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State of the School Report

Academy In Manayunk
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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The future of education will demand that Centers of Excellence provide leadership for teachers, professionals, and parents where research-based programs and data-informed teaching lead the way. This new generation of education will focus on university partnerships aimed at bridging the gap between research and implementing best practices in schools. The vision of the AIM Institute for Learning and Research is clear...if we are to make sustainable change in how children with learning differences are educated in our schools, we must model those best practices at AIM and we must partner with the universities to inform the education of future teachers as well. With 7000 children dropping out of school each day in our country, we face a growing social crisis. We are truly in a unique position to create a “legacy for literacy” in the Greater Philadelphia region and beyond.

AIM Charting the Course to Excellence

- “The field of learning disabilities, like other areas of education, is in the process of transforming from a discipline based largely on clinical intuition and craft to a profession that relies on scientific research. Although intuition and experience influence teaching practices, especially with individual students, instruction needs to be informed by research on effectiveness and the mechanisms that underlie efficacy.”
– *Learning Disabilities*, Fletcher and Lyon et al.2007

This is the guiding principle at AIM. It is no longer “good enough” to have a sense that children are making progress on their path to being proficient readers and learners. We must measure their progress and make adjustments where this progress is not what we feel is possible. When children master reading and math concepts each day and can chart this progress, the effect on their self-esteem is so positive that it prepares them to tackle the challenges of tomorrow’s new concept. As Tom Friedman, author of “The World is Flat” recently stated, “It is no longer good enough for our schools to teach reading, writing and arithmetic. They must teach creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation.” We see this at the Academy In Manayunk everyday.

The Voices of Children

The best way to convey this difference in how our students view themselves is to read their words in the letters and thoughts they share.

Charlie sent us a note, “I can hardly remember how hard it was in the beginning of the year to read and write....Now I think I am so smart – which I am.”

Simon writes, ”As you know I’m an artist and my artwork sells all around the globe. I would like to use my artwork for a fundraiser for AIM. I have a business proposal for you.” And so he does!

Emily’s sister says, “Thank you so much for helping my sister learn the way that she needs to. Ever since she started going to AIM, she has been even more of a shining star.”

Professional Development of Teachers at AIM

In an era when most schools are making significant cutbacks across the board, the Academy In Manayunk continues to invest significantly in teacher training and professional development. Several of our school administrators attended the International Dyslexia Conference (IDA) in November, 2009. As the author of the Reading Rope, Dr. Hollis Scarborough, said over and over again in her presentation, “Reading, it’s more complicated than we thought.” Her theory suggests that we must focus on the teaching of reading in many ways: decoding, vocabulary, grammar, background knowledge, inferential thinking and much more. This is the focus at AIM under the research-based LETRS framework developed by Dr. Louisa Moats, led by nationally-recognized trainer, Nancy Hennessy, a past President of IDA. The next frontier in research will begin to further explore the development of mathematics skills. AIM is uniquely positioned to be a research center for piloting these new math strategies for children with learning differences. Continued research in reading and writing are also on the horizon at AIM.

Educational Outreach and Global Impact

Since the start of this fiscal year in July, 379 teachers have been trained by the educational leaders at the Academy In Manayunk! Nancy Blair, a Wilson® and Just Words® Trainer, has instructed over 80 teachers in the Wilson Reading System, including 40 elementary and middle school teachers from the Medford School District. Michele Walker, our lead Foundations® presenter, has conducted three Foundations workshops for over 60 teachers in kindergarten through third grade. Pam Greenblatt and Jackie Galbally teamed up once again to offer their second session of the Early Literacy Workshop this year blending speech and language development with reading strategies for the early education classroom. Additionally, Jackie Galbally was the lead trainer for a team of educators from South Africa. Finally, on November 20 and 21, forty-five teachers from as far away as Wisconsin, participated in a RAVE-O workshop at AIM conducted by Stephanie Gottwald from Tufts University. Imagine the impact of this training on children in our region and across the globe! We are thrilled to welcome Mary Ellen Trent as our Educational Outreach Coordinator. Her expertise as past Director of the PA Branch of the International Dyslexia Association will be critical to the success of meeting the demand for quality teacher training in the Greater Philadelphia region. The next phase of educational outreach will include adult literacy and after-school reading programs!

AIM Board of Trustees

Mr. Matt Naylor, recipient of the Sally L. Smith 2008 Founder’s Award, assumes the position of Board Chair of the Academy In Manayunk. A member of the board and passionate advocate for improving the educational practices for children with reading challenges, Matt Naylor is well-qualified to lead the way into the next chapter of the school’s growth along with the continued support of Mr. Sam Greenblatt, past Chair of the Board. The prestigious Board, along with new members Darryl Ford, Head of William Penn Charter School, and Alan Gedrich, parent and attorney at Stradley Ronan Stevens & Young Law Firm, will continue to focus on ways to support the school’s mission as a Center of Excellence. Visit our new website at www.aimpa.org to learn more about the educational leadership of our Board of Trustees throughout the region.

Financial Stability

A generous and visionary donor stepped forward this fall to launch the AIM Endowment Fund thus further securing the long term stability of the Academy In Manayunk. The first challenge, a \$100,000 match to launch the campaign, was quickly responded to by donations as part of the Fund the Dream portion of the Second Annual AIM for the Stars Gala on November 5, 2009. We are well on our way to meeting that match with hopes that we may be able to exceed that challenge each year on our way to a \$1,000,000 start to our endowment! The Gala overall produced net proceeds of \$128,000. Several key grants received since July, 2009 will allow AIM to address the growing need to expand learning through the arts, sciences and technologies. The Academy In Manayunk received a leadership donation from one of its families in July, and received a \$250,000 grant from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, a grant from the Brook J. Lenfest Foundation, as well as matching grants from Keystone Charities Foundation and the Elite Charitable Foundation. Additional awards from The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation, the Farber Family Foundation, and EITC grants from Providence Properties and Philadelphia Insurance Companies provide much needed scholarship support for our families.

Future Home of the Academy In Manayunk

As previously outlined, the focus on strategically addressing the facilities needs of the Academy In Manayunk are well underway. In November, several strategic planning task force committees met, including a team of parents and board members looking into potential future sites of AIM. Under the leadership of AIM Advisory Board member Jennifer Crawford of Blackney Hayes Architects, the facilities task force outlined the needs for the AIM Institute of Learning and Research. With a forecasted growth in student population to almost 200 students in the next ten years, coupled with the need for more and more space for teacher training, speech and language and occupational therapy rooms, and research wings for partnering universities, there is much to consider in a future space for AIM. The goal is to keep the search focused on a radius of 5-6 miles from our current location in Manayunk.