



Academy of Whole Learning



2015-16

Annual Report

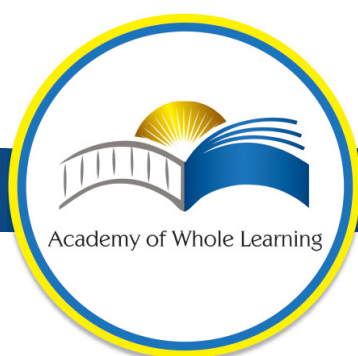
**THE EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL
FOR EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS**

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Our Mission

We provide a personalized learning path integrating academic, social, and life skills for qualifying students with autism spectrum disorder or related learning differences.

Welcome

Dear Friends,

For Academy of Whole Learning (AOWL), this past year can be summed up in three words: recognition, growth, and development. AOWL received well-deserved recognition with state accreditation by the Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association (MNSAA) and national accreditation by the National Federation of Nonpublic School State Accrediting Associations. Being accredited means AOWL has met established, rigorous guidelines and standards for academics, curriculum, finance, and governance. Although it was demanding, the process of accreditation sets AOWL apart and provides a foundation for those who come next to hold to a standard of excellence in education.

For the first time in its history, AOWL has established a seven-year strategic plan focusing on students, staff, parents, and community outreach. It is our long-term vision to continue to grow AOWL throughout the Twin Cities metro area in order to expand the educational opportunities for the many children in and around our community with autism and related learning differences. AOWL has successfully grown from fifteen students in 2012 to fifty-seven students this academic school year. There is a need in our community and a desire on the part of AOWL constituents to continue on this path into the foreseeable future. We are only able to do that with the help of the community and the many volunteers and donors we depend on.

Other exciting developments at Academy of Whole Learning include: enhanced arts and STEM programs, fifteen after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities, expanded summer programming, state championships in both Flag Football and Basketball through Special Olympics, more highly qualified staff, increased student and parent resources, and an expanded board of directors.

We look forward to AOWL's bright future which will include additional expansion so that we can touch many more lives in our community and help our specialized individuals become successful in their own, well-deserved ways. We greatly appreciate your continued, much-needed time, talent, and resources.

Sincerely,

Wayn Rasmussen

Wayn Rasmussen,
Head of School

Janel Dressen

Janel Dressen,
Chair, Board of Directors



School Overview

Today, Academy of Whole Learning (AOWL) is one of the only independent schools in the nation that provides personalized, rigorous academics to students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related learning differences. AOWL began in 2003 when several families banded together to create a school where their children with varying developmental and cognitive disabilities could be safe, nurtured, and guided to reaching their potential. They envisioned a school where their child received direct instruction and attention on a personal level, unlike the education they received in previous settings.

In 2012, the school board decided to take a narrower approach and specialize in an area that was rapidly growing in the public sector. One in 68 people under the age of eighteen was being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. In Minnesota, this ratio is one in 42. Schools were beginning to better understand the needs of these learners, but were also realizing that they could not meet those needs. AOWL could. Staff at AOWL have spent the last four years developing a model that not only serves students with ASD but also students who may have similar needs for their academic environment. In 2012, enrollment was fifteen students, with five staff. Now, we personalize learning and nurture exceptionality in fifty-seven students and boast twenty-six staff. A 501(c)(3) school, AOWL is located currently in St. Louis Park in the Cedar Manor neighborhood.

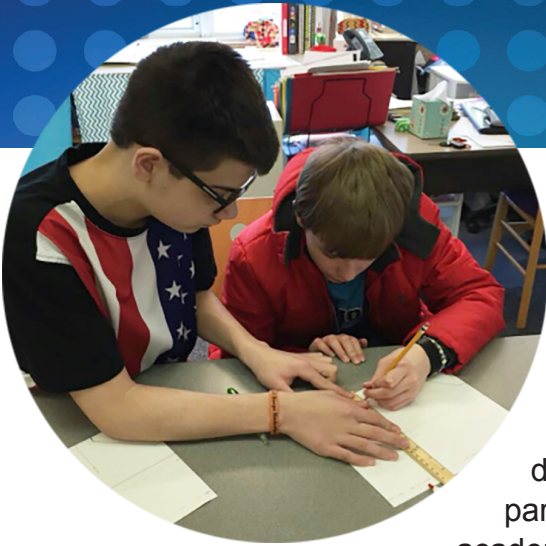
Why do our students succeed? Our environment is finely tuned to the needs of our students. We design our spaces with sensory conscientiousness, academic support, and therapeutic services. Each child at AOWL has a personalized learning plan that speaks to his or her strengths, needs, and future aspirations. Our families become part of a multifaceted support team when they first walk through our doors. This team of teachers and specialists works with the student and his or her family on developing these plans so that caregivers can take part in ensuring their child's success and achievement.

The staff at Academy of Whole Learning collaborate and support each other relying on a strengths-based model of teamwork. As teachers form support networks for each of their students, they are guided by

leadership teams comprised of department heads, school leaders, organizers, and lead teachers. These teams facilitate the day-to-day operations of the school and the overarching schematics of classroom design and programming. Leadership teams in turn are guided by a Board of Directors. Board members are engaged community members and parents of students who convene with the Head of School to oversee the long-term plans for the school. These board members also serve on various committees and are dedicated to growing and sustaining the school's quality and character.



Strategic Plan & Progress Report



In June 2015, our Board of Directors approved a strategic plan – driven by a forward-thinking leadership team and based on faculty, parent and expert knowledge – to chart the course for Academy of Whole Learning for the next seven years.

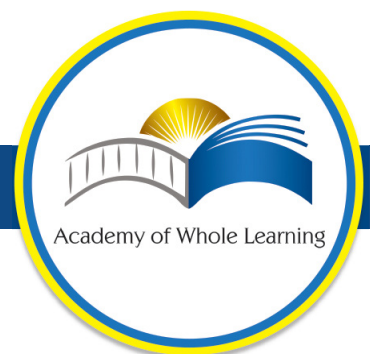
This strategic plan defines the Academy of Whole Learning student of the future, not as a struggling learner, but as a competitive participant in the twenty-first century. An AOWL student will possess academic, social and leadership skills. He or she will think independently, globally, and collaboratively to create opportunities and innovative solutions to real-life challenges with integrity and character. Our strategic plan carefully defines each of our four priorities as we seek to provide a unified learning experience for students so they can become contributing members of our community.

Our four priorities are:

- Attract, retain, and serve qualified **STUDENTS**.
- Attract, retain, and support qualified **STAFF**.
- Communicate and collaborate with **FAMILIES**.
- Cultivate relations to garner support from our **COMMUNITY**.

Our strategic plan is a framework that guides us as we move forward. But it's also a living document, designed to be responsive to changes at Academy of Whole Learning and the broader community. Each year we will evaluate our goals and refine the plan as necessary.

This is a great time to be partnering with Academy of Whole Learning. Our community supports our strategic vision, so we can move forward with clarity, commitment, and common goals.

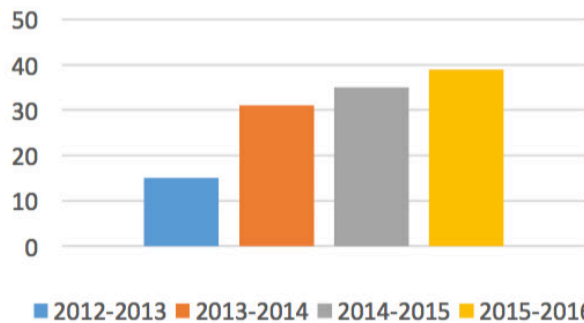


Financial Report

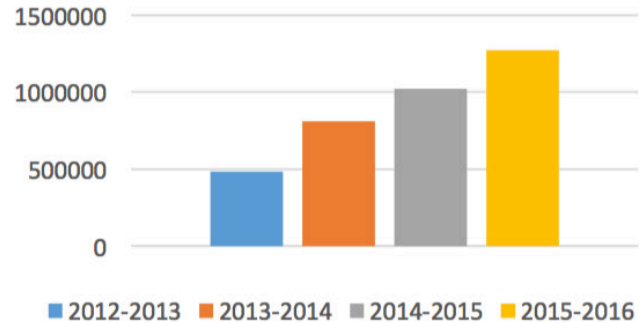
Measured Growth

With your support, Academy of Whole Learning is experiencing growth and financial stability.

Student Enrollment



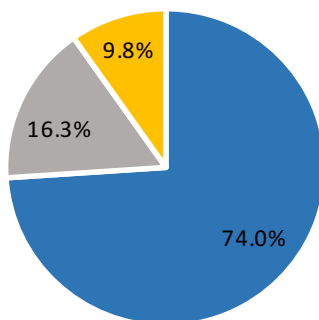
Total Revenue



Our student enrollment has steadily increased over the last 4 years.
Our total revenues are a reflection of the same trend.

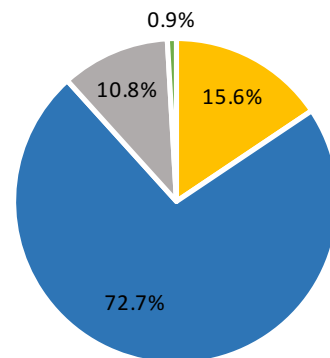
2015 - 2016 Financial Data

Expenses

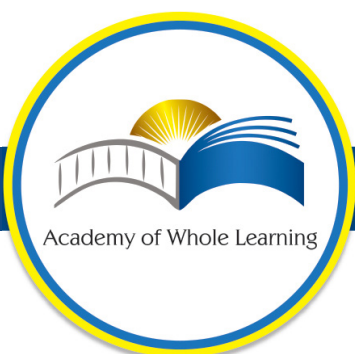


■ Program ■ Administrative ■ Development

Revenues



■ Support ■ Tuition & Fees
■ Program Services ■ Other Income



Our Staff

The faculty at AOWL is comprised of a diverse group of highly qualified professionals. Our classroom teachers are licensed in special education, general education, or both, and our teacher associates are experienced in classroom management and either hold or are pursuing postsecondary or graduate-level education.

Administration

Wyayn Rasmussen - Head of School
Sarah Fitzgerald - Academic Dean
Lindsey Brandt - Director of Advancement
Carly Rasmussen - Business Manager
Karla Przybylski - Human Resources/Office Manager
Katie Thormodsgaard - Behavior Specialist
Paul Gloudemans - Marketing/Admissions Coordinator
Georgette Briggs - IT Coordinator
Cory Hanson - Activities Coordinator

Classroom Staff

Lake Itasca
Dana Liberty
Kelsey Toetschinger
Molly Yost

Gooseberry Falls
Rachel Houle
Dylan Mazza

Minnehaha Falls
Amanda White
Sierra Stockton

Temperance River
Sarah Fitzgerald
Addie Washington

St. Croix River
Mike Faeth
Cory Hanson

Cedar Lake
Kate Drechsler
Kaitlin Walsh

Lake Nokomis
Anita Haas
Louis Bakalars

Staff Highlight

In 2013, Dana Liberty started at Academy of Whole Learning midway through the school year. Although a new teacher, Dana took over her classroom with the finesse of a veteran teacher. She quickly established systems for her students, innovated with curriculum, and developed a teaching style that focused on building rapport with the students. In 2015, Dana developed and established our primary program so that we could serve students in kindergarten through third grade, in addition to our upper school. The primary program is now in its second year, and the transition of adding it to our school has been seamless under her guidance. Thank you, Dana!



Governance

Board of Directors

- *Janel Dressen** - Board Chair
- *Dan Martin** - Board Vice Chair/ Technology
- *Ashley Lee** - Board Treasurer/Finance
- *Chris Elliott** - Board Secretary
- Nate Knoernschild** - Governance
- Jennifer Graham** - Governance
- Jeff Sloan** - Governance
- Becky Gibson** - Finance
- Eric Hawkinson** - Development
- Samantha Funk** - Development
- Janet LaFrence** - Development
- *Robin Rumsey** - Autism Expert
- *Jodi Benson** - Parent Liason
- *Wyayn Rasmussen** - Head of School
- Rachel Houle** - Teacher Representative
- Manny San Miguel** - Member-At-Large



* Denotes member of Executive Committee

Stakeholder Highlight



Kate Hartfiel

Kate has been a stakeholder for AOWL in every imaginable way. She began as a parent when her daughter started at AOWL in 2009. She then quickly became an integral part of the volunteer force by writing grants and assisting with marketing. Kate was also an active member of the Board of Directors with a leadership role in hiring our Head of School, Wyayn Rasmussen, in 2012. Last year Kate began volunteering as an art instructor in the classroom, and this year we welcomed Kate on staff as our art teacher. We recently sat down with Kate to interview her regarding a handful of topics.

AOWL: Tell me how you first got involved with Academy of Whole Learning?

Kate: We first became involved with AOWL as parents. We were looking for high school options, a small environment tailored to meet our daughter's needs as a student on the autism spectrum.

AOWL: What are the biggest changes you've seen in AOWL over the years?

Kate: The most obvious changes are organizational stability, increased professionalism with regard to staff, and student-body growth. Getting the kids into the program as soon as possible is critical. Adding a primary program is a really important step toward putting kids on the right track.

AOWL: What has surprised you most about working at AOWL?

Kate: How much fun I have with the students.

AOWL: What do you wish other people knew about AOWL?

Kate: That it exists! That it provides students with tools and skills to move on to the next steps toward being independent adults.

AOWL: Why are you supporting AOWL as opposed to other groups working on special needs education?

Kate: AOWL made such a difference in our child's life and fulfills a growing need in the community.

AOWL: What do you think will change about AOWL over the next five years?

Kate: I think there will continue to be increasing inquiries from interested families. The tough part of that is maintaining a balance between the number of kids who can be effectively served and wanting to serve as many students as possible in a small, personalized classroom environment. Fundraising and financial stability are always challenges. I hope that the school can rely on a variety of resources — foundation and corporate contributions, government grants/support, tuition, and private annual donations, so it never has all of its financial eggs in just one or two baskets.

AOWL: What do you do when you aren't working or volunteering at AOWL?

Kate: I am an artist and have a studio in the Northeast Arts District in Minneapolis where I paint.



Volunteer Highlight

Lynn Groh - Berkley Risk

This school year, Academy of Whole Learning made some big changes to our spaces, and it wouldn't have been possible without the help of twenty-two amazing volunteers from Berkley Risk. Among the volunteers was Lynn Groh, who dedicated a hot and humid day of hard work to transforming our school.

Currently the Vice President of Human Resources at Berkley Risk, Lynn keeps busy using her charisma and passion to serve her company. However, back when her three college-aged children were younger, Lynn spent countless hours attending events and chairing committees for their activities. Even with her involvement in the community, Lynn's first experience learning about autism spectrum disorder was last year at our school's Minds of All Kinds benefit breakfast. Invited to attend the breakfast by a coworker, Lynn heard stories about what a difference our school's model can make in the lives of people from all walks of life. When the opportunity to volunteer this summer came up, she was eager to come back to our school to see how things work day-to-day.

With determination, Lynn joined her colleagues from Berkley Risk in undertaking a variety of tasks from painting, to moving books into a new library space, to preparing classrooms with supplies and furniture, and building cabinets. While she used many skills often not employed at her job, Lynn also got a chance to see how the staff at AOWL create learning environments and collaborate behind the scenes. Lynn remarked that volunteering at Academy of Whole Learning was truly rewarding because it was evident that she was doing vital work; it was clear she was making a physical difference for children and families she didn't even know. The artwork on the walls of the school in particular reminded Lynn of the impact of her work and the work of our school. In her own words, volunteering with AOWL "was definitely a great experience" because it "provided an atmosphere to see what a difference you can make."

The more time and attention teachers can give students, the more the children can get the supports they need. When Lynn and volunteers like her step in to help our community, we see how much stronger we are together. It is the spirit of engagement and care of engaged community members like Lynn that help us all succeed.



Success Story



Sally began at Academy of Whole Learning in 2009. Having struggled in her academic settings for several years, Sally's parents were desperate to find a place where her challenges would be seen as opportunities to think in new ways, and where her strength and spirit would be celebrated. At Academy of Whole Learning, Sally, like each student, is seen as unique and essential. Her social hurdles have been redefined by her drive and dedication to her own learning. Her willingness to work with staff in new ways inspires her classmates. Sally's leadership skills are highlighted when she is performing her in-school job, helping younger

students learn the ropes, and partnering with peers to expand reading capacities. This June, Sally will graduate and launch into studies at Minnesota Life College. She will leave us with memories of her never-ending smile, her leadership skills, and her ability to see a friend in every person. On behalf of all the people who have watched you grow and overcome challenges, thank you for letting us learn alongside you. Good luck, Sally!

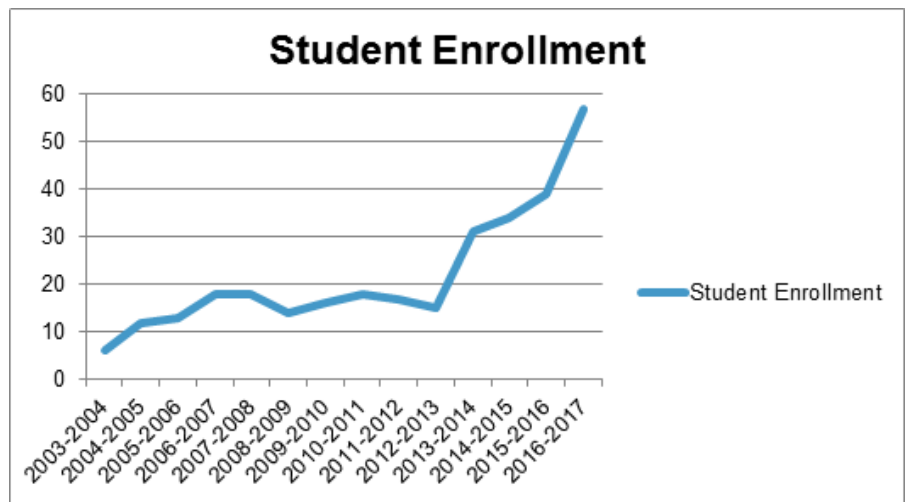
Why Give?

Sustaining the specialized, holistic model of education at Academy of Whole Learning (AOWL) requires an investment of resources, time, capital, and passion. In order to provide a robust and challenging curriculum to each of our students, the school hires qualified, exceptional staff who demonstrate willingness to work tirelessly in order to support the students and the school. To develop engaging projects, staff pursue funding from special grants, network with local partners, and form connections in our local communities. Still, the individualized attention afforded to every AOWL student is a costly investment. Your financial support to Academy of Whole Learning is vital in allowing our staff to continue to serve the needs of the families and students in the community and provides a platform for a future of success for students with autism and related learning differences. As we strive to make a difference in the lives of these future citizens, we ask for your continued commitment and partnership.



2015-16 Highlights

- **National Association of Special Education Teachers — School of Excellence 2015-16**
- **Accreditation through MNSAA and NFSSAA**
- **2015 State Flag Football Champions — Special Olympics MN**
- **2016 State Basketball Champions — Special Olympics MN**
- **Special Olympics Top Polar Plunge School**
- **260 percent enrollment increase since 2012**
- **On-site occupational, physical and speech therapy**
- **Implementing 23 after school clubs**
- **Full-time Physical Education and Health teacher**
- **Project Lead the Way (Design & Modeling) Grant Recipient**
- **Launching of K-2nd grade primary program**
- **4:1 instructional staff to student ratio**



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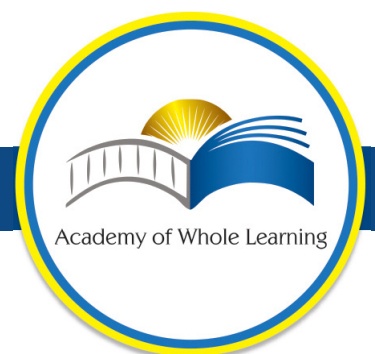
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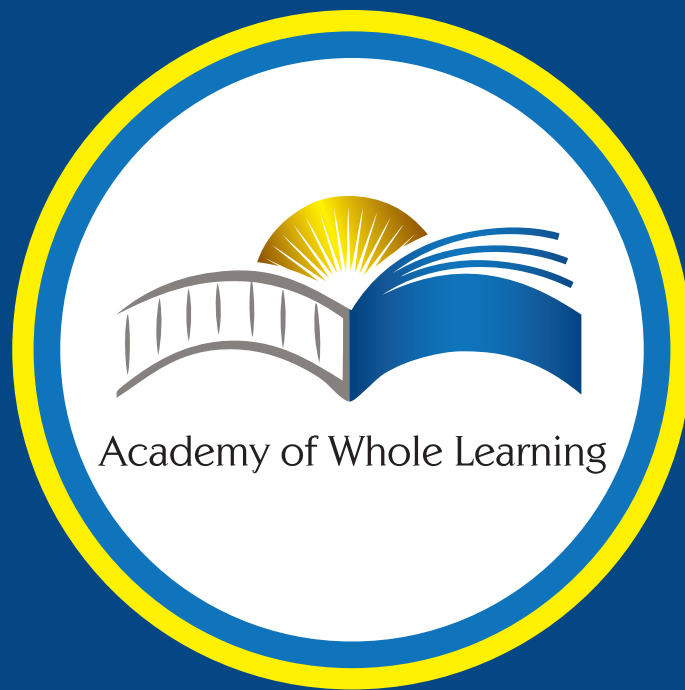
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