The Class of 2023 Graduates

On Sunday, May 21, family, friends and faculty joined the Class of 2023 at Atlanta Symphony Hall to celebrate their graduation. The audience joyfully welcomed the 120 graduating seniors — the largest class to date at the Paideia School — as they entered the auditorium to the Jackson 5’s classic, “I Want You Back.” On such a cheerful day, the hardships the Class of 2023 have experienced may have seemed far away but, the audience was reminded, their High School experience had not always been a cheery one.

Throughout the student vignettes, there was an underlying theme of perseverance. As the Class of 2023 has faced challenges — whether the daily commute by e-bike shared by William Stone, the oppression of Persian women and religious minorities in Iran presented by Marcelle Nahai and Bahiyyih Grant, or battling cancer as recounted by Sofia Irlando — they have persisted, more often than not, citing the support of their friends and community as their strength.

In his opening remarks, Head of School Paul Bianchi shared one of his favorite lines from American writer E. B. White: “I arise in the morning torn between the desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world.” As freshmen coming of age amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial reckoning following the murder of George Floyd, the rise of Asian hate, the war in Ukraine and restricted abortion access, they tried to balance “enjoying the world” and having as normal a High School experience as they could while “improving the world” by using their voices to speak up for their friends, themselves and the issues they care about.

“The school is value-driven, compelling, often changes lives and underscores the value of hard work. It is both funky and funny, which can be contagious,” Paul said, emphasizing, “above all else, it is personal: we know each other as best we can.”

Through knowing each other, the Class of 2023 grew; they found their voice through friendships centered around their shared identities as Asha Ahn and Zalie Strayhorn shared. They found friendship in unexpected places: their teachers, as Marco DeStefano recalled of Barrington Edwards, “once a teacher, always a friend.” With the support of their friends, the Class of 2023 was empowered to create and transform, as Faven Wondwosen expressed in her poem, “In the Beginning.”

Throughout their time at Paideia, the Class of 2023 looked to their teachers and parents for guidance, whether it be finding balance between schoolwork and extracurriculars or big life decisions, such as where to go to college or what to study. As Ava Arepally shared, the challenges presented to her by teachers such as Jack Bross or Miranda Knowles, made her a more capable problem solver. Teachers from Elementary through High School imparted lessons and values that would define the gifts they share. Manal Tarig described the lessons she’s learned from teachers such as Kim Mansion (the importance of taking risks) and Drew Kise (how to think for oneself). Throughout the last year, as seniors have faced many questions and challenges, they have turned to their parents as well. As Katie Horn recounted, through her parents’ willingness to be the “Dr. Watson” to her “Sherlock,” she was able to investigate the challenges that came her way and discover a solution.

For many students, improving the world started with knowing themselves — knowing their gifts and passions, and leaning into them. During their time at Paideia, the Class of 2023 was pushed to branch out and try new things: Michael Aaron toasted his peers on finding themselves and testified to what amazing people they are. For Madelynn Huff, defeating the “curse of the one-year friendship” started with befriending herself — recognizing the confidence and grace that made her a good friend.

The environment and culture surrounding Paideia enabled many students to persevere through difficult times. Jared Hammerstrom emphasized this as he noted the unique ways Paideia forms a community, such as Monday Morning Meeting, calling teachers by their first names or waving to those we run into daily around campus (even if the wave wasn’t intended for us). The traits that make Paideia unique attract newcomers to the school and empower them to be the versions of themselves they want to be.

Allie Schroeder experienced this firsthand. Upon seeing someone not wearing shoes during her first visit to Paideia, she knew she could proudly discard her shoes and embrace her love of being barefoot. Paideia accepts the quirky, unconventional and contrarian, as McHenry Brewer intoned with “Thank God for Paideia,” this school that has always felt like home.

continued on page 4
High School Awards Assembly

“Doing things well is a combination of talent and effort,” remarked Paul Bianchi during the High School Awards Assembly on April 20, 2023. “Sometimes this combination involves academics, sometimes it is in the arts or social service, sometimes in leadership and community building.” As students and faculty gathered in the theater, the High School took time to reflect and appreciate the accomplishments of the past year.

University of Georgia Certificate of Merit
Kate Banks, Maisey Brown, Sahil Gandhi, Sammy Kodish, Krish Leveille, Michael London

Governor’s Honors
Omair Farooqui, Lily Gao, Brodie Gross, Samuel Kodish, Baikal Miller, Emerson Moore, Kaila Pearson

Internship Commendations
Asha Ahn, Athena Assikis, Maggie Bowen, Camilo Castrillon Davis, Adrien Chung, Kaita Cih, Hannah Garrett, Alex Graham, Lily Grill, Teagan McIntosh, Katie Porkert, Phillip Salzinger, Zach Smith, Manal Tariq, Kenji Wu

Community Service Award
Bahiyyih Grant, Alan Schwartz, Phoebe Schwartz, Kolby Seefried

National Merit Scholarship Finalists
Rohan Chanani, Luke Choi, Adrien Chung, Kai Diez, Alex Graham, Alec Hutchinson, Alex Liu, Skyler Marks, Alexandra Schroeder, William Stone

Robotics Award
Alex Crowley

Environmental Citizenship Award
Phillip Salzinger, Kolby Seefried

Journalism Award
Jared Hammerstrom, Theo Stein, Megan Walter

Yearbook Award
Hannah Garrett, Lucy Gillett, Emma Jane Wanamaker

Musician Award
Allie Gilbert

Golden Tin Cup Award
Hannah Garrett, Teagan McIntosh

Musical Theater Award
John Graner, Aurora Gray

Drama and Film Award
Lulu Javelona, Buzz MacIntyre

Mock Trial Award
Athena Assikis, Rohan Chanani, Kaita Cih, Phoebe Schwartz

Junior Book Awards
Brown University — Sammy Kodish
University of Chicago — Carolina Hardin
Columbia University — Emerson Moore
Dartmouth College — Luisa Lieberman
Georgia Tech — Gia Hardi
Harvard University — Brodie Gross
Phi Beta Kappa — Lily Gao

Smith College — Maisey Brown
Wesleyan University — Kate Banks
Yale — Stella Roumanis

Positive Athlete of Georgia Award
Rohan Chanani

Athletes for a Better World
Tebareh Hillo, Megan Walter

Marty Hays Award
Kenan Orlovic, Alessia Sacchi

Head of School Award — Juniors
Tyler Colby, Babisha Dahlal, Catherine Dwyer, Thomas Grant, Sharif Kemp, Maia Pope, Eva Young

Head of School Award — Seniors
Ava Arepally, Athena Assikis, Kaita Cih, Aurora Gray, Justin Griggs, Spencer Hollberg, Sofia Irlando, Kenan Kadragic, Lila Jane Long, Phillip Salzinger, Elshaday Shiberu, Winston Stukes

Leadership and Service
Athena Assikis, Adrien Chung, Kaita Cih, Justin Griggs, Spencer Hollberg, Sofia Irlando, Kenan Kadragic, Lila Jane Long, Phillip Salzinger, Elshaday Shiberu

Susan Ehrhardt Award
Bahiyyih Grant

AJC Cup Award
Rohan Chanani

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Senior Dinner

Throughout the evening, members of the 120-person class displayed their personality, sharing talents and stories unique to them. Following Paul’s introduction, members of the Senior Planning Group — Maggie Bowen, Adrien Chung and Marcelle Nahai — announced the 2023 Class Gift. The Class of 2023 raised $21,700 with 85% of the class participating. The class will continue the tradition of donating the majority of the money raised to Paideia’s financial aid with a smaller portion going toward planting a new tree in front of Oakdale Hall.

The evening transitioned into performances and student speeches. Katie Porkert sang a rendition of “Slipping Through My Fingers” from “Mamma Mia.” Adrienne Chung and Luca Horn-Morawa followed with Jean-Marie LeClair’s Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 3, No. 5. Alessia Sacci, accompanied by Sammy Kodish ’24 on keyboard and teacher Rudy Gilbert on percussion, performed Bobby Caldwell’s “What You Won’t Do For Love” on saxophone. Alexa Miller followed with a rendition of Elton John’s “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.” The last performance of the evening came from choir members Ava Arepally, Vivi Belkin, Josie Bond, Cassie Edmund, Aurora Gray, Anika Hofmeister, Julie Joffe, Jena Nahai, Tisha’s Garten student in 2023 — announced the 2023 Class Gift. The Class of 2023 raised $21,700 with 85% of the class participating. The class will continue the tradition of donating the majority of the money raised to Paideia’s financial aid with a smaller portion going toward planting a new tree in front of Oakdale Hall.

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THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL
1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30307

THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL is nonsectarian, serving families with children ages three through 18. Paideia does not discriminate in employment or in admissions. It actively seeks racial, cultural, and economic diversity in its student body. The ancient Greek word Paideia conveys the concept of a child’s total education: intellectual, artistic, and social.

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The ceremony featured many wonderful performances from the talented graduating seniors. Josie Bond and Julia Joffe sang “Flight” by Craig Carnelia with accompaniment by Anika Hofmeister on piano. Alan Schwartz performed Étude Op. 25 No. 1 by Frédéric Chopin on piano. The choir performed a beautiful rendition of “Baba Yetu” from “Calling All Dawns” by Christopher Tin, featuring soloists Cassie Edmund, Aurora Gray and Alec Hutchinson. Midway through the ceremony, John Graner and William Lowance performed “You and Me (But Mostly Me)” from “The Book of Mormon.” Members of the Paideia band Raw Honey (which includes Aurora Gray, Alec Hutchinson, Anika Hofmeister, Winston Stukes and Cole Williams ’24) followed with a performance of Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke.” Boys choir closed out the performances, singing and dancing to Crewe and Gaudio’s “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You.”

To close out his speech, Paul advised the Class of 2023 to find the people and places that will accept and support them. He said, “We laugh that Paideia is a bubble. As one of the chief soap makers, I’ll admit that we are a bubble, one of the many bubbles that exist. Seniors, find bubbles that work for you, or build a new bubble with your sudsy friends.” Enjoying the world and improving the world is no easy task, but surrounded by a community that supports, accepts and challenges them to learn, grow and embrace their passions, the Class of 2023 will be just fine. Congratulations, Class of 2023! We are so proud of you and will miss you!

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SENIOR DINNER continued from page 3

phes, gun violence, war and disease. While the world has its problems, Dave implored the soon-to-be graduates to help.

“You’ve been given a gift by coming to this school. And you are uniquely equipped to make our world a better place: not because you can throw a frisbee; not because you can read Egyptian hieroglyphics, and not because you know all the lyrics to ‘Mascot of Might.’ You’re uniquely equipped to make the world better because of the core principles the teachers and administrators have woven into the fabric of Paideia: empathy, curiosity, hard work, optimism and humor.”

Dave imparted two lessons to the Class of 2023 — lesson 1: do what you love and lesson 2: make people’s lives better. He then concluded that “if we all work together, then we make society better.”

The evening ended with High School math and science teacher Martin Aguilera ’96 sharing his rules for the world: 1. Don’t die, 2. Don’t be a jerk, 3. Don’t be that person and concluded with an open-ended question, acknowledging that only the Class of 2023 can decide who they will be.