**HARRY TOTTEN EXCITED TO CREATE LIFELONG READERS**

By M.B. Dillon

There’s nothing easy about teaching in-person in the middle of a pandemic. But Harry Totten, Gesu School’s new English teacher, loves his new job -- challenges and all.

“One of the things I try to bring to the table every single day is a sense of enthusiasm,” said Totten, the 7th-grade homeroom teacher. “I am coming in every day and giving it 110 percent. Students coming in are going to know that I’m excited about what we’re doing.”

A product of Dearborn Divine Child, Totten earned his bachelor’s degree in English with certification in secondary education from Michigan State University in 2017. “I have always loved reading. I was always the kid with a book in my hands, reading whenever I could get a chance,” said Totten. “I was also the one, when we had family gatherings, to be organizing activities for my little cousins to do. I’m good with kids and I love reading, so being an English teacher makes a lot of sense for me,” added Totten, who has one younger brother.

Totten was teaching at a middle school in Southgate last year when the coronavirus struck. Transitioning to virtual teaching was a really fascinating experience but it prepared Totten to engage his new virtual learners. “Now everybody is having to adjust to this new state of normalcy,” said Totten, who has just four students in his classroom each day and 13 online learners. “It’s kind of a balancing act figuring out how do I create lessons, and how do I create time in class where I am being fair to both my online learners so they are not just sitting at home disengaged, but also not leaving out my in-person students.”

He thinks outside the box with assignments, too. “The 7th-graders just finished a unit on mythology and heroes. They’re working on creating their own original myths.” It’s up to them to decide “if their main character is going to be mortal or immortal, and what it is that they want,” Totten said. “They’re thinking about traditional mythology elements and making them their own. It allows them to have some fun with it, and gives them a little more creative freedom.

Totten is grateful to be at Gesu. “I have really found a lot of enjoyment in getting to build relationships with these students,” he said. “I am working with kids who don’t look like me, and who are not from the same background as me, and I think that’s amazing. I am getting to learn and grow from what they’re bringing to the classroom, just as I’m hopefully helping them to learn and grow. It has been so enriching.”