

Annual Report Fall 2010



KNOW YOURSELF, ENGAGE THE WORLD

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“The students have a certain bond with the teachers. I used to always be quiet and alone and Quest has made me unafraid to try new things.”

10th grade student

Mission Statement

Achieving excellence in learning through inner awareness and loving engagement with the world.

Organization History and Background

In 2008, Quest Academy opened its doors as an innovative program which strives to serve students in their desire to know themselves, awaken and develop their gifts and capacities, work towards personal integration and balance, learn about the world, and prepare themselves for fulfilling and purposeful lives which contribute to the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants.

Quest Academy is located west of downtown Minneapolis in St. Louis Park; a first-ring suburban neighborhood. The school leases space from Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church. It is on the bus line, enabling easy access for students living outside the area who do not ride the school bus provided by Quest Academy. Although as a public charter school we are our own district 4182, we are a resident of Independent School District 283.

School Governance

The Board of Directors has approximately 80% new membership within the last 12 months and is working with its authorizer, Pillsbury United Communities, to develop strategies to review and update By-laws, policies, and procedures. Per the authorizer’s request, Quest Academy Board of Directors has reviewed by-laws and governance policies pertaining to Board membership, election of members, rotation of membership, and term limits. The current make-up of the Board includes two teachers, two community members and one parent. In the last several months, the Board has taken much greater responsibility and oversight over the fiscal policies of the school, and the accuracy of financial reporting, and is receiving updated financial reports on a regular basis. In addition, all members of the Board have undergone state-mandated training in governance, finance and personnel development.

2009-2010 Quest Academy Board

Name	Board Position	Resigned during the 2009-2010 year	Date Seated	Member Meeting Attendance Rate
Vickie Evans-Nash (Parent)	Chair	No	April 2009	95%
Susan Freivalds (Community Member)	Treasurer	No	December 2009	95%
Mary Fauchier (Community)	Director	No	December 2009	95%

Member)				
Katherine Giteck	Treasurer (until 4/10)	Yes	November 2009	85%
Lee Wignall	Teacher	No	December 2009	95%
Mary Sandbo	Teacher	No	December 2009	90%
Patricia Lucas	Parent	Yes	January 2008	95%
Bryan Schuett	Parent	Yes	January 2008	90%
Ted Harding	Teacher	Yes	September 2009	85%

School Management and Administration

This table contains information for ALL members of the school management/administrative team and also includes faculty employed by the school that did not serve as a classroom teacher (e.g. curriculum coordinators, social workers, counselors, administrative assistance, paraprofessionals, custodial, technology, librarians, etc.)

Name	File Folder Number	Assignment	Years Employed by the School	Left During 09/10	Not Returning 10/11
Laura Porter-Jones	N/A	Exec. Director	6 months	€	€
Sue Roth-Valdes	N/A	Executive Director	1.25	X	X
Nathan Davis	N/A	Executive Director	3 months	X	X
Sherrie Moe	N/A	Executive Director	2 months	X	X
Lee Wignall	384136	Dean of Students		€	€
Janelle Morrison	437355	Co-Director/Lead Teacher	3 months	X	X
Karen Kennedy	960300	SPED Director	2 years	X	X
John Plunkett	N/A	Paraprofessional		€	€
Brenden Babcock	N/A	Paraprofessional	.25		X
Tom Seaver	N/A	Office Manager		€	€
Ellen Jackson	N/A	Office Manager	6 months	X	X
Michael White	N/A	Office Manager	3 months	X	X
Nancy Maupin	N/A	Paraprofessional		€	€
Jordan Bentley	N/A	Paraprofessional		€	X

Jeff Gullord	301934	DAPE	2	€	X
Carol Zempel	N/A	School Psychologist		€	€

The employment of the previous administrator and 2 support staff was terminated during 2009-10 and, for a brief interim, administrative functions were distributed among a small, able, group of experienced faculty. A new director (the 5th in the school's brief history) was hired in March 2010 who has extensive experience in charter schools, specifically school finance and curriculum development.

The current Executive Director possesses a Master's in Educational Administration and Supervision and has more than 5 years of experience as a building principal and administrator for charter, private and public schools. She does not, however, have a Minnesota Administrative Certificate. As per Minnesota Statute, section 124D.10, subdivision 11, she is required to create a professional development plan. The Executive Director has applied to be part of The Charter School Leadership Program, co-sponsored by The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools and the University of St. Thomas. This program was launched to address the unique challenges of charter school leaders whose roles include being an instructional leader, a non-profit executive, and a social innovator. The Charter School Leader Assessment Center is an authentic assessment and development program tailored for those in administrative, instructional, and supervisory positions in a charter school. The goal of the Center is to allow current and aspiring charter school directors to assess their current skills and competencies, using real life work situations to demonstrate the skills and then create a professional development program to enhance and strengthen his/her skills and competencies.

Staffing

2009-10 Teaching Faculty Information

Name	File Folder Number	Assignment/Subject	Years Employed by the School	Left During 09/10	Not Returning 10/11
Jimmy Engler	398034	5/6 Language Arts & Social Studies	2	€	€
Amanda Nachmann	N/A	5/6 Science & Math	1.5	X	X
Tracey Peterson	425804	5/8 Math, Title I	2	€	€
Janelle Morrison	437355	Dance/Yoga	1.25	X	X
Shannon Seaver	432648	HS Math	1	€	€
Lee Wignall	384136	HS English, Physics	.75	€	€
Tim Popp	440593	HS Science, Grades 7/8	2	€	€

		Science			
Sarah Devers	451005	5/12 Spanish	1	€	€
Marie Williams	434440	Theatre	2	€	€
Amy Ketterman	444637	HS Social Studies	1		
Jeff Gullord	301934	5/12 Physical Education	2		X
Alison Humpal	448394	7/8 Social Studies, Title I	1		X
Mary E. Sandbo	367654	Special Education	2		
Michael Deraney	211539	Special Education	1.5	X	X
Teri Steger	403911	Special Education	.5		X
Deborah Olson	406412	Special Education	.5	X	X

A salary schedule for all staff & faculty was created and approved by the Board in the spring of 2010. Additional staff cuts were made between June 2010 and the start of the current year. Detailed job descriptions for all employees, including teachers, were developed by school administration and were approved by the Board of Directors.

Student Enrollment

Quest Academy Charter School serves students from a variety of backgrounds. Students are bused and transported in from urban areas, first ring suburbs, and suburban settings. One-third of the student population lives in the resident district of St. Louis Park (#283) and approximately ten percent come from Minneapolis. More than sixteen household zip codes were represented.

Student Enrollment and Attrition Rates

This table identifies the number of students enrolled at the school during the 2008-09, 2009-10, and estimated 2010-2011 enrollment. Data is based on October 1 Average Daily Membership (ADM).

School Year	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Attrition Rate
2008-09	34	29	23	29	23	19	13	3	N/A
2009-10	9	24	18	13	16	15	14	10	31%
2010-11(as of 9/20/10)	6	10	14	11	11	11	9	15	13%

Currently, Quest's student population is made up of more males than females, 44 and 40 respectively. Forty percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches as of September 17, 2010. Approximately 73 percent of Quest Academy's student body is white. Approximately 13% are black or of African descent, 5% are Hispanic, 6% are American Indian and approximately 4% are Asian.

More than 28% of the student population is identified as Special Education students (State avg. is 12%). Quest has and will continue to staff appropriate ratios and licensures for meeting the needs of the student population. Currently federal IDEA funds align with expected special education enrollment.

Graduation rate for 2010 was 75% for eligible seniors that were concurrently enrolled for the entire school year.

A parent climate survey conducted in June 2010 revealed the following:

- 61.5% of parents stated communication was "good" or better by the end of the 2010 school year
- 34.6% experienced concerns with school communication during the 2009-10 school year
- 73.1% stated that teachers were effective to very effective at relating to the individual needs of Quest students
- 50% stated the educational quality was high or above
- 26.9% stated that QA was unsuccessful at evaluating and promoting their student's academic success
- 85% of parents felt "satisfied" or "extremely satisfied" with the safety and security of the school environment

Innovative Practices

Quest Academy is grounded in contemplative practices with a standards-based curriculum. One of the primary strengths of Quest Academy is the ability to meet the needs of the "whole child" in regard to academics and inner awareness. Our holistic approach carries an equal emphasis on academic learning and self-awareness connected to inner-growth.

Contemplative Practice

Students are educated in contemplative practices to develop inner awareness that empowers students to embody a connected experience of confidence and personal responsibility. This practice is integrated into our school day through the circle process, restorative justice and meditation.

Circles

The circle process is a way of bringing people together that creates individual and collective empowerment. This process is derived from the aboriginal and native traditions, in which the circle is considered to be sacred and essential to community well-being. The circle process also brings together individuals who wish to engage in

conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making or other activities in which honest communications, relationship development, and community building are core desired outcomes.

Restorative Justice

Quest Academy utilizes Restorative Justice as an approach to resolving minor and serious student offenses. Restorative Justice has been cited as an effective method to deal with student transgressions without retribution, shaming or isolation. The goals of Restorative Justice include:

- Reducing reliance on suspension, expulsion and police intervention;
- An alternative way to addressing school and victim safety;
- Sustaining a connection with offending students; and
- Reintegrating offending students back into school communities.

Academic Program

Quest Academy grows out of the tradition of holistic, integrative, and transformative education. It may also be called “brain-based”, in that it incorporates the findings or contemporary research on brain and mind into its educational approach. Rather than being a static, pre-programmed, or genetically determined structure, the brain and its processes are in fact continually formed through the interplay of consciousness and the internal and external experiences of the individual, including a wide variety of environmental factors. The development of a healthy, optimally functioning brain proceeds best when it takes place within the context of a healthy, optimally supportive environment. The quality of one’s educational experience forms a major component of that environment.

It goes without saying that we are far more than just our brains. Brain structure and function, however, can offer a picture of the whole human being that that specific areas of the brain are associated not only with perception, memory, higher order and meta-cognitive thinking, emotions, drives, as well as a variety of “intelligences,” such as kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, etc. This is because the brain plays an active and essential role in coordinating the various aspects of our being. An educational environment that nurtures and helps to develop these various aspects of the human being is by its very nature holistic, integrative, transformative, and brain-based.

Such an education must bring together a diverse range of experiences and activities. The traditional model of a school, which focuses primarily on information gathering, addresses a necessary but relatively narrow band of the spectrum of learning experiences and activities. The Quest Academy program seeks to address the entire range in a balanced and developmentally appropriate manner.

Self-Knowing

We believe that self-knowing forms the essential basis for healthy learning. Therefore, in a developmentally appropriate manner, we seek to foster meta-cognitive skills which allow students to take charge of their personal growth and learning. Self-knowing is woven throughout our curriculum but two primary avenues for its development which we include are rarely found in most school settings. The

first of these is the practice of centering movement techniques. These help students “become present” and ready to learn. The second of these is contemplative inquiry. Quest teaches both faculty and students a variety of such practices, which allow students to access modes of consciousness which are reflective, relaxing, energizing, and conducive to insight. These are practiced in small groups during the first part of the school day.

Relationship and Relational Trust

Relational trust has been identified as the single most influential factor for success in school. Many features of Quest Academy contribute to relational trust, including its governance model, small size, and an instructional plan in which every teacher knows each of the students well. Students work often within groups of various sizes and constellations. To make these activities rewarding and productive, they are prepared by learning relational techniques such as deep listening, Bohmian dialogue, and circle process. Students learn to empathize with others and to approach group decision-making and problem-solving in ways that enhance the emergence of a collective intelligence. Restorative justice circles draw upon the same capacities in resolving issues of disagreement or injury.

Instructional Plan

Quest Academy serves students in Grades 5-12. Middle school students in Grades 5-8 learn as one group, while high school students learn as another. Most faculty work with both groups, so that Quest forms a tight-knit community in which everyone is intimately and individually known.

Quest Academy employs highly qualified teachers in a wide range of academic and artistic disciplines. Faculty typically teach in multi-disciplinary teams which structure their lessons with three goals in mind: 1) deliver age and grade appropriate academic content, including information, skills and practice; 2) coordinate individual teaching plans within a unifying team plan centered around an “essential theme”; and 3) engage and address the individual learner. Quest Academy’s curricular content is closely interwoven with the Minnesota Academy Standards.

The daily rhythm at Quest Academy is distinctive and conducive to learning and the reinforcement of learning. After initial activities which help students become individually and socially centered and present, academic learning begins with a highly focused period of Review and New Learning. This is followed by Individual Projects and Practice, which maintains the academic focus but is dedicated to solidifying new skills, researching theme-related topics, and working on individual projects (which include a written component).

Special Education

The Quest Academy school environment lends itself to delivering special education services within an inclusive setting. Special education teachers divide their time between direct student support, observations and assessments, meetings, and office work. They assist students in small groups or individually (both within the general education classroom and, when advisable, in the special education room). Thus, they oversee the delivery of special education services throughout the day, as specific in

Individual Education Plans, either directly or (under their supervision) with the assistance of other faculty.

Student Assessments

Student assessments are developmentally appropriate. Much assessment is informal, occurring within the context of natural interactions between faculty and students. Assessment always serves the function of assisting the student by means of accurate feedback and constructive suggestions. Three times per year (or upon completion of a project or significant stage of a project), more formalized assessments take place, their purpose remaining that of assisting students in their learning. Formal assessments begin with written self-assessments concerning a) areas of needed emphasis; b) proposed learning strategies; c) observed growth and improvement; and d) goals and aspirations. Space is left after each section for teachers to add their observations and suggestions. Finally, the student reads these comments and add a concluding statement.

School's State Report Card

Math

	Growth Over the 2009-10 School Year		
2009 Status	Low	Medium	High
Proficient	20% 10 students were proficient but made low growth	10% Count in cell too small to report	2% Count in cell too small to report
Not Proficient	33% 16 students were not proficient and made low growth	31% 15 students were not proficient but made some growth	4% Count in cell too small to report

Reading

	Growth Over the 2009-10 School Year		
2009 Status	Low	Medium	High
Proficient	10% Count in cell too small to report	19% 10 students continued to grow	19% 10 students made exceptional growth
Not Proficient	15% Count in cell too small to report	12% Count in cell too small to report	25% 13 students were not proficient but made exceptional growth

Non-Profit Status

Quest Academy is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Verification of this information can be obtained at <http://www.ag.state.mn.us/Charities/CharitySearch.asp>

Authorizer

Quest Academy is sponsored by Pillsbury United Communities. Chanda Baker-Smith and Neal Nickerson of Pillsbury attended 6 regular session Board meetings and additional special sessions. Ms. Baker-Smith was in regular communication with the director(s) as leadership changed. In January 2010, Pillsbury requested detailed information regarding the financial status of the school. Soon after, Quest Academy was placed on probation by Pillsbury in large part due to its financial status. In late spring 2010, Katie Black became the Charter School Liaison for Pillsbury to Quest Academy. Katie and the current Executive Director, Laura Porter-Jones, collaborated to bring the school out of probationary status by the end of the 2010 school year.

Finances

As 2009-10 began, Quest Academy was facing a financial crisis. The school started the year with a debt of \$87,000 from 2008-09 and faced a looming deficit of more than \$150,000 by June 30, 2010. Vendors and contractors were not being paid and expenditures were out of control. The school was overstaffed with teachers and administrators, plus contracts had been entered into that were beyond what could be afforded. To make matters worse, the state applied a 27% holdback of funding. As a new school with no cash reserves, this created a dire situation for Quest Academy. As the financial situation deteriorated during the course of the year, the school was at risk of closing. Generous donations from parents and community members allowed Quest to remain open and begin action to remediate the financial situation.

At the turn of 2010, the current Board took swift and dramatic action to reverse previous patterns, implement sustainable processes and procedures, and keep the school open. A new Administrator was hired in March 2010 with significant experience in charter school development and finance. Payment agreements with vendors were negotiated and viable plans were created to retire the debt. The school avoided entering into Statutory Operating Deficit by a narrow margin. The Board implemented \$155,671 (19.11%) in salary cuts, and worked intensely to develop a FY11 budget that, as much as possible, preserved the academic programs while keeping the school in the black.

Quest Academy made full use of CSP federal start-up grant funds (\$510,000) to obtain needed materials, textbooks, resource materials, furniture and equipment. A formal inventory documenting these assets was established. The grant was formally closed out in August 2010. Initially, the school had inappropriately relied on federal start-up funds to cover general operating expenses. By cooperating with authorities from the Minnesota Department of Education, the school was able to rectify all outstanding payables coded for the federal CSP grant. Required quarterly reports, inventories, and other submissions were completed in August 2010.

Financial Policies and procedures have been reviewed and updated to reflect the necessary check and balances. Policies include, but are not limited to the following:

procurement, fund balance, line of credit, payroll authorizing, monitoring of cash flow, audit, annual report, budget guidelines, MDE reporting, deposits, establishment of internal controls, federal grant reporting, federal grant submissions, vendor contracts, and inventory. In-house material requisition, purchase order and reconciliation procedures have been established and office staff have been thoroughly trained. In May, the Board approved a formal pay and compensation scale that is both equitable and takes into consideration the current economic climate of both the school and greater community. Detailed job descriptions for all employees, including teachers, were developed by school administration and were approved by the Board of Directors.

Plans for the Future

The Board successfully negotiated a reduction in lease costs in September 2010 for the remaining three years of the existing lease. This Lease Amendment significantly lowers the amount for utilities and operations and directly ties the base rent amount to enrollment (ADM). Quest is on track to pay off its debt to Charter School Development Corporation (CSDC) in the amount of \$100,000 borrowed in order to pay its lease obligation.

The FY11 budget was built around a projected model of 122 students. As of the first week of school, 90 students were enrolled so it is probable that additional cuts will need to be made in staff and programs prior to the end of September 2010. Capacity for the school is 147 students. The Board and Executive Director of Quest Academy have acknowledged that no further deficit spending will occur going forward and that by the end of the 6th year of operation a fund balance of 15-20% will be established.

Transportation was cut from three routes to one and St. Louis Park #283 buses are being utilized starting in the fall of 2010 for students that live within the boundaries of District #283. This will represent a savings of more than \$70K over the previous year. A renovation of the kitchen facility is planned for September 2010 so as to provide on-site food service that is affordable, nutritious and delicious.

Starting in May 2010, an extensive review of the existing curriculum and academic program was conducted by the new Executive Director. Her recommendations to the Board included a complete overhaul of the program starting with curriculum maps centered on state standards, extensive professional development and implementation of NWEA-MAP testing. Curriculum maps were created for each academic discipline and textbooks/materials were obtained utilizing federal CSP grant monies. Instructional staff received extensive training in cultural diversity, assessments and the use of data, as well as use of curriculum maps to monitor compliance with standards and meet the individual needs of students. All instructional staff will complete NWEA testing so as to utilize individual and group data in Reading, Language Arts and Math to help students meet and exceed established goals through the use of a co-teaching model.

Based on recommendations provided by the new Executive Director; results of the state MCA-II assessment; input from instructional staff; and, most importantly, feedback from parents obtained in an end-of-year climate survey Quest Academy has set the following school-wide goals for 2010-11:

1. 80%+ of students enrolled concurrently for the entire year will attend 85% or better of possible instructional days
2. 75%+ of eligible seniors enrolled for the entire year will graduate
3. 80%+ of students enrolled concurrently for the entire year will meet or exceed their individual goals in Reading, Math and Language Arts as per NWEA-MAP testing.

Quest Academy did not meet the state guidelines for AYP (Academic Yearly Progress) for 2009-10. As such Quest Academy must enter into a formal School Improvement Plan. The School Improvement Plan will include the 3 goals listed above, along with specific strategies for achieving AYP for 2010-11 and beyond. Some of these strategies include:

- Contracting with LDA Minnesota to provide Title I services to qualifying students. Students that score in the bottom 15% of the school's scores for Reading and Language Arts (*that are not on an IEP or 504 Plan*) will receive pull-out services during the regular school day provided by LDA.
- Due to the extremely high percentage of students identified with special learning needs and disabilities (37%+), Quest Academy has adopted a "co-teaching" model that provides for a lead teacher and paraprofessional in every classroom. Ongoing research has shown that low teacher-student ratios and additional academic support increase achievement and lead to higher rates of retention and persistence towards graduation. Federal and State special education funds will be leveraged to support this model.
- Quest Academy will expend 10% of its Title I allotment for FY11 on high-quality professional development intended to improve academic achievement. Instruction will include: ongoing seminars in co-teaching to support the inclusive Special Education model; seminars and webinars from the Minnesota Humanities Commission that are content-based in language, humanities, history and social sciences; and, training sessions in utilizing TOP 20, a program that focuses on behavior management and self-awareness designed to reduce truancy and increase persistence to graduation.

Summary

Having reached the end of its second year, Quest Academy is poised to move forward confidently for its third year and beyond. At the conclusion of the 2009-10 school year, a thorough needs assessment was conducted of the academic program. Detailed and thorough suggestions were made to the Board and implemented by the new Executive Director, Laura Porter-Jones. The review included detailed information regarding: Assessments and use of results; curricular structure and design; instructional methods; using a co-teaching model; culture of learning; family and community involvement; professional development for all staff; leadership and governance; and, finally, planning for the future. These changes will be incorporated into the School Improvement Plan due in November 2010.