COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

2025

The Frederick Gunn School



The Frederick Gunn School

Highlanders learn to become active citizens and learn to lead.

We value engagement over cynicism, involvement over aloofness, action over acquiescence.

Our school community is a road leading to all the communities beyond our walls.

GIVING BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY

Throughout the school year, students and faculty enrich the Washington community through collaborations in the arts, the outdoors, and athletics. The photographs on these pages provide just a few examples.



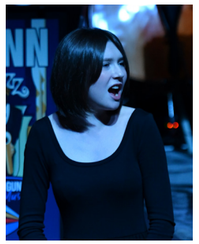




Students in the Highlander-X co-curricular program performed trail work and removed invasive species in support of Steep Rock Association's preserves as part of the Gunn Outdoors curriculum.



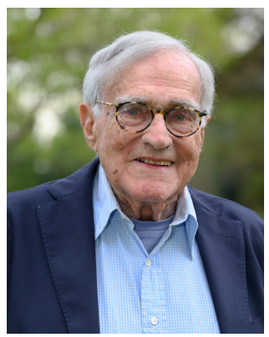






Gunn Music students performed at Washington Primary School as part of their community service commitment to "Back to Bach" and the Tri-M Music Honors Society.

Students also performed in the annual Chamber Concert, which was held in April at The First Congregational Church of Washington and open to the community free of charge.



Leo D. Bretter '52 P '88



Ron Castonguay P'27

Trustee Emeritus Leo D. Bretter '52 P '88 and Ron Castonguay P'27, Director of the Arts and Music Director at Gunn, donate their time as members of the Washington Friends of Music Board of Directors.



WAA | Washington Art Association & Gallery

Lincoln Turner of the Visual Arts faculty was a featured speaker in The Washington Photography Salon series at Washington Art Association on February 13. This event was just one example of the longstanding collaboration between WAA and the school.



Director of Theatre Arts Kent Burnham P'29 and his wife, Tracy Liz Miller P'29, are the Co-founding Producing Artistic Directors of Connecticut Theatre Exchange (CTX). In June, the nonprofit organization hosted over 60 professional theatre artists and developed 11 new plays at Gunn. All readings were held in the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center. CTX hosted additional theatrical readings during the year at the Judy Black Memorial Park and Gardens.

WASHINGTON WP&R SINCE 1977 PARKS & REC



The Frederick Gunn School and Washington Parks & Recreation co-sponsor Washington-Gunn Family Skate, which is held every Sunday from December through early March in Linen Rink.

Gunn families and children registered in the Northwestern Youth Hockey program are admitted free. Proceeds support the Bunker Burr Scholarship Fund, which provides tuition and equipment purchase assistance to children and families wishing to get involved in ice skating or the great game of ice hockey.

Bunker Burr '39 co-founded the Washington-Gunnery Hockey and Skating Association, along with Former Trustee Jim Goodale, in 1973. Gunn also hosts a Learn to Skate program that is held at Linen Rink and run by Michael and Michelle Gorra through the Northwest Icehawks.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND EMTS SERVE THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Gunn faculty lead by example, demonstrating what it means to Be a Force for Good by serving as volunteer firefighters and EMTs. Faculty and staff are among the 60 active members of the Washington Volunteer Fire Department, and several hold leadership positions. The all-volunteer department provides fire protection and first responder capabilities for the 4,000 residents of Washington, Washington Depot, Marbledale, New Preston, and Woodville, an area of 38.7 square miles. Members include:

- Associate Head of School Seth Low P'26 '28, who has been an interior firefighter since 2012 and holds the title of Secretary
- Vincent Belanger of the Maintenance Department, who has been an exterior firefighter, pump operator, and truck driver since 2013
- Don Lundberg of the Maintenance Department, who has been a firefighter since 1980
- Patrick Williams of the Maintenance Department, who has been an interior firefighter since 2008
- Ethan LaBella, who works with the Maintenance Department as a subcontractor, serves as the current Fire Chief and an EMT
- Collin Farrar, whose wife, Blaire, is a member of the English Department faculty, serves as Captain and an EMR







Gunn faculty and staff are among the 28 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and four Emergency Medical Responders (EMRs) that comprise the Washington Ambulance Association. WAA responds to over 400 requests for emergency medical services per year. Members include:

- Morgen Fisher '03, Science Department Chair, who is Assistant Chief and and an EMS instructor
- Amy Paulekas, Dean of Students, who is an EMT
- Elliott Fisher, a former faculty member who lives on campus with his wife, Morgen, and is an EMR

"COMMON GROUND" COMES HOME TO WASHINGTON

Since 2023, The Frederick Gunn School has partnered with the PBS-syndicated public affairs show, "Common Ground with Jane Whitney." The program, which is distributed to about 70 percent of PBS stations in the United States, was filmed in the Tisch Family Auditorium of the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center, bringing nationally recognized panelists representing a variety of viewpoints to Gunn — and Washington — to respectfully discuss pressing issues.



What makes "Common Ground" stand out in a crowded (and noisy) field is that it features civilized conversations on hot button topics that reflect multiple viewpoints and humanize perspectives in an effort to help heal and unite. It's what host Jane Whitney refers to as "stoking light, not heat."

Panelists have included a "who's who" of headliners and opinion molders such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, former Secretary of State John Kerry, former CIA Director John Brennan, General Michael Hayden, U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman, and Maria Ressa, David Axelrod, Steve Kornacki, Joy Reid, Maya Wiley, Danny Meyer, Frank Luntz, U.S. Senator Todd Young, David Brooks, Seth Meyers, and Michael Mann.

The decision to move the show from a local public high school to Gunn in 2023 was a homecoming of sorts, allowing "Common Ground" to return to Washington, where it started over a decade ago as a local speaker series in St. John's Parish Hall. It also marked a return to the community Whitney calls "the heartbeat of the show." At the end of each episode, she signs off, "Until we see you back here next time, from The Frederick Gunn School in 'the other Washington' — Washington, Connecticut — for 'Common Ground,' I'm Jane Whitney. Take care."

The partnership created opportunities for Highlanders to work as interns behind the scenes and build on what they have learned through the school's four-year citizenship curriculum. Live tapings were open to the community and tickets were offered to students and faculty for free. Discussions are underway to reignite the partnership in the near future, so stay tuned!

LITCHFIELD JAZZ CELEBRATES 30 YEARS AT GUNN

In July, The Frederick Gunn School hosted the 30th annual Litchfield Jazz Festival, which drew arts patrons from near and far for an incredible weekend of world-class jazz in the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center.





Litchfield Jazz Camp, now in its 29th year, also returned to Gunn this summer, attracting 350 jazz students who stayed on campus for up to a month and perform at the festival. Throughout July, Litchfield Jazz Camp faculty and students performed free concerts in the Tisch Family Auditorium as part of the "Jazz After Work" series. These concerts are open to anyone in the community.

The partnership between Gunn and Litchfield Performing Arts (LPA), the non-profit organization that produces the festival and camp, began in 2018 and has brought hundreds of talented student musicians, amazing faculty, including multiple Grammy Award-winners, and thousands of jazz fans to Washington, Connecticut. Among the faculty this year was jazz vocalist and pianist Nicole Zuraitis, who won a Grammy in 2024 for Best Jazz Vocal Album.

The school's relationship with local arts organizations such as LPA as well as Pilobolus and ASAP! have only flourished since TPACC opened in 2020.

The state-of-the-art, 415-seat Tisch Family Auditorium, established through the generosity of Jonathan Tisch '72 and Steve Tisch '67, has played a huge part in that, giving the school a space to gather as a community as Frederick Gunn envisioned 175 years ago.

It is where the school hosts plays, musicals, concerts, guest speakers, alumni events, and a nationally recognized PBS-syndicated public affairs show. It has also changed the way people think about the school and set the bar high for all future projects.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES AT GUNN LIBRARY PUT FOCUS ON CIVIC RESPECT

The Center for Citizenship and Just Democracy (CJD) took a proactive approach to the 2024 election, developing a curriculum based on the theme, "Civic Respect." Students engaged in workshops, debates, and discussions organized in collaboration with the Gray Party, a bipartisan student organization founded in 2018 to increase civic engagement; and Youth Commons, whose goal is to promote political depolarization by empowering the younger generation.



On October 17 and 24, 2024, students and members of the Washington community also participated in parliamentary debates at the Gunn Memorial Library, where they shared and explored their views on the future of domestic and foreign policy. The debates were co-sponsored by the Washington Eagle, a community newspaper produced by students in Civic Journalism and Media Making class, and Braver Angels, a national, bipartisan citizens movement working to reduce political poarization and foster respectful discourse.

"The idea is for a group of people to think together, listen, and allow themselves to be changed by each other's ideas," said Bart McMann, Director of the Center for Citizenship and Just Democracy and Dean of Programmatic Innovation, who served as moderator. "When done well, everyone walks out a little closer to the truth, more aware of the validity in opposing views, and with tighter community relationships."

WASHINGTON EAGLE TO ADDRESS NEED FOR LOCAL NEWS

At a town hall meeting in January 2025 about the future of local news in Washington, Connecticut, Gunn students presented the Washington Eagle as a viable solution to the lack of consistent coverage by mainstream media. New relationships and partnerships were forged and one constituent, Jackie Levin, President of Shriver Media and former Executive Producer of NBC's Today Show, volunteered to help steer the Eagle to a new digital platform.







This fall, the Washington Eagle staff, led by Editor-in-Chief Martha Ewing '25, has decided to go fully digital and will focus more on long-form journalism pieces, covering topics in town like the recent school board election, the July referendum to ban wake boating on Lake Waramaug, and affordable housing.

"The editorial staff believes that focusing on long-form journalism instead of more immediate local news coverage will allow our students to practice the skills of journalism in a more deep, intentional, and educational way," said Bart McMann, Director of the Center for Citizenship and Just Democracy and Dean of Programmatic Innovation.

"This approach provides context, makes an impact, and ensures credibility through thorough research, while requiring students to develop sophisticated source-recruitment strategies as they build relationships with community leaders, local officials, and residents over extended periods. Students will hone their ability to generate open-ended interview questions and practice the art of active listening, skills that are essential for extracting nuanced perspectives on complex local issues."

STUDENTS HOST YOUTH VOICES IN DEMOCRACY SUMMIT

To inspire students from other schools to enact change in their own communities, the Center for Citizenship and Just Democracy (CJD) and Youth Commons co-hosted the Youth Voices in Democracy Summit at Gunn on October 20, 2024. Over 30 students from Gunn, Kent School, Westover School, Hopkins School, and Washington Montessori School participated in the full-day program, which included interactive workshops and presentations by guest speakers.







Cole Cochrane, a sophomore at Harvard University and an environmental advocate from Maine, offered students practical advice about how to turn their passions into action. Bart McMann, Director of the Center for Citizenship and Just Democracy and Dean of Programmatic Innovation, introduced the concept of "relational meetings," which sophomores practice as part of their Citizen Gunn class. McMann demonstrated how students could use this framework to build meaningful relationships and foster collaboration in their own communities through active listening, shared values, and trust-building. Students then paired up to practice the skill on their own. Additional workshops at the summit addressed media literacy and how to analyze campaign strategies.

"We designed this summit to introduce great tools and then move into group discussions to find out what students are passionate about, and how they are going to sustain that, bring it to their schools, and involve their peers in civic engagement," said Ryan Ryu '25, who started Youth Commons at Gunn in 2023 and expanded it to other schools in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and California. One of the organization's objectives is to transform activists into proactive "activators," who are equipped to drive positive change.

The program was hosted in The Lizzie & Jonathan Tisch Center for Innovation & Active Citizenship, giving students from other schools the opportunity to see and spend time in this stunning, 24,000-square-foot academic center. Made possible through a $25 million gift from Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch '72, The Lizzie was intentionally designed with collaborative spaces that promote creativity, learning, and community. It quickly became a hub on campus after it opened in January 2024.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WASHINGTON HONORED WITH FRIEND OF THE GREEN AWARD

The Frederick Gunn School honored the First Congregational Church of Washington with the 2024 Friend of the Green Award at the Washington Town Holiday Party on November 23, 2024. Washington residents and business owners, faculty, local alumni, and Frederick Gunn School families attended the event in the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center on campus.

Each year, on the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving, The Frederick Gunn School opens its campus to the community of Washington and the surrounding area to celebrate the joy of the season and to present the Friend of the Green Award. Established in 2010, this award is presented by the school to honor an individual or group that has contributed to the well-being of the town of Washington through their volunteer efforts.



This year's award was accepted on behalf of the First Congregational Church of Washington by the Rev. Dr. Robyn Gray, Pastor. In the spirit of giving during the holiday season, and in support of the church's mission, guests were asked to bring nonperishable food items or financial donations in support of the Warren & Washington Food Bank.

The history of these two institutions have been intertwined for nearly two centuries. More than just neighbors around the Washington Green, the school and the church share a historic commitment to enriching the lives of the Washington community and a connection to many of the same thought leaders who have inspired each institution. Generations of Highlanders will attest that some of their fondest memories stem from formal school events held in the church, including Convocation, Baccalaureate, Prize Night, and Commencement, as well as annual Holiday Concerts and Alumni Weekend events.

The church's dedication to service has been demonstrated through its commitment to reducing food insecurity in and around Washington. Church members volunteer at the Loaves & Fishes Hospitality House of New Milford and prepare sandwiches for the Dorothy Day Hospitality House in Danbury. They collect food in the Parish House year-round, with the goal of donating one ton annually to the Warren & Washington Food Bank, and host a Harvest Dinner, with proceeds to benefit the food bank and local veterans services.

The church hosts weekly meetings for Alcoholics Anonymous and recently started a program called "Good Company" that is intended to provide a sense of connection for those struggling with loneliness. And while helping to support those in need is the core of the church's community mission, the church also strives to foster community spirit through the annual Green Fair, Friends of Music Concerts, and most recently, the Music on the Green concert series. The First Congregational Church and its members continuously make meaningful and positive contributions, opening their doors and hearts to welcoming all people into their community, and by extension, the town of Washington. For all of these reasons, Gunn was proud to honor the First Congregational Church of Washington with our 2024 Friend of the Green Award.











STUDENT CURATOR GIVES VOICE TO MODERN-DAY FEMINISTS THROUGH ART







In January, a traveling student art exhibit showcasing varying perspectives and interpretations of feminism opened in the Perakos Family Cares Art Gallery in the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center. Titled "Amplifying Voices: Global Feminism," the multimedia show was co-curated by Stella Zhu '25 and three of her friends from Shanghai: Churan Xu '25 and Michelle Zhang '25, who attend The Lawrenceville School, and Rui Wang '25, a student at Miss Porter's School. Together, they selected 43 works by 24 artists representing 14 schools, including Gunn, Lawrenceville, Miss Porter's, Taft School, Pomfret School, Governor's Academy, The Hill School, The Cambridge School of Weston, Weston High School, The American School in Switzerland, The Sichuan International Department of Chengdu Shide High School, Qibao Dwight in Shanghai, China, UCLA, and USC. The exhibit was open to the public for one month before traveling to Miss Porter's in February, and then to the Hutchins Gallery at Lawrenceville.

The Perakos Family Cares Art Gallery was established in 2020 in the Thomas S. Perakos Arts and Community Center by the building's namesake donor, Thomas Perakos '69, his family, and the Class of 1969, in celebration of their 50th reunion and to honor their beloved teacher and coach, Wallace H. Rowe III H'57 P'77 '79. The gallery is open to the public free of charge. In addition to showcasing student work, previous exhibits have included: "Cleve Gray: Towards an Art of Hope," a retrospective exhibition featuring works by American Abstract Expressionist painter Cleve Gray (2024); and "Waterfronts and Woodcuts," featuring work by Don Gorvett, a Boston-born artist acclaimed for his hand-pulled color reduction woodcuts recording maritime subjects (2023).

HELPING STUDENTS TO BECOME FORCES FOR GOOD



In the 2024-25 school year, Benjamin Kang, Gunn's new Dean of Belonging and Inclusion, engaged students through the creation of a Student Belonging & Inclusion Council. Now in its second year, council members represent each of the school's nine affinity groups, and have opportunities to develop leadership skills that they can apply to the larger world after they graduate. Affinity groups such as the Black and Latino Student Union (BALU) have been part of the student experience for generations of Highlanders and serve as vital spaces for connection, support, and learning. In the 2025-26 year, the Belonging & Inclusion Office added Fred's Fellowship, an all new affinity space for any male-identifying students. The students in Fred's Fellowship will engage in raising awareness for men's mental health, and lead fun events such as Movember.

In April 2025, nearly a dozen Highlanders had another opportunity to gain experience in the Diversity, Belonging, and Inclusion sphere by attending the Student Diversity Leadership Conference at Hopkins School. Sponsored by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), this conference offered interaction sessions by grade level on topics such as unpacking stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

"Students were able to talk about different topics around identity and different approaches to activism," said Kang, who was invited to serve on the CAIS Commission on Diversity in Independent Schools in 2025. In this role, he is helping to design programs for teachers and students in the CAIS network, including the 2026 Student Diversity Leadership Conference.

In January 2026, students and faculty will be invited to attend a national conference, "Routes to Roots: A Call Forward," where they will join other student leaders from around the country to "strengthen their leadership and advocacy skills, and renew their sense of purpose in shaping inclusive school communities."

Throughout the school year, students learn about other countries and cultures that are represented on campus through programs and activities such as the annual International Fair, Lunar New Year dinner, and presentations at School Meeting by representatives of Gunn Global, a new initiative to foster inclusivity, growth, and leadership among our entire community.

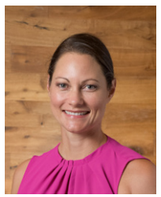
MAKING AN IMPACT

Throughout the year, students on campus organize events to support non-profit organizations in Connecticut and beyond. Working individually or as part of a team or group, students seek to raise awareness and funds that will make a difference in the world around them. Among the many organizations and causes they supported in 2024-25 were: the National Foundation for Cancer Research, American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, Make-A-Wish Foundation, Hockey Fights Cancer, Shoulder Check Foundation, Stop Asian Hate, The Connecticut Women's Consortium, Peace Over Violence, Denim Day, the Trevor Project, Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families, AttackCancer (benefitting the HEADstrong Foundation), Bega kwa Bega Uganda, and Walk4Hearing.

A VIBRANT CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Gunn has been an international community since the beginning. Today, our diverse international population hails from 20 countries (including Italy, Germany, and Oman) and 25 states.

International students represent 20 percent of our community, and this year, a record number of students of color — 19 percent domestic and 39 percent overall — call Gunn home. Our diversity brings cultural vibrancy to the school and the broader community, as students share their interests and pursue their passions through music, art, athletics, and our academic programs.



Caralyn Dea, Senior Associate Director of Admissions and Director of International Recruitment, literally travels the globe each year to attract exceptional scholars, athletes, and artists to Gunn. Last year, Dea was on the road for 55 consecutive days and sent weekly video updates back home to students and faculty about the history, culture, and customs she encountered along the way. As a result of her work, the school partnered with two organizations, the Crown Prince Scholars of Bahrain and TAKATUF of Oman, to bring some exceptional students to our community this year. Through these government initiatives, the top-performing high school students from their respective countries are selected for scholarships to attend boarding schools in the U.S. and the U.K. This year in Oman, 3,500 students sat through the testing process and Bahrain attracted around 2,000 students. Only the top 50 in each country were selected, meaning these students are truly the best and the brightest!

According to Dea, the scholars are expected to attend a Top 100 University and will pursue specific majors that have been predetermined by their organizations. After completing their undergraduate degrees, they will either return to their home countries to work in a government department or apply for a master's program. The scholars programs are also part of larger government initiatives to develop a highly skilled workforce. Despite being ancient civilizations, the average age in both Oman and Bahrain is around 29 years old. Their governments recognize the need for a more educated and skilled population to grow their countries economies and presence in the world, hence starting these programs, she said.



As Director of Multicultural Recruitment and Associate Director of Admissions, Cassie Ruscz partners with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that work with low-income families or other groups that are not widely represented in independent schools. This summer, Ruscz hosted 55 students from one CBO who came to campus for a tour, luncheon, and the chance to meet current Highlanders. She was a panelist at events at Berkshire School and the Masters School and attended a luncheon in Hartford for people who are board members or run nonprofits in the Hartford area. The goal of that event was to think about students from the time they are in high school to their trajectory in college and beyond. The Frederick Gunn School was the only independent high school represented.



Throughout the year, Ruscz dedicates her time to traveling to meet with students who are not able to come to campus for a traditional tour and interview because it is difficult for their parents to take time off of work. "I find it very impactful to have those face-to-face interactions and interviews with them rather than just meeting them via Zoom," she said.

This year, Gunn welcomed 17 students representing 12 different CBOs. Most of the students hail from New York or Connecticut, and some are from Massachusetts. The goal is to introduce these students to boarding school and provide access to those who would otherwise not be able to afford a Frederick Gunn School education.

"From an admissions perspective, my goal with the CBOs is to continually identify students through these partnerships who will be really strong Gunn students," Ruscz said.

Recent examples include Sidney Mutau '23, an alumna of A Better Chance (ABC) who is currently pursuing a degree in cellular and molecular biology at Johns Hopkins University, and Tristan Davis '23, an Inspiring Young Minds alumnus who is majoring in political science and government at Trinity College, and helped its DIII Men's Basketball Team to win a national championship in May. Trustee Omar Slowe '97 is an alumnus of another CBO, Prep for Prep, and has continued to foster its relationship with the school.

Once students are on campus, Ruscz partners with Dean of Belonging and Inclusion Ben Kang to ensure that students are having a strong Gunn experience, and that they have access to resources, including The Highlander Grant, which covers some of the additional costs that come with boarding school such as text books, technology, a ticket to prom, or going to The PO with friends.

"We want to make sure these students are having an equitable experience while on our campus, and not just from a financial aid standpoint," Ruscz said.