



The Neighborhood Academy Hires Gary J. Niels as School President Staff Restructure Results from Board Strategic Plan

PITTSBURGH, PA (April 20, 2018)—The Neighborhood Academy (TNA)—an independent, faith-based college-preparatory school located in Stanton Heights—today announced the appointment of Gary J. Niels as president. Niels most recently served for sixteen years as the head of school for Winchester Thurston School in Shadyside. His tenure at TNA begins with the 2018/2019 school year.

“We are very pleased that an educator with Gary’s credentials and successes will be leading The Neighborhood Academy over the coming years. His accomplishments in academic excellence, teacher development, financial strategies, and partnership cultivation will help us take our school to the next level of excellence,” said Charles I. Ferrara, TNA board chair.

The Neighborhood Academy expanded to include middle school students at the beginning of the 2017/2018 school year; it was founded in 2001 by Rev. Thomas E. Johnson, Jr. and Josephine Moore serving eighth and ninth grade students, with the first high school graduating class in 2005. The TNA board of directors recently undertook a strategic planning process that involved all of the school’s stakeholders to determine how to effectively move forward to ensure its long-term sustainability, while maintaining the school’s integrity, impact, and culture in what it sees as its second phase.

It was clear from the planning process that one of TNA’s strategic priorities over the next three years is to ensure that the school has the educational leadership, organizational structure, and culture to attract, develop, and retain high quality staff, faculty, and board talent. The board determined that a necessary step was to hire an experienced private school educator as president and to restructure the internal organization at the school so that all senior leadership reports directly to the president. Mark Jay Kurtzrock, one of the founding TNA board members, has served as TNA president since September 2016 when the previous president, co-founder Moore, retired. Kurtzrock will return to the board of directors when Gary J. Niels is in place as TNA’s new president.

Before joining Winchester Thurston School as head of school in 2002, Gary J. Niels held progressively responsible positions at private schools in Connecticut, Virginia, Florida, and Ohio. During his tenure at Winchester Thurston, Niels built an advancement office that raised \$50 million; achieved nine years of the highest enrollments in the school's 128-year history; formed an advisory board composed of regional leaders, university scholars, museum and nonprofit directors, and government officials to address strategic topics in education; and pioneered a new format for teacher development. Niels extended his leadership beyond Winchester Thurston as a board member of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools, and as president of the Pittsburgh Consortium of Independent Schools.

“For many years I have been inspired by the vision of Jodie and Tom in founding this school that transforms the lives of underserved inner-city students in Pittsburgh. The opportunity to play a leadership role at The Neighborhood Academy is a dream come true. Moreover, the strategic plan that was carried out by the Board provides a clear blue print for the school's future direction. As I wind down my career at Winchester Thurston I am humbled and excited about the opportunity to team with the fine leaders at The Neighborhood Academy to continue to strengthen the program and its impact on the lives of these outstanding future leaders,” said Niels.

Although the internal restructuring is in preparation for TNA's next growth phase, the board of directors is also recognizing the vision, perseverance, and contributions of the school's founders, Rev. Johnson and Jodie Moore. Ms. Moore is retired from The Neighborhood Academy; Rev. Johnson remains on-staff at TNA as head of school.

About The Neighborhood Academy

The Neighborhood Academy (TNA) provides a holistic college-preparatory education for students in grades 6 through 12 who normally would not have access to a high-quality private education. TNA is dedicated to developing the minds, bodies, and spirits of its students so they become fully productive members of society. Located in the Stanton Heights neighborhood of Pittsburgh on an eight-acre campus, 100% of TNA students receive financial aid. Enrollment at TNA is 130 students, mostly from at-risk communities, with a student-teacher ratio of 10:1. For more information, visit theneighborhoodacademy.org.

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