ATHENA ACADEMY
Exceptional Education for Dyslexic Children

Celebrating our 5TH Anniversary

Annual Report
2016-2017 Academic Year
THE 2016-2017 SCHOOL YEAR WAS OUR 5TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR, AND WHAT A YEAR IT WAS!

On our first day of school in 2012 we opened our doors with 7 students and 3 teachers, all excited at the potential of this new and pioneering school. Each of our founding families had tremendous faith that we could really teach their children the way we knew their brains learned best. We ended our 2017 school year with 68 students and 18 teachers, assured in the knowledge that we had achieved all that our founder, Carla Rayacich, had dreamed of and more.

As Head of School, I have the honor and the privilege to lead Athena Academy alongside the most capable faculty and staff with whom I have ever had the opportunity to work. I walk into our classrooms every day inspired by the purposeful, meaningful, and thoughtfully constructed lessons being taught. Without a doubt, we have assembled the best team of educators to serve our students and their families. This remarkable growth could not have been achieved without them.

This year, being a milestone year, it seemed fitting to revisit our original mission and vision. The faculty, board, and members of the administration team thoroughly examined who we are today as a school and worked hard to redefine our fundamental purpose, philosophy, and values. We wanted the updated Mission and Vision to really clarify the essence of who we are today, what we do, and what our students look like when they leave here.

In the coming years, we are confident that our new Mission will ground and direct us and our Vision will inspire us to new heights. We are so grateful for your continued interest and support. Athena Academy really does provide Exceptional Education for Dyslexic Children.

MISSION STATEMENT
Athena Academy educates first to eighth grade dyslexic children with compassion and expertise. We nurture the visual-spatial abilities and inherent strengths of students with dyslexia. Our students develop self-advocacy skills, open-mindedness, and creative problem-solving strategies. Athena Academy graduates are ready to take risks, collaborate, and be changemakers in the world.

We accomplish this through:

• Small class sizes and project based curriculum, which allow for individualized instruction
• Incorporation of the innovative neuroscience and educational research
• Our customized social emotional learning program
• A focus on cognitive skills and learning strategies

VISION STATEMENT
Athena Academy’s vision is to become a leading institution for the teaching of dyslexic students. We will achieve this vision by developing, applying, and validating innovative teaching methods based on scientific research, and then share these methods with others with the goal of serving as many dyslexic students as possible.

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Sarah Burnett
Class of 2017

Sarah Burnett’s parents remember clearly the time that she visited Athena Academy. When Sarah came home after the second day she said, “I wish I could go back tomorrow, and never go back to my other school again.”

The relief that they felt was immense, to finally find a school where Sarah could heal from the damage done to her self-esteem. Like many undiagnosed dyslexics, she was feeling like she was “stupid” and “the dumber one in the class.” At last they had found an environment where Sarah felt accepted for being exactly who she was. Her parents looked at several schools which supported children with language based learning differences, but felt that each was missing a very significant social emotional component that would be integral to Sarah’s success.

Sarah needed a different setting, a community that not only understood the very best ways to teach her, but one where social emotional learning was woven into the fabric of every lesson, and every interaction.

She needed a school which would help her explore her gifts and talents, and guide her back towards being the bright, enthusiastic child that she was before losing her confidence.

Changemakers, the SEL program at Athena, was just what they were looking for. After just a few short days at Athena Academy, Sarah found herself wearing her dyslexia proudly, and experiencing school again. Her love of learning and self-esteem were reignited.

When asked to describe Athena Academy, and the impact it had in Sarah’s life, her parents said: “It’s a place full of big hearts, sharp minds, and wisdom. Athena Academy has the most amazing teachers to guide students, help them find their strengths, and discover the enormous success they can achieve. The change we saw in our daughter’s self-image was not only desperately needed, but transformational in many other aspects of her life. Athena Academy helped our daughter, and us as her parents. We can’t wait to see the person she grows up to become.”

Sarah’s teachers comment that she has a keen awareness of others, empathy and willingness to reach out to those in need. She has a strong sense of self, showing kindness and patience to peers in times of struggle, often sharing her own experiences.

Sarah attended Athena Academy for four years from fifth grade to eighth grade, graduating in June 2017. Today, Sarah is at an international school and is flourishing. She is an advocate for her dyslexia, an independent learner, and a courageous, self-assured young woman.

When Christopher started second grade it was immediately obvious to his parents that something was very wrong. He had lost a lot of confidence and did not want to attempt even the most basic reading or writing tasks.

This lack of confidence was greatly impacting his school day. He was becoming aware that he couldn’t do the work no matter how hard he tried and his self-esteem was waning.

“The hardest thing to watch was him struggle with school and coming home feeling so low about himself. Hearing him say ‘I just can’t do it. Why can’t I do it?’ Questions we could not answer.”

His parents immediately had Christopher tested and discovered that not only was he dyslexic but also highly gifted, a category of children known as Twice Exceptional (2E).

Similar results were achieved in math. He increased from a fifth-grade level to a tenth-grade level in just 1½ years.

His parents believe that Athena’s unique learning environment was just what Christopher needed to excel. The low student-to-teacher ratio of 1 teacher to 6 children in the elementary school and truly individualized instruction has allowed Christopher to progress and learn at a level that is appropriate for him. He also has the freedom to deeply explore all the amazing ideas that he has, which nurtures his continuing love of learning.

Christopher Duncan
Class of 2022

Athena Academy was recommended to them as a school that was expert in working with Twice Exceptional students.

Christopher entered Athena Academy in January 2016, in the middle of his second-grade year, reading at an early first-grade level. His parents saw immediate progress both academically and in his confidence, and self-esteem. At the end of third-grade Christopher was reading at an early sixth-grade level.

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Christopher Duncan’s parents comment that “as bright as the sun, dedicated to his process and learning.” He approaches problems with a playful attitude, and absorbs knowledge with exuberance. He brings a natural awareness, compassion and kindness to our Athena community.

We look forward to working with Christopher for many more years to come.

““My teachers taught me how to read. I was so down and low and I’m not anymore.”

““We have really enjoyed watching his joy of learning blossom. He was proud of being here from the first day.”

““My teachers taught me how to read. I was so down and low and I’m not anymore.”
In the Classroom
STEAM

At Athena Academy STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) is woven throughout our curriculum.

Our students are taught to think, experiment, and to solve problems. Our project based curriculum encourages our students to explore questions together in collaborative groups, or independently. We understand that STEAM education creates meaningful and deep learning experiences.

Our highly visual spatial thinkers learn best when enabled to actively grapple with the Scientific Method and Engineering Process by designing, building, and creating. Our students are taught to ask questions, make connections, draw inferences, test assumptions, and think critically about the world around them.

Our student engineers participated in a rollercoaster (gravity ride) building competition at California’s Great America during their annual Physics, Science and Math Days. The key ingredients in constructing a successful rollercoaster were creativity and application of science principles.

Designing and building Ferris wheels was a project that taught our students about the Engineering Design Process. Their driving question was: How can you use the materials (provided) to design and create a Ferris Wheel that will spin on a central axle? As a class, they discussed the wheel design and built and tested models. They discussed potential problems and supported each other’s trials and errors. After many false starts, do-overs, and peer consultations, each student successfully created their own Ferris Wheel.

A class of our 5-6 grades students built Doodle Bots. A Doodle Bot is a simple robot that can draw pictures and write messages with a pen. Using only a battery pack, yogurt cup, tape, and pens the bots were constructed. The bots draw as they “dance”. They have a counter weight positioned on top of a motor that causes the bot to jump around the page. They are made with found objects.

The creation of 3D pieces from recycled materials and machine parts was a favorite unit in this year’s Art curriculum. Combining these recycled parts with more traditional mediums such as paint, clay, and paper products as well as the use of surfaces such as cloth, cardboard and wood gave our students the opportunity to experiment in new, creative ways. These dynamic Art classes invited our students to engage their creativity within a space that allowed for individual expression.
In the Classroom

**Language Arts**

One of the first priorities in the Language Arts classes, particularly for those children new to Athena Academy, is to help the students feel safe and to restore their confidence. Many have spent years struggling in school thinking that they were not smart enough to learn to read. We encourage our students to have a growth mindset despite previous challenges or failures. Our class sizes are small 1:6 in elementary school and 1:8-10 in middle school. This allows us to really work alongside our students and personalize the learning experience for them.

An essential part of having a successful Language Arts classroom/program is ensuring that children have established respect, learned to work together and become confident in taking risks in new situations. To facilitate this, at the start of the year students participated in partner projects to plan and create a structure that would support as many pennies as possible using straws. Children were encouraged to remain open to others’ ideas, reflect on what worked and didn’t, and persevere.

A very popular unit in Language Arts this year involved building a website. Children were asked to create a website for a county suffering from a decline in tourism, answering the question “Why visit …?” Students were given a specific group of criteria that they needed to gather information on. This project taught the children research skills and how to summarize information. Each child created a website which included photographs and text. They then presented the website to their classmates.

Spelling is taught through Structured Word Inquiry; developing literacy and critical thinking by scientific inquiry about how spelling works. Children are taught to use SWI as a method to support spelling through meaning and structure of words, the words stories, and relationships. They are encouraged to explore and understand prefixes, suffixes, and bases. In this example, we are exploring the base muse, meaning to wonder.

**Changemakers**

**Social Emotional Learning**

At Athena Academy, we value the whole child. We understand that students come to school with an “invisible backpack” of experiences, emotions and beliefs that directly influence their day academically, emotionally and socially. We know that our students have depth and that learning simply does not happen when they are in fight, flight or fear. Neuroscience teaches us that cognitive ability is compromised when our primal, emotional brain takes over. To honor these inner realities, Athena is a community where Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the core of who we are, what we teach and how we connect with one another.

Our school-wide, customized SEL program, Changemakers, is based on decades of SEL research and weaves together best practices in emotional intelligence, mindfulness, positive psychology and neuroscience. All our students participate in a weekly interactive lesson that teaches the core SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Our students build growth mindsets, share authentically during Check-in, rate play real-life situations and problem solve win/win solutions from the playground. Our SEL Specialists and trained faculty are present outside every day to help guide students through compassionate and creative problem solving.

It’s a daily practice at Athena to speak with courage and kindness and advocate assertively for one’s needs.

This year we offered a Girls on the Run elective for our 4th to 6th grade girls. Girls on the Run is a program that teaches life skills through fun, engaging lessons that celebrate the joy of movement. This elective built on our SEL foundations, focusing on self-awareness and positive body image.

““As a Girls on the Run coach at Athena Academy, I was witness to some incredible student growth. Along with my fellow coaches, I met with the girls every week to explore social emotional learning through running and active games. At one of our first meets the team talked about ‘finding your happy pace’ — not just in running but also in life! The girls discussed experiences where they felt like they had to ‘keep up’ — sometimes in math class when another student finishes more quickly than they do or sometimes when a sibling reads something faster than they can. We talked about how just like everyone has their own individual ‘happy pace’ when running, everyone has their own ‘happy pace’ in other areas too, and that you can always do what feels right for you. After 10 weeks of training and growing together, the team reached their goal of participating in a 5K Fun Run with all the other Silicon Valley Girls on the Run teams.””

— Ms. Hovish, Lead Elementary School Teacher

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Outdoor Learning
River Rafting, American River – June, 2017

The Fort Ross Environmental Living Program was an experience like no other! All 2nd through 5th grades students participated. Teachers, parents, and students planned, researched, and collaborated to make history come alive.

Each student was given the name and biography of a person who actually lived at Fort Ross in the 1800’s. To fulfill their roles, students made timelines, explored primary documents, and created historically appropriate costumes. Based on their biography, students were also grouped by role — cooks, clerks, hunters, artisans, and militia. They took on the real responsibilities of their group — the cooks made the meals, the clerks passed out paychecks and ran the company store, the hunters researched native plants and animals and went fishing, the artisans created crafts and useful materials to sell in the store, and the militia guarded the fort with replicas of historically accurate muskets.

In the culminating overnight trip, all the students, teachers, and parents “went back in time” for two days and experienced the way the community at Fort Ross lived 200 years ago.

“We know that outdoor education and play supports emotional, behavioral and intellectual development. Students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, empathy towards others, motor skills, self-discipline and initiative. This year our whole middle school went on a 4-day rafting and camping trip on the north fork of the American River. Here are some reflections of the trip from students and teachers.

“Just being with everyone, seeing everyone so happy and seeing people falling off boats but enjoying the excitement of jumping/falling off was so much fun.” — Grace

“At one point our raft went up against a rock, but we all stayed calm and we pulled through.” — Zooey

“I was told that we were going towards a big wave, we hit it and our boat just went vertical. Jessie and I were in the front, we shot backwards and took Mrs. Siegel out with us. I pushed the boat away from me and I popped out behind the boat. I grabbed the guide’s paddle stick and was pulled back in.” — Ben

“I was inspired by sitting with the children and watching their fearless way of making merchandise to sell.” — Christy F., Parent, 5th grader.

“Watching the kids interact with such positivity in an open space that allowed them to free themselves for mindful moments was most memorable to me. The activities that the hosts provided made it smooth with transitions and they treated the students like young adults while taking into consideration the need to repeat directions, reflect on the activities and set expectations for activities and events to come.” — Mrs. B, Teacher

Outdoor Learning
Fort Ross – April, 2017

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“When Sarah’s tent got drenched overnight in the rain, she joined Eliza and me in our tent. We played games and didn’t go to sleep right away. We heard the teachers laughing and they were really loud. It was fun.” — Amrah

“One of my favorite times on the rafting and camping trip was our final evening. We made a campfire after dinner, and in the falling twilight, the sparks floated up into the warm June air. All the rafting guides, teachers and students gathered around the fire and shared our gratitude and appreciation for the thrilling adventures, delicious food, and friendships we had experienced that week. The guides were really impressed by our students’ positive attitudes and comradery. We were grateful for the fun and interesting conversations we had with our guides and all of the freedom we experienced to explore the campground and play on the rafts. It was such a positive experience for the whole group!” — Mrs. Siegel, Teacher

“Fort Ross was an incredible experience for the kids and parents alike. Having our Russian or Native Indian names and a little history and working in that role was a great way to bring the learning experience to life. Having our group assignments as well helped to imprint how it really takes everyone to make the work of a village successful and that everyone has a vital role. My son’s favorite part was being a hunter gatherer and climbing on the rocks by the ocean looking for food. I was in the artist group, I was inspired by sitting with the children and watching their fearless way of making merchandise to sell.” — Christy F., Parent, 5th grader.
Faculty & Staff

In our fifth year, we are delighted to introduce to you, Ms. Wendy, one of the founding members of our staff. In her first year at Athena Academy Ms. Wendy was the face of the front office. In her second year, she moved into a faculty position and quickly became an integral part of the teaching team. Ms. Wendy is described by her colleagues as “magical,” the one who somehow always anticipates the needs of the team. Another word often used when talking about Ms. Wendy is Zen. Her calm, peaceful demeanor in the classroom is a joy to observe.

Ms. Wendy says — “For the past 5 years, I have had the pleasure of working at Athena Academy. I’ve watched a start-up school, with a vision to help dyslexic students, grow from 7 students to 70! Athena Academy is a small community where members often wear many hats. This has been the case for me at Athena. I’ve had the opportunity to teach music, drama, technology, math, science, and history.”

“As an educator at Athena Academy, I’ve experienced the joy of teaching with an amazing team of people. Athena truly is a refuge for teachers and students. It’s a place where we can grow, share our talents and be ourselves. It has been an amazing journey to see Athena grow into the amazing school it is today.”

Athena Academy is grateful every day for Ms. Wendy’s five years of dedicated service!

Thank You for Your Support!

DEAR ATHENA ACADEMY SUPPORTERS,

By any measure the 2016-2017 school year was exemplary! We had a record number of donors, and thanks to a growing number of generous supporters, we attained 99% family participation and 100% Board, faculty and staff participation in Annual Giving. Your contributions support our mission-driven budget and allows us to hire and retain expert teachers, provide ongoing professional development, and offer tuition assistance to qualified families so that no child who needs us is lost.

The school gladly accepts online donations, checks, recurring donations, corporate matching, social media fundraising, bequests, estate gifts, and gifts of stock or other assets. We are grateful for all your contributions.

With sincere appreciation,

Carla Rayacich
Founder Athena Academy, President, Board of Trustees

WAYS OF GIVING

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Make a one time or recurring gift online at www.athenaacademy.org/give. All major credit cards are accepted.

Recurring gifts
Recurring gifts are billed to your card on dates you choose. It’s an easy way to make a bigger investment in education!

Matching Gifts
You can easily double or even triple your contribution by taking advantage of corporate matching.

Checks
Checks are payable to Athena Academy and may be mailed to: 525 San Antonio Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94306, or dropped off at the office during regular hours. Please write “donation” in the memo section.

Pledge to Give
A pledge shows you intend to make (a) donation(s) on (a) convenient date(s). It gives you complete flexibility to make payments for any amount. Families are counted in the Per Cent Participation when a pledge is made.

Stock/Securities
Do you own marketable securities such as stocks, bonds, or mutual fund shares that have appreciated in value and you’re ready to sell? If you have owned the securities for at least one year, you can donate them to us and earn a tax-deductible donation equal to the full current market value. You won’t pay capital gains taxes on the appreciation over your basis price. If this giving option works for you, please contact your financial advisor for advice specific to your situation, then contact Director of Development Sandra Gresham for instructions.

Planned Gifts
A planned gift is a donation from your estate. It is a lasting legacy on behalf of our students. Planned gifts may be simple bequests, transfers of cash or securities, a percent remainder of your estate, or you designating Athena Academy as the beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy. For more information or sample bequest language, please contact Sandra Gresham. If you have included Athena Academy in your estate plans, please let us know so we can thank you and be certain we understand your wishes.

Athena Academy is a not for profit 501-C3 organization, EIN # 45-2885305. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. We gratefully acknowledge all donations made July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. If you see an error, please accept our sincere apologies and contact Sandra@athenaacademy.org, so our records can be corrected. Thank you!
Honor Roll of Donors
2016-2017

We are grateful to the following individual donors for their generous contributions:

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Silicon Valley Community Foundation • Sky High Sports • United Health Matching Gift Foundation
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Financial Report

OPERATING REVENUE

Revenue in the fiscal year 2016-2017 totaled approximately $2,365,000. While the majority of the revenue comes from tuition, a significant portion comes from generous donations and matching gifts to the Annual Giving Campaign. Modest contributions are also made by foundations and corporations. These are very important non-tuition sources of income to Athena Academy, and help support operating costs including hiring and retaining teachers with competitive salaries and benefits, professional development for faculty and staff resulting in a constantly improving academic program, and financial assistance to qualified families so that no child who needs an Athena education will be lost.

OPERATING EXPENSE

Educational program expenses account for the greatest part of Athena Academy’s expenditures (80%). General Administration (20%) includes all overhead and physical plant costs such as rent, utilities, maintenance, campus improvements and fundraising. $257,400 in financial aid was awarded to qualifying families.

Athena Academy continues to place the highest priority on the quality of our educational program for children with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory processing differences, and related learning challenges.

INCOME

Tuition and Fees 97.05%
Donations 2.05%
Foundation Funding 1.81%
Corporate Support 0.83%
Sublease and other 4.24%

EXPENSE

Administration, Overhead, Physical Plant 17%
Fundraising 3%
Summer Program 1%
Educational Program Costs 79%

We are grateful to the following individual donors for their generous contributions: