

Samuel Gerlach

Certificate of Accomplishment - Springside Chestnut Hill Academy

Samuel Gerlach is a junior at Springside Chestnut Hill Academy. His sponsor describes him as a student with a powerful voice who is not afraid to open up a racial dialogue. Sam has been able to gain the support and trust of the head administrators at the school to be impactful in addressing the dialogue of racial diversity and understanding head on.

At a student-faculty diversity retreat in the summer of 2015, Sam was charged with assembling a student panel. Sam really went into the student community and purposefully chose an extremely diverse group of 10 panelists. There were students who were African- American, Asian, White, Jewish, Muslim, boys and girls. Each student was able to address the faculty and administrators and share their perspective as a student in their school community. The presentation was so powerful that Head of School tapped Sam as a student leader to continue the dialogue of race relations at the school.

After the retreat, Sam formed the Upper School Affinity Group for students of color which focuses on student-centered programming to promote diversity and understanding. Sam has led nine assemblies this school year on diversity. The assemblies, while at times uncomfortable, have continued the dialogue on race relations at the school. On Martin Luther King Day, Sam and the Affinity Group showed "I'm Not a Racist, am I?" and facilitated group discussions for students, parents and faculty.

Sam has also been working to expand the Affinity Group to the Middle Schools and even the Lower Schools. He is currently working to cultivate Middle School student leaders so that programming about racial acceptance can begin there. Sam wants to empower other students to be leaders in the discussion because he feels that kids are more likely to be receptive to positive peer influences.