



# Epiphany School Graduate Report

## Overview

The Epiphany School opened its doors in September of 1998 to 40 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. We graduated our first 8<sup>th</sup> grade class, therefore, in June of 2001. Our oldest graduates are twenty-one years old or older. If they have not repeated a year or taken time off, they are currently juniors in college. This could mean that the first graduates to serve as interns would work at Epiphany in the fall of 2009.

It has been clear to those of us in leadership positions at the school, almost from the very beginning, that Epiphany's graduates would continue to need support in the larger community as they tackled high school, college, and their first employment opportunities. The Flora Hewlett Foundation issued a report in con-

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junction with Stanford University entitled, “Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds .” In this report the authors state that lack of support from home and other systems is the number one reason low income youth fail in their endeavors. The report emphasizes all the ways in

which affluent youth between 14 and 25 have supportive adults and communities built into their lives. The best teachers, best college professors, best sports leagues and coaches, most stable and supportive churches and leaders, surround them. While there are obviously exceptions to this rule, the reality is that the very youth who lack support at home then fail to be offered substantive adult support during their formative years of independence.

There is no question that our graduates need all the support and guidance we as a school community can provide. Graduate Support at Epiphany began as twenty-hour-per-week, part-time job charged with the supervision and support of forty gradu-

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ates. Currently the job is manned by two adults who work some 50 – 60 hours per week, guiding, advising, and challenging 130 former students.



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There is no clearer measure of the success of Epiphany than who our graduates become. We are proud that so many of our graduates are either in college or work ready by the time they finish high school. Our numbers are especially noteworthy when we compare our students to their peers who did not have the benefit of an Epiphany education. Nonetheless, our graduates have suffered their share of both mistakes and setbacks. Their experiences point to many improvements Epiphany could make, both in terms of preparation and high school placement.

## A Week In the Graduate Support Office

While there is no typical week in the Graduate Support Office, the dilemmas from a week in June are detailed below. Will and Lino helped:

- A student who was attempting to transfer back to a charter school in Boston, but her previous school in Florida had lost her transcript
- A student who needed English help to prepare for being a freshman at the Roxbury Latin School
- A student who was displaying more and more signs of mental illness
- A student who wanted to re-up for an internship at Harvard Medical School
- A student who wanted to pursue mechanic school
- A student who was applying early decision to Brown and needed a recommendation
- A student who was going in front of the discipline committee at his boarding school and had no idea how to advocate for himself
- A student who was being removed from a Catholic School because it could not support her learning disabilities
- A student anxious to get his drivers license because he could get a better job if he could drive for his employer

Another important measure of the effectiveness of Graduate Support is of course the extent of our contact. We have located and spoken to all but three of our Epiphany graduates. Last year 81% of our graduates returned to Epiphany on at least three occasions during the academic year. Many came nightly and many came to fulfill community service requirements for their high schools. Many of them sought out help and advice from Will Brown or Lino Sanchez, the program's co-directors. Even more students stopped by to be tutored, to play pick-up basketball, to use the computers, to be tutored, to be encouraged, to be disciplined, or even just to be hugged. One hears:

“Don’t worry honey, we’ll figure out about how to buy that \$250 chemistry textbook.”

“Boy, why don’t you explain to Mrs Daly how I saw you hanging downtown with those kids you shouldn’t be with?” And over and over again, from Will and Lino, the same encouragement: “We can do this!” And they mean it.

Something the Board of Epiphany is going to have to ascertain is just how to measure the success of Epiphany – the number of graduates in college, the number



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who return here to work, the number who live out of poverty, the number who are capable of long term, intimate relationships, the number who end up working for and in their communities. In putting this report together we have been struck by the realization, and by the luxury, of the fact that we know, very well, the vast majority of the people to whom these numbers refer. Judgments made about the success of Epiphany based solely on these numbers would be both incomplete and one-dimensional.



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## Graduate Support 2006-2007

### Introduction

The transition from a long-standing Graduate Support director, Walker Coppedge, to two new co-directors, Will Brown and Lino Sanchez, was filled with challenges. Fortunately, the fact that both Will and Lino were already members of the Epiphany community in other capacities smoothed the process. The summer of 2006 began with several students showing up at Epiphany looking for employment. The problem, of course, was that so many deadlines had already passed. Some had graduated from high school and didn't have a plan. Others had dropped out and wanted to get back in, or they needed guidance as to how to get their GED in order to move forward. Still others had started college, had not done well, and needed other options. A few stopped by just to say "hi" or to see if they could help us. Eventually we decided that we would focus on three imperatives during the upcoming year: offering direct service to more students, building even more collaborations with other agencies so as to provide our graduates with more opportunities, and gathering and organizing data so as to increase our basic contact information and gain a better sense of each student's whereabouts and future goals.

### Direct Service

Our most immediate goal was to cast the net of graduate support wider. We really wanted to be in touch with all Epiphany graduates. This report was born first and foremost of our feeling that we should have current information on, and offer support to, everyone. The Graduate Support committee met in September to set goals. We began the year planning our annual graduate support reunion. We wanted this to be the event with the best attendance ever, and it was. Over 70 graduates came to Epiphany the day before Thanksgiving. They enjoyed great food and a raffle which meant that several graduates went home with Ipods and gift certificates to Barnes and Nobles. The event culminated with a game between Epiphany graduates and teachers. It was very special to have all those graduates in the school house at the same time.

We also composed an alumni committee of 10 graduates, two from each graduating class. The committee met only a few times this year and is still in the planning phase. Nonetheless they are interested in planning more graduate events



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and in doing monthly service trips. They are here to be the voices of all our graduates, and we are optimistic about their leadership.

As graduates show up at our doorstep we must assess their needs. Some come every day for a place to do school work, to play basketball, or to get a T-pass. Others come for help in planning their next step. Others are just in search of a friendly ear or a shoulder to lean on. Some of our weekly tasks include:

- Connecting students with different organizations
- Helping students throughout their high school years by monitoring homework, receiving grades, and working with parents
- Enrolling those who do not graduate high school in GED programs
- Writing recommendations for jobs and scholarships
- Advising our graduates on resume writing, job searches, and placement
- Visiting graduates weekly at school and meeting with their advisors
- Aiding graduates in apartment searches or referring them to shelters, medical services, counseling

## Collaborations

This year we were able to collaborate with many other agencies and schools that allowed our graduates wonderful opportunities.

- **Summer Search** is a national leadership development program. The first summer in the program, students attend a wilderness trip within in the United States. In their second year, they travel abroad. Graduates have gone to Japan, Brazil, Jamaica, and Spain.
- **Higher Mountain Institute** works to nurture personal growth through interaction with nature and participation in a strong community. The High Peaks Adventure is an action-packed, two-week wilderness program for 14-15 year olds at the High Mountain Institute in Leadville, Colorado.
- **INROADS** is the premier organization for developing and placing talented minority youth in business and industry and preparing them for corporate and community leadership. 12 Epiphany graduates attended a seminar at Putnam Investments to learn more about the program. Currently, we have one graduate participating and are looking to increase this number this year.



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- **Bottom Line**'s goal is to improve the Boston community by helping disadvantaged youth get into college, graduate from college, and go far in life. Some 40 Epiphany students are affiliated with Bottom Line.
- **The Laurel Ball** is an event for students from independent schools all over the city. Each year we chaperone between 10 and 20 Epiphany graduates to this event.
- **Youth Enrichment Services** engages urban kids in an experience that takes them places they've never been before, mentally and physically. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany and the Youth Enrichment Services collaborated and took 15 graduates on a trip skiing to the Magic Mountain in Vermont.
- **Chyten Standardized Test Prep** gets students prepared for the SAT. They offer a significant discount for SAT prep classes, which take place at Epiphany once a week for 12 weeks.
- **Gear Up of College** was a three-day seminar held at Northeastern University addressing all aspects of the college experience for graduates of Epiphany, Nativity Prep, and Roxbury Prep.
- **The Salem State College Tour** provides high school seniors with the opportunity to visit Salem State and receive an admissions decision on the day of the visit. Salem State gives students the opportunity to get a sense of the college experience through campus tours and meeting with the admissions staff.
- **Boston Scholars** provides scholarships and mentors which help guide students through the challenges of high school. Every year Boston Scholars comes to Epiphany to interview all our 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and several are chosen each year as scholarship recipients.
- **The Stephen Phillips Memorial Scholarship Fund** offers college scholarships to students with financial need who display academic excellence, strong citizenship and character, and a desire to make a meaningful contribution to society. Several of our college students are recipients of this award.
- In **Project Success**, students participate in paid, mentored, summer research internships at Harvard Medical School and its affiliated institutions. The program is augmented by seminars and workshops given by faculty and administrators, site visits, and career counseling.



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- **The Food Project** partners youth and adults to create social change through sustainable agriculture. 2 of our graduates worked at the farm this year.
- Through the **Department of Recreation and Conservation Life Guard Training** we had 12 graduates receive training or certification in three general areas: Lifeguard Training, First Aid, and CPR.
- **Year Up** is a one-year, intensive training program that provides urban young adults, 18-24, with a unique combination of technical and professional skills, college credits, an educational stipend, and corporate apprenticeship. Several students participated in this program and are currently enrolled in college or working full-time in the field in which they interned.
- The **B-SAFE Program (Bishop's Summer Academic and Fun Enrichment)** offers four sites of day camp for low income children around the city of Boston. This summer, 6 of our graduates served as counselors in the program.
- **Groton Summer Intensive** is a four week academic, boarding summer experience. This past summer, 4 of our graduates served as counselors.
- **The Epiphany Work Program** provides employment opportunities at Epiphany. This summer, 3 students worked at the school.

## Data

The amount of information that needed to be transferred, culled, and collected was tremendous and at times overwhelming. The first thing that we noticed was that there was no centralized location for data, and we quickly learned that much of the data we had was no longer relevant. The task was to pull together the information we had in regards to students as well as resources. The numerous filing cabinets of information were whittled down to several key resource binders for different things such as summer programs, jobs, internships, scholarships etc... Then came the hard work: getting the student data together and in a usable format. Research was done on several different low-cost programs and a basic computer program called ACT was purchased. Inputting information into ACT continues to be a challenge as it is very time consuming to enter all the relevant data into the program. Once we gathered all the contact information, we realized we needed to ask crucial questions of our graduates. We wrote up a survey, and then began the long process of



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calling each graduate and getting them to answer the questions. In the end, we hired graduates to collect information on other graduates. A significant portion of the information garnered in this report came as the result of student responses to the survey.



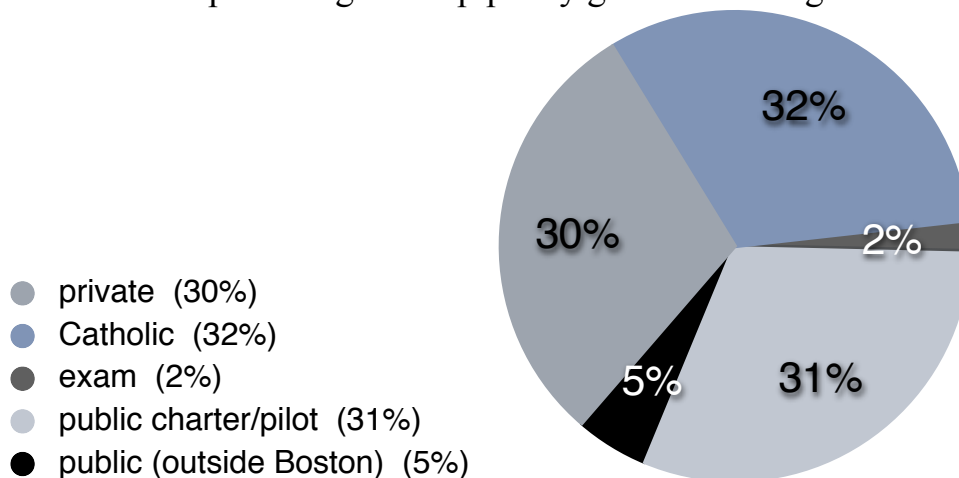
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## Statistics

In trying to gauge the success of the Epiphany graduate support program, we asked ourselves a series of questions about what our graduates do after moving on from middle school. We were concerned both with the rates of continued education for Epiphany graduates and how those percentages compare with statistics from comparable populations.

**Question #1: What percent of Epiphany graduates go on to high school, and specifically, which schools do they attend?**

First and foremost, it must be mentioned that **100% of 8th graders who graduated from Epiphany have enrolled in and started high school.** The comparable statistic for 8th graders graduating from Boston Public Schools is unknown, but certainly far smaller than the 100% rate Epiphany has posted. Epiphany students go on to a variety of high schools. The high school placement team works hard to encourage students to apply to schools that will fit their strengths and needs. Epiphany graduates attend private, Catholic, public charter/pilot, and exam schools as well as public schools outside of Boston, in some cases. Figure 1 shows the break down of percentages of Epiphany graduates that go to each type of school.



**Figure 1: Percent of Epiphany Graduates Who Attend Private, Catholic, Exam, and Public Charter Schools and Public Schools Outside of Boston**



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## Question #2: What percent of our graduates graduate from high school?

Of the 59 graduates in the first three graduating classes at Epiphany, 47 students have (80%) graduated from high school (46 completed the graduation requirements of their respective school and 1 earned a GED). The only somewhat comparable statistic we could find for Boston Public Schools was a study done on a cohort of students entering the 9th grade in 2003. Four years later, 59.1% of the students had graduated from high school and only 55% of the African American students in the study had graduated. It is important to note that the statistic for Epiphany refers to the percent of students graduating 8th grade who also graduate high school, while the BPS statistic refers to the percentage of students entering the 9th grade who graduate high school. Including the Boston Public School students who graduate 8th grade but do not enroll in high school would lower the BPS statistics. We can also compare the Epiphany statistic to the findings of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88). 76.5 % of the low income students in the study had graduated from high school or earned a GED by the year 2000, 12 years after graduating from 8th grade. It should also be noted that 7 of the 12 Epiphany graduates who have not yet graduated from high school are still in school working to complete the requirements for graduation.

**Table 1: Percent of Students Who Graduate High School**

Group	Percentage of Students Who Graduated H.S. or Earned a GED
Epiphany <sup>1</sup>	80%
Boston Public Schools <sup>2</sup>	59.1%

1 Epiphany graduates who graduate from high school

2 The Boston Public School 9th graders who graduate from high school



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It is also fascinating to look at the percentages of Epiphany graduates who actually graduate from each category of high school. The information regarding this can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Percent of Epiphany Graduates From the First Three Graduating Classes Who Graduate From the School in Which They Initially Enrolled

Type of School	Number of Students Enrolled	Percentage of Enrolled Students Who Graduate
Private	15	67%
Catholic	18	67%
Exam	1	0%
Charter/Pilot	21	48%
Public	4	75%

### Question #3: What percent of our graduates are in college?

In analyzing the data for this section, we looked only at the 59 students from our first three graduating classes who are old enough to be in college. 34 of those 59 students (58%) are actually in college. We once again had difficulty finding a comparable statistic for Boston Public Schools. The closest we could come was a document stating that 46% of BPS graduates plan to go to college upon graduating high school. It is important to note a few major problems with this statistic. First, our number is the percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduates who go on to college. Their number is the percent of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade graduates who plan to go to college. Thus, their number is, in fact, 46% of 59.1% (27.2%), since only 59.1% matriculate to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. 58% as compared to 27% is a number we can be proud of. Looking at it another way, if we ask what percent of our 12<sup>th</sup> grade graduates are in college our statistic jumps to 68%. Secondly, they do not have statistics as to whether or where graduates enrolled, but only that they were planning to go. Each of our students is actually in college. Furthermore, the same study cited that 49% of graduates were listed as “information not available.” More significantly, the Bridgespan



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Group conducted a study of 4.2 million students in order to determine rates of college enrollment and found that 33% of the 2.1 million low income students went to college, with 21% of enrolling students graduating. Again, 58% as compared to 33% is a number we can be proud of. Finally, the NELS study mentioned in the previous question found that 44.8% of the low income students had some post-secondary education but no degree, 6% of students had a bachelor’s degree, and 0.4% had a masters degree or higher, meaning that 51.2% of the students enrolled in college. Below, Table 3 shows a comparison of Epiphany to BPS to the Bridgespan and NELS studies.

**Table 3:** Percent of Students From Epiphany, Boston Public Schools, and the Bridgespan and NELS Studies Who Enroll in College

Group	Percentage of Students Enrolled in College
Epiphany	58%
Bridgespan Group Study	33%

It is also important to note that initial high school placement matters. Table 4 shows how much more likely an Epiphany graduate who earns a degree from a private or Catholic school is to attend college than a graduate who earns a degree from a charter/pilot or district high school.

**Table 4:** Percent of Epiphany Graduates Currently in College Based on the Type of High School From Which They Graduated

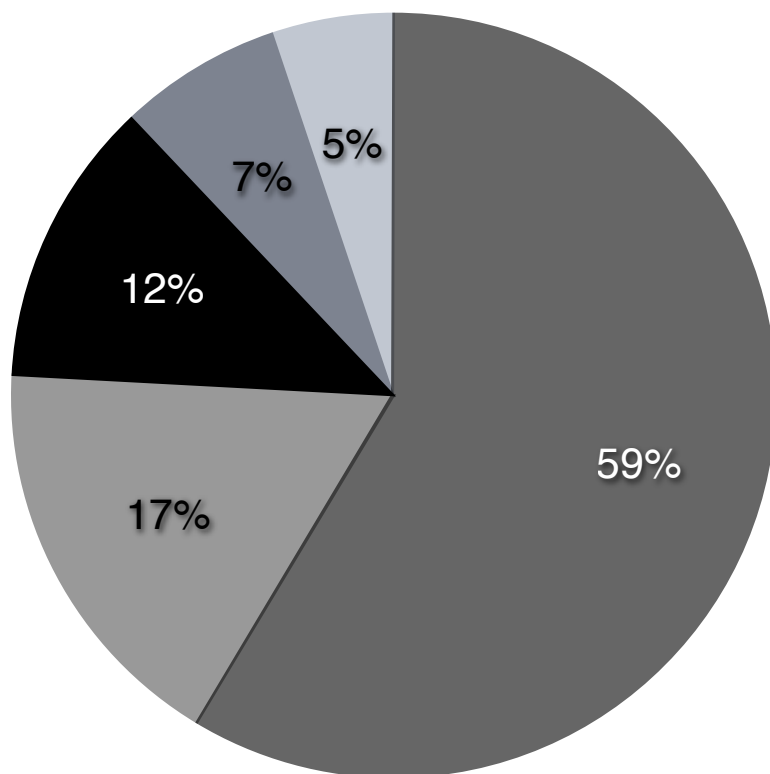
Type of High School	Percent of Students Currently in College
Private	91%
Catholic	90%
Charter/Pilot	46%
Public	38%



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Question #4: With what percent of our graduates are we currently in touch?

In the Graduate Support Office, we define being “in touch” with a student as being in contact with them one time in the last year. We are currently in touch with 97.7% of our graduates. Additionally, we have been in contact with 82% of our graduates more than three times in the last year. We have lost contact with only 3 of the 129 Epiphany graduates (2.3% of all graduates). Below is a chart of what our graduates are currently doing.



**Figure 2:** Percent of Epiphany Graduates Currently In Higher Levels of Education and Pursuing Other Endeavors

It should be noted that one of the 10 students working full time is in the military.

- Attending College (59%)
- Working Full-Time (17%)
- Working to Graduate from High School (12%)
- Unemployed (7%)
- Unknown (No Longer In Touch) (5)



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## Expanding and Deepening Our Vision

We have many ideas about how to improve and deepen Epiphany's graduate support program. The following is a brief description of the various ways we envision this happening in the coming years.

### Introduce Families to the Graduate Support Program Earlier

Too often Epiphany's Graduate Support Program is thought of as beginning when our graduates walk out of our doors and head off to high school. Our hope is that, increasingly, graduate support at Epiphany will begin when students and families start the high school placement process. We would like Epiphany's students and families to begin to envision the ways in which they can use Epiphany as a resource as early as possible. We are committed to doing more when it comes to reaching out to them in formal ways, beginning with 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and families through seminars and information sessions.

Between preparing for tests, visiting schools, applying for financial aid, participating in interviews and completing lengthy applications, it takes most of Epiphany's 8<sup>th</sup> graders a full year of preparation and hard work to get to high school. The vast majority of our students and families are doing this work for the first time, and Epiphany is available to help with each milestone.

It is during the placement process that Epiphany's families and students begin to get a sense of the ways in which they can partner with Epiphany after graduation. It is also a time when Epiphany can help students and families build skills that will ultimately help them communicate with schools, advocate in effective ways, navigate the college process, identify and apply for internships and summer jobs and build long-lasting support networks.

Furthermore, Epiphany's Graduate Support Program believes it can do more to reach out to local schools and admissions officers, introducing them to our students, expanding their understanding of our mission and the existence of the GSP. By formally introducing schools and admissions officers to Epiphany, through information sessions and school visits, we hope to improve our ability to place students in high school and help schools use Epiphany's Graduate Support Program as a resource. We should consider the creation of a committee to help us begin the



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process of advocating for our 8<sup>th</sup> graders during the placement process and beyond and for Epiphany as an institution.

## Dramatically Expand Our Graduate Support Employment Network

The transformative effects of summer employment, internships, and opportunities for Epiphany's graduates are obvious. Therefore, we are interested in building an increasingly formal network of employers, programs, and individuals who can provide Epiphany's graduates with excellent experiences.

In addition to this, we are hoping that Epiphany can increase the amount of funding it has allocated, primarily through the facilities budget, to employ graduates at Epiphany during the school year and throughout the summer. While currently a handful of graduates are employed at Epiphany during the school year, in the evenings, and for the summer months, we believe there is significant room for growth in this area.

We are also in need of expanding vocational opportunities for our graduates who choose this path. Part of this will undoubtedly involve identifying some outstanding "feeder" programs and employers or even individuals who can provide specific vocational assessments for our students. Beyond that, we are interested in hiring a part-time vocational coordinator, as there are so few vocational tracks available. We need support with identifying and researching these opportunities for some of our graduates, and with ultimately placing them and supporting them in such endeavors.

## Develop Evening Programming

On any given evening, there are some twenty graduates in the schoolhouse. While our space is limited, we strive to provide our graduates with computers, quiet workspaces, employment opportunities, gym space and tutoring.

Last year, Epiphany offered a free SAT class for eight 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders and hosted a workshop designed to help students manage their finances. Our dream is that we continue to head in the direction of providing structured and focused evening programming, as opposed to activities that are less formal in nature. We



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are hoping to find creative ways to offer on-site opportunities to our graduates that have both programmatic and educational tie-ins.

## Increase Graduate Events

Epiphany would like to increase the number of events it has for its graduates. Traditionally, we host a Thanksgiving weekend reunion in addition to offering small, monthly events—ski trips, Red Sox games, the Laurel Ball—to interested students. Our goal in expanding the size and number of graduate events we host is to continue to try to build a sense of community among our graduates and to engage them in as many ways as possible. We are also interested in encouraging graduates to join together for service opportunities and for an annual retreat.

## Conduct Graduate Focus Groups

As stated in the overview, while we think the numbers that have come out of our most recent survey are compelling and interesting, we do not think that they tell the whole story. We are hoping to conduct in-depth interviews of a diverse sampling of Epiphany's graduates in the interest of getting a complete picture of their experience at Epiphany and beyond. Our hope is that a process of this kind will help us to understand precisely what students get from the Epiphany experience and how effective we have been in terms of supporting them.