

# THE CALL TO TEACH

By Judy Mayer

It is often said that excellent teachers respond to a call to serve. For them, teaching is a gift that they share with their students. For four young men, this calling is evolving along different paths, yet it is rooted in their experiences at Charlotte Latin. Sterling Thomas '02, William McEachern '04, Ryan Marklewitz '07, and Jacob Segal '09 are currently teaching or pursuing degrees in education.

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**STERLING THOMAS '02** *Thomas worked during the 2008-09 school year at Edmondson-Westside High School in West Baltimore, Maryland, teaching two sections of tenth grade English and a speech elective for seniors. "My classes are 1.5 hours long and I have 33-35 students in each class," Thomas states. Located in one of the lowest income neighborhoods in Baltimore, the school also is a trade or vocational school, so students work toward certification in nursing, cosmetology, auto-mechanics and similar programs.*

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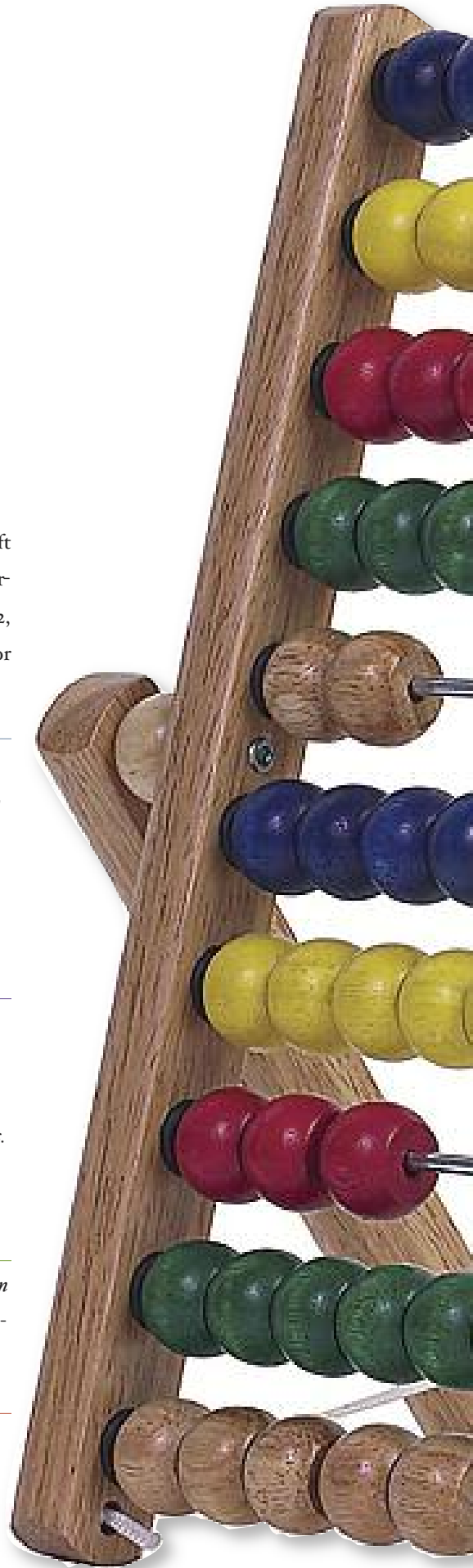
**WILLIAM M<sup>C</sup>EACHERN '04** *McEachern just completed a year teaching at Montgomery Bell Academy (MBA), a private day school for boys in seventh through twelfth grades in Nashville, Tennessee. He taught U.S. government and economics to seniors, coached seventh grade basketball and middle school baseball, and worked in the college counseling and admissions offices. In addition, he served as a faculty sponsor for the school's chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). He returned to Latin in August to teach Middle School science and math.*

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**RYAN MARKLEWITZ '07** *Having completed his sophomore year at Middlebury College in Vermont, Marklewitz transferred to Elon University to pursue a degree in elementary school education. He is also assisting with coaching Latin's swim team.*

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**JACOB SEGAL '09** *Segal just completed his senior year at Latin and is beginning his freshman year at Western Carolina University to work toward a degree in elementary education.*



TEACHING WAS IN THEIR FUTURE

Each young man is at different point in his career and determined that teaching was in his future through very different circumstances. During high school and college, Thomas never considered becoming a teacher. Upon graduation from the University of Georgia with a major in psychology and a minor in English, he recalls, "The decision to teach came to me almost by default. I remember driving back home to Charlotte from the University of Georgia, and the thought hit me: I want to do something more than just earn a paycheck." A stint in Wyoming teaching outdoor education showed Thomas that he worked better with children than adults. "I taught half of a year in Charlotte at Trinity Episcopal School before accepting a job overseas teaching eighth grade language arts at the International School of Trieste, Italy. After that I was sold on teaching."

McEachern headed straight to a teaching position after earning a Bachelor of Arts in economics from Princeton University in 2008. As the son of Latin teachers Pete and Page McEachern, William is pursuing the "family" business. McEachern says, "To a large degree, the example of my parents and their careers in secondary education motivated my desire to teach. I have watched the joy that they derive from educating young people, and I have a heart for mentoring youth, specifically boys. Opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, present themselves in which a teacher may provide encouragement and advice with regards to various life issues."

Like McEachern, Marklewitz is following the lead of his parents, current Latin teacher John Marklewitz and Ruth Marklewitz, who

previously taught at Latin. Although he entered college intending to become a veterinarian, he was curious about a career in education and decided to explore that option. During the summer between his freshman and sophomore years, Marklewitz worked as an assistant coach for the Raintree Swim Club team. He also served as an instructor at the Mecklenburg Aquatic Club. "It was fun for me to interact with kids. It's a challenge, but I like finding different ways to explain things to a kid when he or she is struggling to understand something."



*Above William McEachern '04 and right Ryan Marklewitz '07*



Marklewitz's research continued. "I wanted to experience being in the classroom to confirm that teaching was what I really wanted to do. Middlebury offers an option for students to participate in an internship for credit during the January term," he explains. He contacted Upper School Head Lawrence Wall, who was very supportive of the plan that Marklewitz created for his internship, which took place over a four-week period in January of 2009 and involved instructional time in all three divisions.

Marklewitz's interest in elementary school education became more focused after he participated in the internship at Latin. "In the beginning, I was 99% sure

that I wanted to be an Upper School teacher," he recalls. "I am a 'biology nerd,' and it was rewarding and challenging working with the Middle and Upper School students and helping in the science labs, but it just wasn't the experience that I wanted." Then he headed to the Lower School.

"I had no prior interest in teaching Lower School students, but I was hooked after one day. The relationship that you develop with the kids from spending a whole day with them is so fulfill-

ing,” he states. “You are the significant adult in their lives during the day, and they share their lives with you. By showing an interest in them they really open up to you and you can really have an impact on their lives.”

Segal also became committed to teaching elementary school after working this past school year in a special program that was developed especially for him. After learning of Segal’s interest in becoming a teacher, Headmaster Arch McIntosh asked Lower School Head Mark Tayloe and four of his male colleagues to mentor Segal. Teachers Russell Buxton, Michael Gutmann, Andrew Hammitt, and Neil McConaughy responded by managing the internship for Segal and mentoring him as he rotated through their Lower School classes.

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*-Sterling Thomas '02*

The teaching practicum was designed to provide Segal with exposure to educational theories, teaching strategies, and classroom techniques, as well as providing him with a deep insight into the daily roles and responsibilities of an elementary school educator. “First semester, I spent a month at a time in each grade (second through fifth) and then repeated the cycle during the second semester,” explains Segal. “I was in the classroom for an hour a day, often working with small groups or individual students, and I created lessons, including a version of Candyland to teach multiplication.” Segal also spent time with his mentors to review their feedback and kept a journal of his progress to document his “growth as a young educator.”

Thomas and McEachern also have or are participating in special programs that are designed to encourage and support persons who are pursuing careers in education. “I am working towards a Master’s degree in Secondary English Education at Johns Hopkins University,” says Thomas. The degree is largely funded by the Baltimore City Teaching Residency Program, which Thomas entered this year. “It is very similar to Teach for America, but specifically for the city of Baltimore,” he explains.

McEachern states, “My position at MBA was an endowed one-year internship designed to bring a recent Ivy League graduate to the school and give him various responsibilities. The intern teaches one class, coaches a sport or sports of his choosing, and provides administrative help in the college counseling and admissions offices. In addition, the hope is that MBA students will learn about the intern’s college experiences, which may be helpful in instructing their own college choices.”

#### EXPERIENCES IN THE CLASSROOM

As different as their paths have been so far, all of the men share a sense of enthusiasm for the process of learning. Thomas’ own quest for knowledge propels him to teach. “For some reason when I finished being a student, I wanted to regain that demand of constantly being required to learn new things.” McEachern appreciates his students’ efforts. “My favorite moments in teaching occur when a student exceeds his own expectations,” says McEachern. “For example, a student of mine may have spent the majority of a week swimming in uncertainty about a subject. However, once we sit down one-on-one to review example questions, he develops confidence in his ability to answer questions and realizes that the material is not as insurmountable as he once thought.” Marklewitz echoes this sentiment. “It is the most rewarding experience when you see that proverbial light go off in kids’ eyes when they ‘get it.’ Their excitement reflects back on me...they did it, but I feel good because I

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helped.” Segal, too, enjoys contributing to his students’ success. “It is very rewarding when something you said makes a lesson click for a student.”

The young men all recognize that teaching is hard work. “Teaching takes a lot of creativity and patience,” says Thomas. “And I dislike being a disciplinarian. I have a hard time getting angry with students for doing the same things I once did ten years ago. So, I started off trying to be a ‘cool’ teacher, but you learn quickly that a ‘cool’ teacher is the last thing they need. I’m still not as strict as I should be, but I’m working on it.”

McEachern’s least favorite aspect of teaching is observing the time demands and pressures placed on his students. He says, “Teachers have some obligation to insure that students maximize their potential; however, due to the competitiveness of college admissions and even the simple enjoyment that students get out of various activities, teenagers are asked to dedicate significant amounts of time to a number of activities. Frequently, the result for students is a daily wrestling contest with minor sleep deprivation.”

Their classrooms also have yielded some surprises for the young men. McEachern says, “I probably should not have been surprised by this, but it took me several days to realize how immediately my excitement about a given topic affects the students’ excitement about it.” Thomas says, “It was a surprise for me being called ‘Mr. Thomas’ (at first I would look around for my dad). That and how much time it takes to plan a lesson, grade work, and all the other organization that goes into it. It is a much harder job than I could have ever imagined.” Segal agrees that teaching requires a lot more preparation time than he expected. “I prepared what I thought was a 15-minute lesson

for my first class. We covered the material in about a minute and half,” he recalls with a laugh. “After that I decided I would take things more seriously.”

Apparently his extra time and attention paid off. McConaughy states that “Jacob showed tremendous improvement because he came in every day organized and ready to work.” He quoted one of his students who said, “Mr. Segal made learning fun and exciting.” Gutmann states that he observed “tremendous growth” as Segal learned the spectrum of students’ abilities and learning styles. Hammitt says, “It’s been a privilege to have him in my classroom. The kids are disappointed when he doesn’t come.”

### THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS

The importance of mentors is a common theme for all four men. Says Thomas, “I still remember a conversation with Mr. Weiss when I was in tenth grade. He told me that I reminded him a lot of himself when he was a student. At the time I was a teenager and did not want to hear that from any teacher. But I often think back to that now, and would certainly like to be more like him as a teacher. Also, Mr. Edwards (whom I still call ‘Chuckie’) was

a neighbor of mine growing up and our families always get together over the holidays. I always admired the passionate way he talked about his profession. He has always reached out to me to offer all the support he can provide in terms of resources and advice.”

Marklewitz thanks everyone at Latin who facilitated his internship, particularly Mary Gibson, in whose third grade class he returned often. “She’s very knowledgeable and open to my questions,” says Marklewitz. “And I observed that Mr. Gutmann loves to teach and he understood what I want to do.”



*Above Jacob Segal '09  
and right  
Sterling Thomas '02*



Latin's commitment to excellence in teaching continues to inspire the young men.

Segal observes, "When I look back, I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity that I've been given to get experience in my field of interest." During a Board of Trustees' meeting in May, McIntosh thanked Segal's mentors for their investment in his life. "This is the example of what you can do in an independent school by providing opportunities that don't fall into the 'routine.' We are grateful for your commitment to Jacob."

Thomas believes that Latin inspired his decision to teach "but it took me a while to realize just how much. My current experience, teaching in a very difficult learning environment, has really made me aware how much I benefited from my time at Latin. Not only from the challenges in the classroom, but the overall community. I took it for

granted while I was there, but Latin, as a school and as a community, is such a culture of rigor and success. I can now appreciate the value of spending so much of my teenage years in an atmosphere of such optimistic support and access to achievement."

The nurturing of future teachers will once again benefit Latin's students as McEachern returns to the School to teach Middle School science. He states, "I had a very meaningful academic experience at Latin due to the passion and compassion of many Latin teachers. Thus, I developed a desire to impact young people as they do. Latin played an integral part in preparing me for life choices. The school imbued me with a sense of honor, a sense of personal responsibility, and a dedication to service. I directly link my time at Latin to my ability to successfully begin my young adult life independently and to my desire to pursue a service-oriented vocation."

## HEADMASTER'S CORNER - *cont'd from p.10*

for working with students not as well behaved as those typically found at Latin. Once Jacob had completed his background reading and discussions on the subject of classroom management, the teachers stepped out of the classroom after priming a few well-placed students to purposefully misbehave. The objective of this exercise was to see how Jacob would respond with a class of unruly students and whether or not he could apply some of the strategies he had been learning about as part of his reading assignments. According to Mr. Buxton, Jacob did a "superb job."

"The most powerful tool for Jacob was the personal reflection journal he was required to maintain," according to his

teacher mentors. In the journal Jacob was expected to respond to his observations, his teaching performance or his readings in personal written reflections on a daily basis.

At the close of his internship, I asked Jacob, Mr. Hammitt, Mr. Gutmann, Mr. McConaughy and Mr. Buxton to share their experiences with our Board of Trustees at the Board meeting on May 11. From their remarks and the expression on Jacob's face, it was obvious that the student internship program had been a great success; a win-win for all involved.

Let's make that a win-win-win...

As fourth grader Madison Hembrick expressed it from a student's point of view: "Jacob made me feel better about math because he was helpful and cared about my learning."

And what about Jacob's future plans? I am pleased to report that Jacob is enrolled at Western Carolina University where he plans to major in elementary education.

