THE EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL FOR EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS

Academy of Whole Learning

2016-17 Annual Report



Academy of Whole Learning

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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 Academy of Whole Learning Supporters,

When you hear about a school-age child with autism or learning differences, what comes to mind? If you're like most in our community, you think about Academy of Whole Learning. Why? Because the contributions from our community of both time and gifts have helped make Academy of Whole Learning the leading school for students with autism and related learning differences in Minnesota, attracting students from across the United States.

We are so grateful to you for helping to create and support our students, who receive a top-notch education from our dedicated, compassionate education professionals in a warm, caring environment.

With your contributions, you are helping us touch the lives of our exceptional families and students. Inside the walls of Academy of Whole Learning, our students are thriving in school, making friends, and planning for the future.

Academy of Whole Learning is your expert in exceptionalities education. We exist to serve you, your friends and the community– to provide hope, friendship and academic success. Your gifts are extremely important because they offer immediate resources that are directed to current needs and opportunities at the school.

Our faculty, counselors, therapists, families, students, and staff join us in thanking you for your generous partnership and support.

As educational best practices advance, Academy of Whole Learning is committed to staying at the cutting edge – for you, your family, your friends, for every child in the community. You have made this possible.

Thank you so much for your help.

Sincerely,

Wyayn Rasmussen

Wyayn Rasmussen, Head of School

Ashley Lee, 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 reach their potential. They envisioned a school where their child received direct instruction and attention on a personal level.

In 2012, the school board decided to take a narrower approach and specialize in an area that was rapidly growing in the public sector. In Minnesota, 1 in 42 people under the age of eighteen is diagnosed with ASD. Schools are beginning to understand the needs of these learners, but they're also realizing that they cannot sufficiently meet those needs. AOWL does. Staff at AOWL have developed a model that not only serves students with ASD, but also students who may have similar needs for their academic environment. From 2012, when enrollment was 15 students and 5 staff to a current enrollment of 58 students and 31 staff, we continue to personalize learning and nurture exceptionality. A 501(c)(3) school, AOWL recently moved and is now conveniently located near Highway 494 and Minnetonka Boulevard in Minnetonka.

Our new facility is uniquely designed to fit our model of fostering both the academic and social needs of our students. We designed our spaces with sensory conscientiousness, academic support, and therapeutic services in mind. 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 strengthsbased 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 advised 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.

New Facility



In mid-July of 2017, we moved into our new location at **3500 Williston Road, Minnetonka, MN 55345**. Located just over 3 miles from our previous location, the new campus gives us space to grow our programming to serve up to 100 students.

With the help of our staff and many volunteers, we were able to customize the new campus for our students as we have exclusive weekday use of 11 classrooms, including a complete life skills classroom, a full science lab, and a conference room. The beautiful campus has ample green space, a large outdoor play area, soccer and football fields, two gymnasiums, and many nearby walking trails.

Here are some additional features:

- · extensive parking
- secure entrance
- air conditioning
- locker rooms
- · lockers and student storage outside of classroom
- consolidated office space
- · projectors mounted on ceiling

What our students are saying...

"I like the new sensory rooms a lot." "This building is so much quieter." "I love having my own locker." "The gym is really nice and big." "The Learning Commons is awesome."

Strategic Plan & 2016–17 Highlights

Our strategic plan has four main components: students, staff, families and community. Highlights from 2016–17 in these four areas include:

For students:

- new researched curriculum resources: Leveled Literacy Intervention, TenMarks math supplement, Achieve 3000, Project Lead the Way (K-5)
- new (to us) campus in Minnetonka-completely refurbished through generous donors and volunteers
- · behavior support department
- · teacher associates in every classroom
- electives in American Sign Language, art, self-regulation, drama, music therapy
- · summer career exploration on campus of Minnesota Life College

For Staff:

- · student teachers from St. Mary's and Bethel Universities
- · member of TIES technology and information education services consortium
- · full-time Marketing/Admissions department

For Families:

- · Bloomz electronic peek into the classroom
- · mini, mid-year, year-end surveys
- · parent roundtables
- · parent support group
- parent liaison board member

For the Community:

- vocational training program
- · first annual report
- · donor relations officer
- more corporate partnerships



The Strategy House



Financial Report

Measured Growth

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

Student Enrollment





Our student enrollment has steadily increased over the last 5 years. Our total revenues are a reflection of the same trend.

2016 - 2017 Financial Data



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. Our teacher associates are experienced in classroom management and hold postsecondary degrees, many of whom are pursuing graduate-level education.

Administration

Wyayn Rasmussen - Head of School Greg Saunders - Director of Exceptional Learning Cindy Schriever - Donor Relations Officer Lindsey Brandt - Advancement Officer Carly Rasmussen - Business Manager Karla Przybylski - Clinical Services Mgr./H.R. Coordinator Katie Thormodsgaard - Behavior Specialist Boyden Lee - Behavior Associate Paul Gloudemans - Marketing/Admissions Coordinator Georgette Briggs - IT Coordinator Cory Hanson - Beyond the Bell Coordinator Luella Ramberg - Executive Assistant Jen Finger - Administrative Assistant

Classroom Staff

Lake Itasca Dana Liberty Molly Yost

Gooseberry Falls Rachel Houle Louis Bakalars

Minnehaha Falls Kate Drechsler Sierra Gemheart

Temperance River Sarah Fitzgerald Maggie Kregness Dylan Mazza St. Croix River Mike Faeth Molly Zupon

Cedar Lake Amanda White Sarah Crowley

Lake Nokomis Anita Haas Kaitlin Walsh

Lake Harriet Kelsey Toetschinger Addie Washington

Staff Highlight

In 2012, when Sarah Fitzgerald was hired as a teacher at Academy of Whole Learning, the school had just two staff and no official location. Sarah joined the fledgling team, bringing years of prior experience, skills from several specialized licenses, and most importantly a passion for the job. She worked overtime for months to establish the foundations of our unique programs and processes. In following years, Sarah nimbly took on new roles and responsibilities, serving as a lead teacher, social skills teacher, and Dean of Students. Beyond the classroom, she chaired the Curriculum Committee for the school's accreditation process, and throughout her tenure, she presented several times on autism and education for professional audiences. This past summer,

Sarah led AOWL's first program in partnership with Minnesota Life College where students cultivated both academics and targeted life skills. In her sixth year at AOWL, Sarah hasn't slowed down: She's a mother of two, caring for her mother at home, teaching upper school science, and sharing her experience on the School Leadership Team. Sarah's bright presence and tireless work stand as a model of our philosophy and mission. Thank you for your contributions over these years, Sarah!

Governance

Board of Directors

Ashley Lee - Chair - Senior Accountant, Boyum & Barenscheer PLLP

John Higgins - Vice Chair - Chief Executive Officer, Ligand Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

Chris Elliott - Secretary - Vice President, Director of Marketing, Berkley Risk

Rebecca Gibson - Treasurer - Director of Sales, Lifetouch National School Studios

Allison Barosko - Parent Liaison - Parent of two students at AOWL

Wyayn Rasmussen - Head of School

Members at Large

Rob Dingmann - Community Member

Samantha Funk - eMentors Program Manager, BestPrep

Jennifer Graham - Vice President, Medicare & Retirement Product Management, UnitedHealthcare

Cynthia Kerr - Engagement Manager, ClickSoftware - StreetSmart

Nate Knoernschild - Partner, Chestnut Cambronne PA

Janet LaFrence - Sr. Payments Consultant, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

Dan Martin - Information Technology Professional, HRST, Inc.

Patty Salmon - Trade Marketing Manager, Michael Foods

Robin Rumsey, PhD - Pediatric Neuropsychologist, University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview



Stakeholder Highlight

Amy and John Higgins

The Higgins family has been a blessing to Academy of Whole Learning from the moment they walked in the door with their son Ben, currently in 10th grade. Amy volunteered to be the Special Olympics Coordinator four years ago, bringing competitive sports to the school for the first time. Since then, AOWL has gone on to win two state Flag Football Championships and two state Basketball Championships. Not only does Amy coordinate our Special Olympics, she coaches too. Amy, thank you for your time!

Like many other private schools, our tuition only covers about 80 percent of our operating costs, so fundraising to support our programming is vital. The Higgins family continues to be a supporting pillar along with several corporate and family financial sponsorships for our Minds of All Kinds Benefit Breakfast each year. These sponsorships for the breakfast allow all the funds raised to go directly to student programming.



Amy and John have opened their home welcoming parents, board and committee members, and staff for a winter holiday party. And last June, Amy and John hosted an end-of-school-year party to celebrate and thank our incredible staff. We are delighted that John recently became a member of our leadership team by joining our Board of Directors as Vice-chairperson.

Knowing the costs of relocating our campus this summer would be significant and wanting to help make sure the new building was set up, Amy and John gave a generous building refurbishment gift which allowed us to completely transform our new campus into a modern educational facility designed to meet the individual needs of our students. Amy and John are true stakeholders at Academy of Whole Learning.

We recently interviewed Amy and John regarding a handful of topics. Here are a few:

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

Amy and John: Everything! The school enrollment has doubled in size, the campus has just been relocated to a spectacular new facility, and more programs, activities and sports are being offered than ever before. The school is on a very exciting, upward growth trajectory. The only thing that has not changed is the excellent leadership and the energy and commitment the entire staff has to the school to make it the best it can possibly be.

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

Amy and John: We wish more people knew about the school. It's a young school with an emerging reputation. We also wish AOWL was known to provide education to more than students with autism. It seems to be known for having a specialized focus and, as terrific a school as it is for students with autism-related needs, we know it also serves a much broader special needs community.

AOWL: Where do you see AOWL five years from now?

Amy and John: We see a school that's bigger, better, and recognized regionally as a major component of the Twin Cities educational community. The school no doubt has a bright future. The need for quality special education is significant so student enrollment will likely double within five years. AOWL might have a second campus serving St. Paul and the eastern part of the Twin Cities and will definitely have an endowment established to help secure its future!

Academy of Whole Learning

Volunteer Highlight

Margie Fuchs, Michelle Williams, and John Broich

Each year, Academy of Whole Learning owes a debt of gratitude to dozens of tireless volunteers. This year, as our school moved to a new building, the need for extra help was immense—and it was met! The host of volunteers this year numbered over 100, and those family, friends and community members generously dedicated their time, resources, and muscles to the growth of our school. A few volunteers in particular invested an exceptional amount of their time for the cause.

As co-chair of the PTO, Margie Fuchs took charge of recruiting parents and family friends to volunteer throughout the move. Her primary role was rallying people to paint the interior of the building, a monumental task considering it was summer time, and she made a point to have fun with the hot and tedious work. Margie's son Christopher, who is in his third year at AOWL, is a driving force behind her motivation to volunteer because she believes strongly in the school's specialized mission and active vision. For her, the reward of volunteering was working alongside parents, board members, and staff. They shared ideas, laughs, and resources while building a better, leading-edge school for our students. Margie's persistence and positivity engaged a whole community in our successful move.

One of the parents who more than answered the call for volunteers was Michelle Williams. She taped areas for painting and cleaned some surprisingly grimy spaces. Morgan, Michelle's daughter, is in her second year at AOWL, and Michelle found that she could use a parent's intuition to spot things to safety-proof or clean in the classrooms. When we asked Michelle about what motivated her choice to volunteer, she replied: "I honestly believe that the Academy has given me my child back, and I know how much more can be done for our kids if sweat equity is put forward." Michelle firmly believes that as families contribute time and energy toward events and projects, more funds can be allocated to programs and the needs of the students.

Another volunteer who went above and beyond his duty was John Broich. When he arrived on the scene, John got a list of projects from Carly Rasmussen, the Business and Operations Manager who coordinated all the logistics of the move. Between his stockpile of tools, many trips to the hardware store, and about two weeks of hard work, John completed a set of tasks to prepare our gym and other spaces for the students' arrival. The best part of volunteering for John was that he was able to have his son Dash along as his assistant. Dash, who is in his third year at AOWL, helped carry, lift, and clean up–and all with a great attitude.

These parents model a spirit of passion, dedication, and generosity that we aspire to build in our AOWL community. We are so grateful for each of our many, many volunteers. Without their help, the exponential growth and development of our school would not be possible. Thank you!

Success Story

James is a fourth grader at AOWL, entering his 3rd year at the school. When his parents Chris and Audra sent James to a local private school for Kindergarten, they thought he would flourish like his older brother. However, over the course of two years at the school, it became obvious that James had needs they had not recognized and which the school could not meet. James was white-knuckling his way through school and coming home dispirited and exhausted. His parents would dread the end of each day when they often received an email from his teachers describing his behavioral and academic problems. The school wanted to help them but was out of ideas and resources.

After two years, they finally accepted that their desires to mainstream James with his peers were not realistic. Shifting their long-term vision for James was one of the hardest choices they've made, but it was clear that his immediate needs required an intervention. Chris and Audra fumbled for a path-

way forward until they found AOWL. Once James started at the school, a remarkable transformation began. He looked forward to going to school and made new friends. James made real academic progress because there was a plan, an individualized curriculum, and purposeful implementation of both social and academic learning. Chris says that, "setting aside fears about taking James out of his peer-mainstream was the best thing I've ever done." James' academic skills have accelerated, and not only is he accepted by his classmates, he flourishes as a classroom leader. They still have hopes that James will be prepared in the future to return to a mainstream classroom, but they know that either way, it's possible to give James a quality education based on his needs and what is best for him.

Why Give?

Sustaining the specialized, holistic model of education at Academy of Whole Learning 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.

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