ATHENA ACADEMY
Exceptional Education for Dyslexic Children

Annual Report
2018-2019 Academic Year
Update from Board of Trustees

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IS THE GUARDIAN OF ATHENA’S VISION, VALUES AND MISSION.

We accomplish this through the development and implementation of a long-term strategic plan with specific goals, and then monitoring how we are performing against those goals.

The goals for the school were categorized as Financial, Facilities/Mission Enhancement, Administrative, and Board Management.

Financial:
• A plan was developed to regularly review and, if appropriate, increase tuition in relation to the school’s expenses.
• The goal of enhancing Athena’s development activities is critical to support our long-term financial stability. A very successful first annual “Celebrating Dyslexia” fundraising event was held last May as part of this effort.
• The Board committed to the development of a “rainy day fund” for the future.

Mission / Facility Enhancement:
• To meet the schools mission of serving as many dyslexic students as possible it was decided to expand the summer academic program to attract more students who may not be able to attend the regular school year.
  We increased the number of students at our summer program 50% over last summer.
• A decision to consider improving the current campus or search for an alternative new permanent campus is currently in process.

Administrative:
• The administration is conducting an ongoing evaluation of the student achievement tests to verify that we are best serving the needs of the students.
• The teacher evaluation process is being more formalized to continuously ensure that we are able to support and retain the highest caliber faculty.
• Several new information systems were installed to increase our efficiency.

Board Management:
• Several governance goals were set to ensure that the Board understands their duties and has procedures for monitoring and implementing those duties.
• We have increased the Board size substantially over the past several years to get more diverse and expert opinions.

The Board of Trustees is grateful to the staff and many volunteers and supporters of Athena Academy for their ongoing commitment to providing Exceptional Education for Dyslexic Students. If you have an interest in perhaps joining one of our committees or the Board of Trustees itself, please let Shama or me know.

Dave Pritchard, Board President

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THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR WAS ONE FOR EXCITING FIRSTS FOR ATHENA ACADEMY.

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.

We held our first annual Cognitive Diversity Day in the fall of 2018. This community outreach event was designed to provide parents and educators both foundational information and innovative approaches for supporting young people who learn differently. We had a number of experts and specialists from the broader community share their knowledge with 90 attendees allowing them to expand their understanding and ability to work with cognitively diverse populations. We look forward to being the community leader in this area. In the spring we held our first Celebrating Dyslexia event at Hotel Nia. The evening was designed to bring together parents of dyslexic thinkers, supporters of innovations in the world of dyslexia, and successful dyslexics in a celebration of the gifts that dyslexic thinkers bring to the world.

Our partnership with the UCSF Dyslexia Center allowed our students to participate in both their Phenotyping, study to help determine the different underlying cognitive profiles of dyslexic thinkers, and their PRONTO study, to help define what educational approaches best support each type of dyslexic learner. We look forward to our continued work on these ground-breaking projects and to the additional research partnerships it may bring.

We are delighted that we are continuing to expand our reach into our community and beyond so that we can serve as many dyslexic students as possible.
Meet Some of our Graduates

AVA
Ava joined the Athena Academy in the 6th grade after public school became more and more difficult for her with every passing year. We wanted her to be part of a school where she could thrive rather than fall further behind. The small classes enabled Ava to actively participate in class and stay engaged. The teachers understood her strengths and challenges and helped her grow academically, socially and emotionally. Ava so enjoyed the community of students and teachers that made her feel that she was not alone with her learning differences. As she moves on from Athena, she will take with her fond memories of the teachers, staff, friends and most importantly, her self confidence and self-esteem. We are so thankful we have been part of the Athena Academy.

JACK
My son’s experience at Athena Academy was transformative. When he was diagnosed with dyslexia — rather late, at the end of 6th grade — he had reached a profound low in his school journey, having been treated as if he were willfully underperforming when he knew he was trying his hardest. Coming to a school where his strengths were recognized, and where he learned that having dyslexia is not a negative, but just a fact of the way he learns, changed his course. He regained a love of school and made lasting friendships here. I am forever grateful for Athena!

“I’m so grateful for the five years I had at Athena, for my incredible teachers and for the amazing staff. I learned a lot over those years but the most important thing I learned at Athena is that I am a good student. I’m a good student and if there are barriers in the way to my learning at school, I need to remove them because I now know that it’s those barriers, not me, not my learning disabilities, that prevent me from doing well.” — Jonathan
MADDY

Madeleine (Maddy) began her year at Athena Academy in February 2014 and graduated 5 and half years later in June 2019. Prior to coming to Athena, Madeleine was depressed and miserable at her former school. Her former school was unable to support her needs academically and most importantly emotionally. Since completing her education at Athena through middle school, Maddy has been able to blossom into a confident and happy person. She is transitioning to public high school wonderfully, she is academically challenged (as all dyslexics are) and it is difficult, but she has the confidence to know how to speak up for her needs and the spirit to never give up. The staff at Athena supported Maddy in sticking up for herself and believing in herself. Since the students are all also dyslexic everyone understands each other and have grown very close. Maddy considers the teachers and friends at Athena Academy as family and still enjoys popping in and visiting.

BEN

At Athena, Ben found a like-minded and welcoming community to be a part of during some of the most important years of his life. Because of his comfort and belonging, Ben was able to sharpen his academic and social skills in a nurturing environment where he felt appreciated and respected. The creativity of the students and staff made Ben feel more creative and helped him be more successful at learning. Ben now enters high school with self-confidence and the tools to do his best work while exploring his other gifts. Athena helped Ben be more confident and a happier person.
Project Based Learning

“Project Based Learning is distinguished by its focus on ‘big picture thinking’ and rewarding students for expressing their understanding in a variety of ways. This is ideal for students who tend to be big-picture thinkers and remember content better if it is attached to overarching concepts. Project Based Learning’s interdisciplinary approach integrates, rather than compartmentalizes, knowledge. This is advantageous for students who like to make connections between ideas.”
— Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity

Elementary students began the school year exploring the question, “How do we set ourselves up for success?” Students answered this question by planning a trip to Shoreline Park and a Camp-Out on the school lawn! Each Homeroom Learning Community took on responsibility for a different part of the project, like planning and making lunches for the group, designing games and building challenges, and creating a schedule.

This project was a fun and creative way for students to practice the skills of the Project Based Learning Cycle: ask, plan, learn, show, reflect. Students asked valuable questions like, “What materials do we need to order? How much time do we need for each activity?” Then they practiced planning by creating permission slips, writing supply lists, and emailing the information out to their families. Students learned all the steps involved in the project process along with how to use tools and strategies to help them be successful. Students showed their learning by making a class list of questions, resources, and ideas, and by enjoying the fruits of their labor at a successful field trip and camp out. Later, students completed thoughtful reflections about the project that helped them identify their strengths and areas of focus for the next project.
Project Based Learning is all about engaging learners in authentic problem solving. For our final science project of the year, students explored the question “How can we use renewable sources of energy to reduce the electricity the school uses from the power grid?” Students chose one of three “Energy Groups” to work in. Each group focused on building a different type of renewable energy source: solar panels, wind turbines, or a human powered bike generator. Along with their focus area, students also studied how circuits work, how electricity is generated, how batteries work, and the pros and cons of various energy sources.

Ultimately, students were able to charge school iPads with power generated by the wind turbines they constructed, power a pencil sharpener with the solar panel circuit they put together, and were able to generate enough energy on the bike generator they built to power the classroom TV!
Summer Academic Camp

For two weeks of the summer, dyslexic children from all over the Bay Area come to Athena Academy to learn tools and strategies to help them be successful in a fun and stimulating environment!

Students are introduced to specific Math and Language Arts practices like making clay words and numbers, using voice to text technology, exploring structured word inquiry, and more. In the afternoon, groups also focus on problem solving and working collaboratively through science experiments and engaging building challenges in our makerspace.

Our summer program this year partnered with the Stanford Brainwave Learning Center. Researchers worked with kids to investigate how education interacts with the development of brain function.
Art Lab

At Athena, the Art Lab is a beloved space where students are given the freedom to create. Through artistic improvisation, experimentation, risk-taking, curiosity, and play students build self-confidence, communication skills, and resilience. Students are given consistent support for their projects while at the same time being the driver of their creations. By building the ability to explore and try new things without judgment, amazing pieces and growth abound.

“Athena freed me to do my own art!”
Social-Emotional Learning

Advocacy for social-emotional learning (SEL) is growing nationally, and at Athena Academy we are ahead of that curve. Research is catching up with common sense which may help to influence educational policy in time. It is fortunate for our students that the founders of our school saw the intrinsic value and importance of SEL for our students from the beginning.

A recent report from The Aspen Institute summarizes findings and recommendations from an extensive study by its National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. The report shares findings from one of two meta-analyses that combine results across more than 250 studies and show that participating in social-emotional programs improves students’ academic performance. Students also did better on key SEL outcomes, including positive social behaviors, levels of social and emotional skills, behavioral problems, emotional distress, and attitudes toward self and others.

At Athena Academy, the gifts and challenges of dyslexia add value to our SEL approach. Athena is very much a “learning in action” school and as such the students aptly refer to themselves as Changemakers. In big and small ways as we “become the change we wish to see in the world”, SEL is woven into all aspects of our school experience, across content areas and across campus. In these very unique ways, Athena continues to set itself apart as a place where an exceptional and nurturing education is provided for the whole, dyslexic child.

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<tr>
<th>SEE IT</th>
<th>AWARENESS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Are you noticing that something isn’t quite right with someone?</td>
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<td>• What do you notice about the person’s tone of voice, facial expression or body language?</td>
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<tr>
<th>FEEL IT</th>
<th>EMPATHY</th>
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<td>• What does he/she feel?</td>
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<td>• Can you feel what the other person is feeling?</td>
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<td>• What would you be feeling in that situation?</td>
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<th>DO IT</th>
<th>COMPASSION</th>
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<td>• What does this person and you need?</td>
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<td>• How can everyone involved get their needs met?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can you find a WIN/WIN solution?</td>
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<th>ASK</th>
<th>&quot;I’m noticing...&quot;</th>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;It looks like...&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>LISTEN</th>
<th>&quot;It sounds like...&quot;</th>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;So you are feeling...&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>BRAINSTORM</th>
<th>“What do you need?”</th>
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<td>“I feel _____, when _____ and I wish _____”</td>
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Ms. Pam, School Manager

Pam is an extraordinary member of our staff who connects with everyone on campus. She not only takes care of front office responsibilities and communication with parents and families, but she also ensures teachers and students are thriving and successful every day, no matter the circumstances. Pam’s not-so-hidden talent is creating songs to make announcements (some classics include “Clorox wipes” and “Get your gum in the trash”). Those who attended the 2019 graduation ceremony will recall her talented recreation of the king’s song from Hamilton the musical. It only seems fitting to pay tribute to her in a similar way. Pam, you would do this so much better, but you inspire us to try! This is dedicated to Pam and all the moms out there.

DEAR PAMILTON
(sung to the tune of “Dear Theodosia” from Hamilton by Lin Manuel Mirada)

Dear Pamilton, what to say about you?
You love each child
You know them by name
When you came
into this school, you smiled
and won our hearts
We’re dedicating this page to you
School life never had so much style
When you file,
you organize, we don’t fall apart
You make us look so smart
You brighten the school with vegetation
Students run and climb for you,
band-aids and ice come from you
Your tough love lays a strong foundation
Students pass it on to you,
they give the world back to you
And you blow us all away
Celebrating Dyslexia — a Night to Remember!
Honor Roll of Donors
2018-2019

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

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**Financial Report**

**OPERATING REVENUE**
Revenue in the fiscal year 2018-2019 totaled approximately $2,616,000. While the majority of the revenue comes from tuition, a significant portion comes from generous donations and matching gifts to the Annual Giving Fund. Contributions are also made by foundations and corporations.

**OPERATING EXPENSE**
Educational program expenses account for the greatest part of Athena Academy’s expenditures (81%). General Administration (19%) includes all overhead and physical plant costs such as rent, utilities, maintenance, campus improvements and fundraising. $156,250 in financial aid was awarded to qualifying families.

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, 2018-June 30, 2019. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. If you see an error, please accept our sincere apologies and contact Jo@athenaacademy.org, so our records can be corrected. Thank you!