formed by the merger of the Village & Silver Springs Martin Luther School

gemma SERVICES
where hope shines

THE LATEST NEWS
PUBLISHED FOR OUR FRIENDS & FAMILIES

Fall 2022
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

“I believe in the future, and that's what our kids are.” These sentiments, recently expressed by one of our staff members, perfectly capture our shared mission at Gemma.

The start of a new school year always feels full of promise. Earlier this month, Martin Luther School welcomed students back. For some, it was their first time on our Plymouth Meeting campus, while others got a fresh start in a new classroom. We are thrilled to continue our expansion into high school as we welcomed our first class of tenth graders.

I remember my first day here in 1997. I had recently completed my Ph.D. in School, Community, and Clinical Child Psychology and arrived feeling nervous and excited about all I would experience and learn, just as I imagine our students have felt in recent weeks. I look forward to seeing how the year unfolds and hearing all the stories about the amazing things our students will surely accomplish. Whether served by Martin Luther School or by one of our behavioral health or prevention programs, witnessing our children and their families reach their goals is all the more rewarding because we know that their journeys are so challenging. We are honored to walk beside them along the way.

As we move through Gemma’s strategic vision work this fall, we also are looking toward our future as an organization. I will be excited to share our plans with you as we define Gemma's path toward our most bright future. Your partnership matters and we appreciate you. It is truly a new year of promise.

Sincerely,

Kristen E.M. Gay, Ph.D.
President and CEO

First Days at Martin Luther School
A Mission in Murals

“What does Martin Luther School’s mission mean to you?” This is the question that Emily Jenson, Art Education Intern, posed to 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students this past spring. The students’ responses inspired three murals that now adorn the walls of the School’s Harrison Center in Plymouth Meeting. Jenson helped the students create the murals using data visualization to represent Martin Luther School’s mission – “Instruct the Mind, Engage the Heart, and Empower the Will.”

“The project emphasized literacy, a focus at Martin Luther School, but literacy of numbers and data is also important,” said Jenson. “It incorporated STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) methodology.” Eva Morrison, School Director and Vice President of Education, added, “The mural exemplifies project-based learning. The process helped students gain an understanding of the mission in a way that made sense for them and resulted in a great work of art.”

In preparation for painting, Jenson observed the students over three days and recorded the data that would soon be painted on the hallways outside the classrooms. “Every time I saw them practicing certain skills that represent parts of the School’s mission, I tallied that.” The students then assigned a color and shape to each aspect of the mission in action. “Orange triangles symbolize when I observed students working as a team, for example,” explained Jenson. “The students created several mural designs to convey each part of the mission and then they and staff voted for their favorites.

The painting began, and the students brought the designs to life! The three murals were finished as the school year came to a close, perfectly symbolizing all the boys and girls had accomplished this past year, and all they most certainly will achieve in the future. One student participant said proudly, “I like it! I think it looks really nice!” The permanent art installation now serves as a reminder of the School’s mission and as inspiration for each student passing by.

Welcome to Janet Felder!

Gemma Services is pleased to welcome Janet Felder as our new Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Janet comes to us from the YMCA of Bucks & Hunterdon Counties where she served as the CHRO, reporting to the CEO, since 2016. In that role, Janet led the Y’s HR office which supported seven membership and satellite branches that included 2,500+ staff. Her responsibilities included the development of all aspects of talent management from recruitment through the employee’s work experience. She led diversity and inclusion initiatives and assisted with creating and maintaining the Y’s organizational culture. Janet was a close advisor to management and participated in setting agency goals, developing policy, and implementing strategic objectives.

Janet has extensive experience working in both private and public sectors. She is passionate about mentoring and encouraging people to reach their highest potential. She received her B.S. from Immaculata University and M.S. from Villanova, both with a specialization in Human Resources and Organizational Development. Janet is a certified Professional of Human Resources (PHR), received her SHRM-CP certification, and is well on her way to earning her Ph.D. in business from Walden University.

Kristen Gay, President and CEO of Gemma Services, states, “We are thrilled to have Janet join our team of dedicated professionals at Gemma. She brings expertise and extensive experience that will enhance our Human Resources department and overall organization. Please join me in giving her a warm welcome!”
The Sights & Sounds

“This summer was the best!”

Laughter and smiles were abundant on Gemma’s Plymouth Meeting campus as children served by our Residential Treatment Program and Martin Luther School’s Extended School Year (ESY) program enjoyed a fun-filled and enriching summer.

“This summer was the best!” exclaimed one child. “I got to do so many fun things. My favorite was the water slide!” Children stayed cool on hot days with water play, enjoying a giant inflatable water slide, running through sprinklers, and even soaking some of their staff in a dunk tank. Flag football games, time on the playground, gardening, and a foam party rounded out the many outdoor activities. Indoors, children had the opportunity to play bingo, learn new dances, compete in video game tournaments, make crafts,
of Summer at Gemma

swim in the pool, and more. There was, of course, time for learning and keeping their reading and math skills sharp for the upcoming school year.

“The planned activities let the children have fun, experience new things, and practice skills they will need and use for a lifetime,” said Martin Luther School Social and Emotional Learning Associate/Coordinator, Christine Oakes.

The fun extended beyond campus, too, with trips to the Harry Potter exhibit, riding rides and eating tasty treats at a local fair, visiting nearby parks, trips to the movies, and more. One child shared of the trip to the Franklin Institute's Harry Potter exhibit, “It was like being in the movie!” As the summer fades and the school year begins, the memories will certainly remain.
Gemma Services is hiring Bachelor’s and Master’s level Behavioral Health, Education, and Child Welfare Professionals in our Community Based Programs, Residential Treatment Program, and Martin Luther School.

Here are the words of some of our incredible staff describing what they enjoy about their work at Gemma:

“The most rewarding part of my job is knowing how many children and families we are able to help.” Gemma’s Applied Behavior Analysis program is one of the biggest in Philadelphia, serving more than 100 families. I’m so proud of all the hard work that our employees do to help these kiddos!” – Applied Behavior Analysis Clinical Director

“I didn’t choose Child Welfare; Child Welfare chose me. A favorite part of my job is assisting or advocating for foster parents and youth. My role is to help them feel supported and not alone. It is very rewarding when a youth finds permanency, either by returning to their home or through adoption or permanent legal custody.” – Foster Family Care Case Manager

“My favorite part of working in the Residential Treatment Program is providing a safe and healthy environment for children to learn appropriate coping strategies when they feel angry, upset, or scared. The most rewarding part is seeing children that I worked with become successful adults.” – Residential Treatment Program Mental Health Worker

To view all of Gemma’s open positions, please visit www.gemmaservices.org/about/careers or text "Jobs" to (610) 850-6444.
"What drew me to Martin Luther School is the amazing potential of the kids and the staff," said Eva Morrison, Vice President of Education and Director of Martin Luther School (MLS). From the moment she stepped onto campus more than three years ago, Morrison saw how special the students are. "The first time I visited MLS was a Friday afternoon, and the classroom was having a spelling test. One boy was spelling a very long word correctly. I was very impressed!"

Morrison's 20+ years as an educator has spanned teaching pre-school to graduate school. She has been a classroom teacher, administrator, and lifelong student. For Morrison, possibility is achieved through reading. "No matter the lives of our children, if they become readers who love books, their lives will be better," she shared. "When I first started here, about 5% of the kids were reading at grade level. Now, we're up to 48%. Our goal is 100% reading at grade level by the end of next year." Morrison's commitment extends further. "We also want them to fall in love with reading."

Morrison credits the MLS staff with students' success. "This is by far the most dedicated, committed staff I have seen across all the years I've worked in education. They are incredible team players. They believe it really matters and that shows." Beyond the improvement in students' literacy levels, the school's list of recent achievements is long. Staff and students quickly and successfully pivoted to online learning during the pandemic, adapting to technology they continue to use today in the classroom and during virtual learning days. Morrison launched a Teacher Apprenticeship Program last year through which ten teaching assistants are completing their bachelor's degrees and training for teaching certification. Additionally, in 2020, MLS was approved to expand to include high school, extending even more opportunities for our students. Last September, MLS welcomed its first class of 9th graders, many of whom have returned this fall for 10th grade.

Looking toward the future, Morrison said, "We are in year two of expanding to high school grades and we are very excited about that. I want us to be the model for what it can look like to help students who have emotional support needs thrive academically, socially, and emotionally." Morrison's vision and dreams for the students, the staff, and the School are at the heart of MLS. "Being able to connect people to their hopes and dreams is extraordinary. Whether they're kids or adults, it doesn't matter. I want people to see possibility." The possibilities at MLS are endless. We look forward to watching Morrison's vision of the school and its students become a reality, one spelling word, one book, and one student at a time.

Leading Through Literacy
Save the Date!

Friday, April 28, 2023
6–10 pm

The Vogt Foundation’s
15TH ANNUAL
Chefs for gemma

Featuring:

CHEF AMANDA SHULMAN
of

Her Place Supper Club

JAMES BEARD AWARD NOMINEE FOR BEST EMERGING CHEF

Supporting Programs for At-Risk Children, Youth, & Families
DINNER AND AUCTIONS

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