UPDATE FROM
THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees is the guardian of Athena’s vision, values, and mission. It consists of parents and volunteers from the community who bring their skills to help plan Athena’s future, and ensure that Athena is fulfilling its Mission and Values. We accomplish this by implementing a long-term strategic plan with specific goals, and then monitoring how we are performing against those goals. We focus on long-term goals, while the administration, led by the Head of School, focuses on the near term. We strive to achieve these goals despite external issues—such as the COVID-19 pandemic!

Highest Board Priority

The Head of School informed us in 2020 of her desire to transition to a new phase of her career. Therefore our highest priority goal was to find a new Head of School to continue the work that Shama had started, and take us to the next level. A search committee of teachers, administration, parents, and board members was active all summer. We had a tremendous response with over 80 applicants. Due to circumstances beyond our control, our chosen Head of School was ultimately unable to fulfill the position and an interim Head of School was appointed effective July 2021. The search committee was re-established and an announcement of the appointment of our next permanent Head of School is expected in January 2022.

Mission/Facility Enhancement

We are currently evaluating whether to improve our current campus or find a new permanent campus. There are more potential students and less competition in other parts of Santa Clara county. Campuses of our size are scarce, so this effort may be ongoing for some time.

Financial

The Board is committed to developing a “rainy day fund” for the future. We applied for and received a PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) loan which was subsequently forgiven. This has helped us augment our finances. Overall, our finances have improved dramatically in the last 3 years.

A plan is in place to regularly review and, if appropriate, increase tuition in relation to the school’s expenses. Our costs (especially salaries, benefits, and utilities) continue to increase.

A MESSAGE FROM
THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Our “secret sauce” consists of flexibility, a sense of urgency, and creativity. We were one of the first schools to shift to remote teaching when the first signs of the pandemic were evident, but we only did it after we had determined a plan that we thought would work, and we implemented it quickly. We heard from many parents that the “Athena Approach” to remote learning was superior to the techniques their other children at other schools were receiving. Most parents felt that, although not as good as an in-classroom experience, the “Athena Approach” allowed real learning to occur!

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 contact us.

David Pritchard
Board President
MESSAGE FROM
THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

As I reflect on the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, I keep landing on an incredible feeling of accomplishment in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Athena Academy, like the rest of the world, was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We had to shift to distance learning and adapt to the ever-changing health and safety guidelines, all while providing an incredibly nurturing environment and a high-quality education for our neurodiverse dyslexic and twice-exceptional learners. It was no easy feat, but this amazing community pulled together and supported each other in reaching and even exceeding our goals.

Athena’s talented and dedicated teaching team spent countless hours refining lessons, finding time to connect with each and every student, and honing their skills around distance learning strategies and techniques that play to our students’ strengths.

We completed our mid-cycle accreditation visit with the Western Association of School and Colleges and received high-praise for both our in-person and online classes.

We graduated two groups of amazing 8th-grade students, including our largest class ever, and saw the students from our first two graduating classes head off to college.

While I step away from Athena for my next adventure, I know that the foundation of the school is strong and that the team at Athena will continue to be at the forefront of dyslexia education focusing on the students’ strengths, focusing on the students’ overall well-being, fostering articulate advocates, and creating a community of young people who are accepting and tolerant of each individual.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this journey - it has been a true honor.

Cheers,
Shama
LIFE ON CAMPUS 2019
BEFORE COVID-19

In March of 2020, Athena Academy was visited by Stanford researchers studying dyslexia. Stanford researchers shared with the community about their research and students who opted to participate were invited to do some cognitive tasks while researchers monitored brain activity.

Prior to March 2020, life on campus was full of fun activities, learning through application, group projects and special guest presentations.
DISTANCE LEARNING

As schools were forced to close in-person instruction in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Athena Academy teachers and staff had to swiftly strategize, plan and implement an online learning model that would work for our students. Over many video calls, late nights and trials, Athena Online Academy was born. Our teachers and staff managed to put together an impressive platform of teaching strategies and tools that accommodate our unique teaching style and the needs of all our students.

"To say I’m amazed at how well the transition to online classes has gone would be an understatement. As each week passes I watch my child continue to learn and grow academically. I appreciate the hands-on approach the teachers have created for a distance learning environment. It speaks volumes about the time and love that goes into Athena’s online program. THANK YOU!"

Elementary School Parent
We are eternally grateful for how well Athena Academy staff and teachers adapted our son’s education to online school. He is able to access the full program, even enjoying being in the school play on zoom. Athena Online Academy has impressed us with their organization, tools and ability to individualize his education.”

Middle School Parent
Athena Academy proudly graduated 8 students in June 2020. Since in-person gatherings weren’t possible, graduates celebrated with a car parade!
Sophia Kaprielian started at Athena Academy in 2016 in the 5th grade and graduated from 8th grade in June 2020. Throughout her time at Athena, Sophia’s creative spirit made quite an impression on her fellow students and the faculty. Her love of theater was evident and the Athena community loved to see her beautiful Victorian outfits and hoop skirts on free dress Fridays. Her confidence and grace inspires all to break out of the mold and wear (or do) something you enjoy.

Sophia is an incredible actress and was in several plays over her years at Athena Academy! From the Peninsula Youth Theater down the street, to hilarious Middle School Plays Disorder in the Court and Daze of Olde, it has been a joy to watch her acting skills improve with every performance.
SUMMER 2020

BACK ON CAMPUS!

After the staff worked for months closely with the County of Santa Clara to put COVID-19 safety protocols in place, students are allowed back on campus for some multi-sensory, skill-building projects - that are really engaging and fun!
Following strict Santa Clara County protocols of ventilation, hand sanitizing, social distancing and mask wearing, students were allowed to return for full-time instruction in January 2021. The students were so excited to return, some ran through the gates screaming and jumping for joy! Quarantine was tough on everyone!

In June 2021, we graduated sixteen 8th grade students, our biggest graduating class ever. It was a joyful and heartfelt goodbye as we sent them off to the next phase of their education, with plenty of self-advocacy and self-awareness skills in hand.
ART SPECIALIST

MS. JEAN

From 2015 -2020, Athena Academy had the pleasure of having Ms. Jean teach Art to our student community. As a lifelong artist herself with experience as an Expressive Arts Therapist, Ms. Jean helps students build a greater sense of self and gain comfort with risk-taking through artistic expression. She guides students through relaxation exercises to encourage whole body involvement of their creative expression and a release of perfectionist thoughts.

“Art changes lives. Everyone has the power to create and I love sharing that.”

Ms. Jean Karki
Art Specialist
Since 2015, Ms Shauna has been teaching elementary drama, speech & debate and film critique. In addition, each semester, Ms. Shauna teaches play production at the middle school level, where the class culminates with a one act play presented to the school community. It is an Athena tradition to keep the play a secret so the community can be surprised by what is revealed! Many students choose play production semester after semester, as Ms. Shauna is able to guide students to be comfortable performing and help them to learn teamwork and collaboration, the principles of acting and improv and how to design and build a set.

“I love our community and how we’re all welcome to come as we are to school. Among the staff and faculty, we all have respect and great care for each other, and when one of us has a problem or concern, we all are there for each other.”

Ms. Shauna Yelnick
Drama Specialist
When Ryan was 4 years old, my husband and I discussed my concern that he really struggled to remember the sounds for each letter. My husband dismissed my concerns with evidence that he was “just like him” at that age.

By 5th grade Ryan was struggling. He would bring home spelling words and spend 6 evenings of the week learning them. We commended his hard work and did all we could to help but memorizing sequences of letters was not working. Soon, he had started to refuse to do any writing. We learned afterwards that the teacher was using peer editing and he was made fun of during recess for his inability to write. Not surprisingly with that as the backdrop, he had begun to misbehave in school which we knew was not our child’s temperament.

When we found Athena and we signed up as quickly as we could. At Athena, Ryan saw he was not alone in his struggles. Ryan was able to see that he was actually very smart and that his dyslexia helped him to think about the world differently. I believe the small class size allowed Athena’s teachers to really create custom benchmarks for the children based on where they were at. Ryan learned to use technology as a tool to help him compensate for his learning differences. He began writing again and we saw his confidence slowly return.

As parents, Athena also taught us. We learned how to help Ryan manage his strong emotions and how to be there for him when they popped up. Athena also prepared us for how we would need to advocate for Ryan in a post-Athena world.

Ryan is a true success story. At his first parent teacher conference after leaving Athena, I had 3 teachers complimenting Ryan. They said things like “We wish that every child would ask questions and communicate so clearly with us” (self advocacy!). Today, Ryan is at St. Francis and while he is getting grades any parent would be proud of, we are most gratified to see his independence, his good judgment, his kind demeanor towards friends and not least of all, his big dreams.
We are grateful to the following individual, corporate and foundation donors for their generous contributions.

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