality education!

¹ City Forward Collective. Equal Funding for Milwaukee's Students. <https://www.cityforwardcollective.org/s/Equal-Funding-Brief.pdf>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). CPI for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUUR0000SA0L1E?output_view=pct_12mths

An Education That Transfers Beyond a School's Walls:

The Diaz Olea Family's Experience at Nativity

For many families, choosing to send their child to Nativity is a significant commitment. It requires not only agreeing to a rigorous curriculum but also sending your child away each summer for three weeks to Camp Thunderhead located in the northwoods of Wisconsin. While the decision was a difficult one for Olivia Olea Molina and Gustavo Diaz Sanchez, parents of Nativity 6th grader Yamileth, they know it was the best decision to make for Yamileth's growth.

When Olivia and Gustavo were looking for schools for Yamileth, they had heard about Nativity from friends and family. They were intrigued by the Catholic, Jesuit values, talented educators and the excellent education that Nativity provides for students. They also shared how confident they felt in the Nativity team at both the Milwaukee campus and at Camp Thunderhead.



As Yamileth was only entering K4 at the time, it was difficult for Olivia and Gustavo to envision sending their daughter to camp in middle school. However this big decision is something they don't regret making. Throughout Yamileth's time at Nativity, they noticed her growing in her education and creating and prioritizing important life habits.

Yamileth holds Nativity's five core values true at school but also transfers them to life at home. Yamileth has internalized the importance of being religious, loving, open to growth, seeking intellectual excellence and committed to justice. "I've watched Yamileth grow from a K4 student



who was scared to leave me to now being ready to go to camp and be independent in new ways," Olivia recalls. "The Camp Thunderhead experience really strengthened my confidence in Nativity."

When Yamileth returned from camp, she gained a renewed perspective on the many things she is grateful for, including her family, her home and the many things her parents work hard to provide. As parents, they knew she was in good hands and felt comfortable letting her go for those three weeks.



Nativity has given the Diaz Olea family an opportunity to grow alongside Yamileth. The Nativity community allows them to feel supported and heard as parents, leading them to feel empowered to support their daughter. "Yamileth is growing not only educationally but spiritually and as a person," Olivia says. "We are excited for her to share with the world what she's learned and how to serve others."



Investing in Nativity Students

In 2023, Nativity's annual Scholarship Dinner and Golf Outing collectively raised more than \$479,000 to support Nativity students and fill the gap between School Choice funding and the true cost of a Nativity education. Because of an invested community who deeply cares about student support and success, Nativity students get to experience a unique model of education that includes an extended school day, extended school year, graduate support services and formation to be "men and women for others." See you at our events in 2024!



NATIVITY JESUIT

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UPCOMING EVENTS



ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP DINNER

Thursday, May 2, 2024, Greenhouse #7 (attached to the Mitchell Park Domes)
Njadinner24.givesmart.com

GOLF OUTING 2024

Monday, July 29, 2024, at Westmoor Country Club
Nativitygolf24.givesmart.com

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