A PRESCHOOLER USES CLAY TO LEARN HIS LETTERS.
In a recent conversation, a long-time Gifft Hill School parent compared our school to “the little engine that could.” In various locations on island and under different names, GHS has grown from a handful of preschool students to an accredited institution offering unique educational programs for toddlers through 12th graders. Despite storms, pandemics, and many other challenges, GHS has, for more than 40 years, expanded its programs, increased enrollment, and served our island community in meaningful ways. We are a small school, but we create transformative experiences for our students and have a significant impact on our community.

We are grateful to everyone who has supported GHS over the years and for our ever-increasing number of new friends. We are especially thankful for your generosity during the unique challenges of the 2020-21 school year. With your support, our students benefited from in-person instruction from September to June. They were able to collaborate with peers and teachers to plant, tend, and harvest from the school gardens, play on the green top, build robots, conduct STEAM labs, and participate in field research across the island. Your support made these opportunities available to every GHS family with demonstrated financial need.

We invite you to read this annual report in which we recognize those who have helped our engine gain momentum and share stories that define the Gifft Hill School experience.

With Appreciation,

Ruth Alden Doan
President of the Board of Trustees

Kenneth S. Mills
Head of School

Unwavering Resolve

MS. LAURA’S FOURTH GRADERS ON A FIELD TRIP
The faculty, staff, and families of Gifft Hill School want to express their sincere gratitude to the Board of Trustees, who volunteer countless hours and donate generously. We also want to say a hearty “THANK YOU!” to the many supporters in our community who have donated their time, services, goods, and money to help us educate the children of our island community. You really do make this all possible.
### Yearly Expenditures

- **Salaries**: $1,746,618.52
- **General Operating**: $697,817.81
- **Educational Materials**: $52,451.74
- **Maintenance**: $76,637.32

**Total**: $2,573,525.39

### Total Contributions

- **Annual Fund**: $688,489.47
- **Temporary Restricted**: $716,002.51
- **Grants**: $584,904.87
- **Auction**: $234,360.00
- **In-Kind**: $40,079.34
- **Endowment**: $15,100.00

**Total**: $2,278,936.19
Francine Francis grew up next door to Gifft Hill School and even spent time here as a student. Now, as the Upper Campus social studies teacher, she works in tandem with the Virgin Islands National Park to bring the island’s history and geography to life for her students. Ms. Francis wasn’t able to take her students on the Reef Bay hike in the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19, so they brought Reef Bay into the classroom, illustrating the trail’s scenery and remnants of the Taino and colonial histories found on that hike. When the Leinster Bay waterfront area was added to the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom last year, Ms. Francis arranged for all Upper Campus students to visit the area, where they learned firsthand about the enslaved Africans who attempted the swim from Leinster Bay to Tortola, where freedom awaited. The trip also served as a geography lesson, as students learned that the narrow Leinster Bay hiking trail was once a road that residents drove up and over Johnny Horn to Coral Bay.

When Elizabeth Arnstein joined the Gifft Hill School staff in 2020, she was excited by the school’s diversity, our unique approach to learning, and the sense of possibility she felt as she became familiar with her new school. After 19 years of teaching at the same Minnesota school, Elizabeth says she loves having the freedom to introduce important contemporary issues through literature. Trevor Noah’s “Born A Crime” gave rise to classroom discussions about post-apartheid South Africa, while “Educated: A Memoir” by Tara Westover led to conversations around domestic violence and gaslighting. Elizabeth guides her students through research on how issues like drug trafficking and the abduction of indigenous women affect people around the world today, connecting the books they read to relevant, real-world topics. Her students respond with engagement and curiosity about contemporary issues, helping them learn compassion for others, and opening their eyes to the problems in today’s world that they may one day help to solve as adults.
Ms. Coreen’s Busy Bees

When the 2020-2021 school year kicked off with in-person instruction, teachers of younger students were faced with the challenge of helping their students understand how to stay safe at school. As Ms. Coreen arranged the desks in her classroom in a hexagon pattern to maximize space between the students, it dawned on her that the layout resembled a beehive, and the idea of the second grade Busy Bees came to life.

Ms. Coreen starts the year by asking her students what they want to learn, preferring to allow their curiosity to drive the curriculum. In the 2020-2021 school year, the theme of “Busy Bees” guided the students’ interests through many areas of study. They began by learning about bees themselves—their anatomy and the role they play as pollinators, working together as a group to research the insect. The theme permeated everything from classroom rules—students held their arms out to their sides, using their “wing span” to ensure they were properly distanced from one another—to science, which the students saw in action in the pollinator garden they planted.
Ms. Ashley’s Kinderkids

Kindergarten is a time of curiosity and growth, and as Ms. Ashley’s kindergarteners progressed through the first year of their elementary education, she fostered in them a sense of compassion for their classmates, community, and the world at large. In social studies, students learned about the different jobs that make life possible on St. John, from the water truck drivers to Virgin Islands National Park personnel.

Students then put crayons to paper to encourage compassion for their island’s natural environment, creating posters about how to keep our sea turtle population safe and healthy. Today, those posters can be found on display at island restaurants, placed there with the goal of educating visitors.
Mindfulness

Gifft Hill School provided emotional support to students throughout what was undoubtedly a difficult year for children across the globe. By the time the pandemic arrived in the Virgin Islands, many of our students had already experienced the compounding trauma of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and some face the added stressors of insecure housing, complex domestic relationships, and other worries. The emotional support provided by school counselor Angel Dubovoy was critical to our students’ well-being.

Angel taught mindfulness, a class that was tailored to each grade level, at the Lower Campus. Younger students learned emotional regulation through a program called Superflex, in which they imagined themselves as superheroes and used their “superhero powers” to react to difficult situations and to find a sense of calm when they are upset. Older students at the Lower Campus worked with a program called MindUP, which dives deeper into the science of how the brain works and teaches students how the body reacts to fears, anxieties, and other negative emotions. Angel also worked individually with students on both campuses who needed additional support in working through coronavirus fears and the other traumas they’ve faced.
In Their Own Words

A Parent’s Story

Hunter Simpson spent part of his early education at Gifft Hill School before a combination of family circumstances and the 2017 hurricanes led to his relocation to St. Thomas. Four years later, Hunter and his mother made the choice for him to return to Gifft Hill School. Even with the commute, he couldn’t be happier.

“The context of the relationships students develop with teachers here allows the students to be both pushed and nurtured simultaneously, which is the perfect combination,” says Hunter’s mother, Lyz Jaeger. “Knowing that when he gets to school he is cared for, respected, and dare I say loved, I never have a second thought about dropping him off.”

Lyz’s older son, Alex Raymond, Class of 2016, found so much happiness during his time at Gifft Hill School that when Lyz had to relocate to the states, he chose to stay on island to remain at our school. Alex even returned to the school as a teacher during the 2020-2021 school year.

“Nothing is perfect, but Gifft Hill School is perfect for my kids,” Lyz says.
A Student’s Story

Tenth grader Violet Aldrige came to Gifft Hill School as a fifth grader when she moved to the island from Texas. She says she benefits from many of the things our school has to offer. Violet likes the school’s small class sizes because she says she learns best when she’s able to dive deep into a subject. Small class sizes also allow for a deeper connection between students and teachers, Violet says. Gifft Hill teachers are often aware and considerate of challenges students may be facing outside the classroom.

“I’ve always liked that the teachers seem to care about students’ personal lives,” says Violet. “It’s nice to know they care.”

Violet says she plans to stay at Gifft Hill through her high school graduation, in part because she enjoys the engaging, hands-on experiences the school provides.

“I can say pretty confidently that Gifft Hill School has had a positive impact on me,” she says. “I know I fare a lot better here than I would at another school.”

A Student’s Story

Alewdys Peguero joined Gifft Hill School as an eighth grader in the wake of the 2017 hurricane season. He initially came to GHS because it was the only school open at the time. As he finished eighth grade, Alewdys asked to stay at Gifft Hill.

“In my previous school, you’re just a student, but here, you’re one of the students,” says Alewdys. “You’re not on your own. They don’t let you fail. Everybody gathers to help you.”

Alewdys has always been science-minded, and says he most enjoys the subjects of physics, biology, and chemistry. He’s hoping to pursue a career in engineering by attending the University of Michigan’s School of Engineering. Upper Campus English teacher Ms. Elizabeth says that not only is Alewdys intelligent, he’s also charismatic, personable, and incredibly empathetic. In addition to being a member of the National Honor Society, which Alewdys says gives him incentive to keep his grades up, he holds down a job outside of school.
Cultivating A Sustainable Future

Learning Begins in the Garden

Students of all ages get to experience the field of agriculture in a myriad of ways. This starts in the Early Learning Center, where our youngest students watch with delight as seeds they’ve planted sprout to life, and continues across grade levels with in-depth studies of vermiculture, composting, pollinators, and aquaponics. Whether they are reading, sketching, or collecting data, students find solace and apply learning in a variety of green spaces including the Lower Campus garden and the container gardens that line most decks and walkways.

The fourth grade garden permeates many aspects of Ms. Laura’s curriculum. Students learn about adaptations and pollination, expressing excitement as they see these concepts in real time in their garden. Their gardening is connected to Virgin Islands history, where students realize just how difficult it would have been for enslaved Africans to cultivate sugarcane here. Math comes into play when students measure their individual plots and calculate how many cubic yards of soil they’d need to fill the space. The garden instills a sense of pride and personal responsibility, which builds students’ confidence as they raise their plants from seed to harvest, bringing the fruits of their labor home to share with family.
Upper Campus Gardening

Upper Campus students dive deeper into agriculture through our STEAM, EARTH, and even culinary classes. Beginning in middle school, students in the STEAM class are encouraged to take ownership of the aquaponics system and the FarmBot system.

Students interact with the aquaponics system—which combines hydroponics, in which plants are grown without soil, with aquaculture, or raising fish—by feeding the fish, testing the water quality, and planting seedlings. GHS’s aquaponics program is sponsored with on-going support from Island Green Living Association. The FarmBot system combines simple coding with farming, allowing students to instruct the robotic tool to plant, water, and weed its garden. These interdisciplinary programs highlight the intersection of science, technology, and math, bringing theoretical concepts to life while demonstrating the real-world application.

All middle school students enjoy one trimester of EARTH, and high school students have the opportunity to take the class as an elective, which pairs with the culinary elective to delve further into Gifft Hill’s Farm-to-Table program and sustainable food sources.

Through the EARTH program, students learn about what grows on the island successfully, seasonal planting, composting to help condition the soil, and dealing with pests from insects to deer and donkeys. With these hands-on learning experiences, students learn that what tastes good isn’t always practical to grow here and that plants that grow easily—lettuce, for example—need to be balanced with carb-rich food sources like cassava, avocado, or breadfruit.

These three unique programs aim to instill in our students a passion for agriculture through their interdisciplinary approaches, with our ultimate goal of having students put their learnings into practice at home, helping to make food sustainability a reality on our small, isolated island.
Folklife Festival

Gifft Hill School actively encourages students to learn about the culture and history of this beautiful island we call home. Each year, our students and community look forward to one of the island’s signature events, the Folklife Festival. This event, sponsored by the Virgin Islands National Park and Friends of the VINP, invites schoolchildren from across the territory to interact with culture bearers from the V.I. The 2021 Folklife Festival was scaled back due to the ongoing pandemic, but that didn’t stop Gifft Hill School from connecting our students with an immersive cultural experience.

In conjunction with Transfer Day, the day that marks the transfer of the islands from Denmark to the U.S., Upper Campus social studies teacher Francine Francis brought Folklife Festival vibes to our very own Trayser Field. Students across all grades enjoyed the opportunity to make and sample johnny cakes, to taste locally made juices, to make their own handmade brooms, and even to be picked up by a towering moko jumbie. Culture bearers shared stories as they demonstrated their crafts, allowing students to connect with the island’s culture on a deeper level.

These important events provided opportunities for students native to the Caribbean to learn more about and celebrate their own heritage, while helping students who moved to St. John from the states develop a better understanding and appreciation for the rich cultural history of their new home.
GALA & LIST OF THOSE WHO DONATED

Our annual fundraising goal is $1.1 million to fund scholarships for our students, 70 percent of whom receive financial assistance. The 35th annual Gifft Hill School auction, “Lights, Camera, Auction!” was held on Saturday, March 6, 2021, at the open-air drive-in movie theater in Susannaberg. This annual event is our largest fundraiser of the year.

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1864 The Restaurant
Alfredo's Landscaping
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Bamboula
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Barbara Yatsko

Thanks to the support of our sponsors, donors, and attendees, we raised more than $230,000 at the auction this year—more than we’ve ever brought in at any auction in our past. These funds directly support the Gifft Hill School scholarship program.
GIVING CIRCLES

Thank you to our amazing friends and donors who have supported Gifft Hill School this school year. The Giving Circles below include all donations to the Annual Fund from July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021.

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A YOUNG READER ENJOYS THE 2019-2020 GHS ANNUAL REPORT.
Giving doesn’t always have to mean opening your wallet. Gifft Hill School board of trustees member Miles Stair, who’s supported the school in various ways for many years, recently teamed up with his sister Sherry to offer a creative approach to philanthropy. The siblings were gifted two pieces of land in Florida by their grandfather, who retired to the Sunshine State.

“Sherry suggested we find a way to donate the land to the school,” Miles shared.

And that is how GHS became the owner of two parcels of land in Florida, which the school was able to sell, using the proceeds to help fund its continued operations.

Donating the land was easy, Miles and Sherry said, and came with an advantageous tax break. The two encourage others to consider planned giving, whether you have a property to donate, a vehicle you can sell for the school’s benefit, or stock you can transfer to Gifft Hill School as part of your estate planning.

“I’ve found Gifft Hill School to be one of the most rewarding institutions to give to and to be able to see the results of my efforts,” said Miles. “With every student that graduates from Gifft Hill and takes the skills given to them, I feel like I’m doing something good for St. John in a long-term way.”

MEMBERS Thank you to the current members of our 1978 Society who have included Gifft Hill School in their estate plans:
Ms. Ruth A. Doan
Mr. Miles and Mrs. Susan Stair
Mr. Rich Emmett
Mr. Dana and Mrs. Martha Robes
Mr. Mark and Mrs. Tina Brinson
The Hans J. Tiller Trust
Kenneth S. and Elaine A. Mills
Mr. Samuel and Mrs. Kay McCullough

Ways to Give

CREDIT CARD
To contribute by credit card, please visit our website at:
www.giffthillschool.org/give

CHECK
Please make checks payable to Gifft Hill School and mail to:
Gifft Hill School
5000 Estate Enighed PMB 356
St. John VI 00830

Direct Money Transfer
Incoming Wire Instructions: Bank: Citibank, New York
ABA: 021000089
111 Wall Street, New York, NY 10043
SWIFT: CITIUS33
Beneficiary: Morgan Stanley
Beneficiary Acct Number: 40611172
1300 Thames St., Baltimore, MD 21231
For Further Credit: GIFFT Hill School Inc;
Account number 013-022644

SECURITIES/STOCK:
To make a gift of stock, please notify the Advancement Office at
Giff Hill School in advance of the transfer by contacting 340-776-1730 or advancement@giffthillschool.org use the following:
Direct Transfer of Securities
Morgan Stanley DTC# 0015
Account name: GIFFT Hill School Inc
Account number: 013-022644

Types of Giving

ANNUAL FUND

UNRESTRICTED: The Annual Fund supports the school’s operating budget. Giving options include one-time donations, recurring monthly gifts, and multiple-year pledges. Your gift can be increased or doubled if your employer sponsors a matching gift program.

SCHOLARSHIP RESTRICTED: Another option is restricting your gift to scholarships. This fund goes directly to supporting tuition assistance for students. All proceeds from our annual auction benefit the student scholarship fund.

ENDOWMENT

UNRESTRICTED: This fund provides the school with annual operating support towards areas including merit and need-based financial aid, faculty salaries, and overall operations. The fund is invested and grows in perpetuity to provide resources to the school.

RESTRICTED (NAMED FUNDS): The minimum gift to establish a named endowed fund at Gifft Hill School is $50,000. The annual draw from these funds supports specific scholarships, faculty, and other operational needs. Funds are often created in memory or honor of a loved one or community member.