

## **Southeast Side Experience Incubator**

*St. Francis de Sales High School Work Study Program*

Press Release

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Big Shoulders Fund Launches the Southeast Side Experience Incubator**

*St. Francis de Sales High School will host a work study program through the incubator, offering students the opportunity to gain valuable real-world job experience while continuing their education*

**Chicago – May 18, 2022**

Big Shoulders Fund is pleased to announce the launch of the Southeast Side Experience Incubator (SSEI), which will serve as a platform for programs and activities benefitting schools in its network. Initially, it will host the St. Francis de Sales High School Work Study Program. Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, St. Francis de Sales High School, part of the Big Shoulders Fund network of schools, will provide students with a tremendous opportunity to gain valuable life experience and develop real world job skills while continuing to receive a high-quality college prep education.

Through this work study program, students will have the opportunity to work in law firms, hospitals, financial institutions, universities, car dealerships, the administrative departments of manufacturing facilities, and more. Students who participate in the work study program receive professional, real-world experience to enhance their college and career readiness, and are provided job skills training and ongoing support. Funds earned by the students in these jobs will significantly offset the cost of tuition for families.

“Over the last decade, we have partnered with and been the largest funder of St. Francis de Sales High School and investor in their students because we know how important this school is to the East Side community of Chicago and that its incredibly talented students only lack for access to ample opportunities,” said Josh Hale, President and CEO of Big Shoulders Fund. “We believe the Southeast Side Experience Incubator and its work study program will best serve the community and its high school students by giving a fundamentally different academic, work and life experience.”

“Work experience like the ones envisioned with this program will help further student achievement and serve as a differentiator in admissions, scholarship, and hiring decisions at the post-secondary level,” he added.

The effort to launch this work study program at St. Francis de Sales High School began in September 2017 when a committee of community stakeholders was formed. The committee spent the better part of the year talking to community members, businesses, families, area elementary schools, and alumni to understand their interest in and the potential for such a program. The response and enthusiasm for the program was overwhelmingly positive.

“The name, ‘Southeast Side Experience Incubator’, says it best. We are providing experiences to transform lives, improve outcomes in our community, and level the playing field for our kids,”

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said Roni Facen, Principal and CEO of St. Francis de Sales High School. "Equity is one of the core values of the work at St. Francis de Sales and the SSEI work study program will help us break down barriers and better prepare students for success in college and in life"

St. Francis de Sales High School is the oldest Catholic co-educational high school in Chicago and has seen increased interest and growth under the leadership of Principal and CEO Roni Facen. The school will continue to offer a strong academic education in conjunction with this work study. The academic curriculum will be delivered in four days each week so that students can participate one day per week in entry level work or education and training.

Work partners will support the program by employing a team of students in either an office setting or remotely at St. Francis de Sales High School. Ten work study partners have already committed to supporting work study next year. The work to secure the jobs necessary to support work study is being led by a committee of community leaders and business executives.

For more information, visit [www.southeastsideincubator.org](http://www.southeastsideincubator.org).

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### **About Big Shoulders Fund**

Inspired by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Big Shoulders Fund was founded by a group of business and civic leaders in 1986, raising more than \$500 million to date, to create wider access to a network of schools for low-income students. For more than 35 years, Big Shoulders Fund has helped Chicago's children in need achieve their dreams through access to a quality, values-based education. Big Shoulders Fund accomplishes this by investing more than \$30 million annually in scholarship support and academic enrichment for students, operational improvements for schools, leadership development programs for the next generation of school leaders, and academic programs and professional development for teachers. Big Shoulders has earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest evaluator of nonprofit, for 15 consecutive years, a distinction held by less than one percent of nonprofit organizations nationally. For more information, visit [www.bigshouldersfund.org](http://www.bigshouldersfund.org).

### **About St. Francis de Sales High School**

St. Francis de Sales High School is located at 101<sup>st</sup> and Ewing on the Southeast Side of Chicago and has served families from their community and beyond for more than 80 years. It has been located in its current building since 1958. Since 1962, the school has been sponsored by the Archdiocese of Chicago. In 2013-2014, Big Shoulders Fund became the school's primary financial donor and partner. St. Francis de Sales High School has always served working class families, many who immigrated to the United States to make a better life for their families. As steel mills and manufacturing plants have closed and businesses have moved, the economic stability of the neighborhood has dramatically changed. The Southeast Side still attracts hard-working families who want to give their children the opportunity that only an education can

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provide. Under the leadership of Roni Facen, the school has experienced a 40% increase in enrollment and increased investment from new partners.

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