



GREETINGS FROM THE O-SCHOOL



Dear Friends,

This season has brought much growth and renewal to the O-School. The Day School has grown and expanded in every way. There are now three classrooms for elementary and middle school students, with plans to add another.

The high school has continued to expand as well, and it has been a pleasure to see the students enjoy a newly renovated music studio.

The Transition Learning Center is entering its second year with an increased census and a full roster of exceptional programming.

All this comes on the heels of Camp O, the O-School's first summer camp, which successfully launched this August!

This edition highlights the many ways the talented professionals at the O-School have been busy blending tradition and innovation to meet the mental health and educational needs of Chicago area children and families.

— **Diana Kon, Ed.D.**
Executive Director

Behind the Yellow Door

Providing a Safe Haven and a Path to Hope



Celebrating Our Traditions

Traditions have always been a critical part of the O-School's milieu. They help us celebrate important accomplishments and milestones, and they give students a chance to strengthen their relationships with their peers and members of the faculty.



This spring and summer, the building was once again alive with the much-missed energy and excitement of students planning, decorating, and enjoying traditional events. Some of these included a Valentine's Day celebration, individual student graduations, a student recognition ceremony, and an eighth-grade graduation ceremony that included family and friends. Another highlight was the spring musical featuring live performances showcasing the talents of O-School guitar and choir students.

O-School Executive Director Dr. Diana Kon said being back together at the current level has been inspiring. "At the beginning of the pandemic, we had to scale back the size of our in-person events and activities, but it has been reinforcing and encouraging to be able to connect again in person. It has been joyous to feel more spontaneity and fun across the school."

The O-School had live performances showcasing the talents of O-School guitar and choir students.

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Especially important was the return of Prom, a student favorite. This year, prom was held in the O-School's side yard and included food, a DJ, and plenty of dancing. Prom 2022's theme was supermarkets, a very O-School choice, and many students and staff came dressed appropriately!

“This year’s supermarket themed prom was a huge success,”

— Dr. Diana Kon

“There’s no replacement for having an opportunity to get dressed up, share food, and being able to dance. There’s no replacement for these events and activities to build a sense of community,” said Dr. Kon.



Renovations Continue as the O-School Grows



The sights and sounds of renovation filled the halls during the summer break as the O-School expanded to accommodate increased Day School enrollment. Director of Facilities Dan Sliwinski has been busy working with the entire O-School team on several projects throughout the building.

This fall, the third floor will enjoy the addition of two newly outfitted high school classrooms, an updated school library, and a new area designed for students to practice music, dance, and drama performances.

On the second floor, classroom space was added to the Transition Learning Center (TLC) to provide additional instructional and common areas for the program. This space will also provide a place for TLC students to have larger meetings and gatherings throughout the school year.

The renovations also provide future expansion opportunities for elementary and junior high classrooms on the first floor.

“To date, these changes represent about half of the planned changes needed to accommodate growth in attendance at the O-School,” Dr. Kon said.

Check the website for ongoing updates as the O-School continues to expand.

Communications with Families

In an effort to continuously improve communications with family, the O-School provided a broad range of engagement opportunities this spring and summer, including a parent support group, a biweekly parent meeting with O-School leadership, and the Winding Path educational series, where parents and guardians learn about all aspects of transition planning. Parents also receive the weekly academic wrap-up, which contains news, information, and weekly updates.



New Programs Bring New Energy to the O-School

To better meet the growing need for mental health services, the O-School continues to expand its programming with the goal of serving more students and families while also offering a broader array of treatment and engagement options.

Busy Times for Admissions

Building and grounds isn't the only team that has been busy this spring and summer. O-School Admissions Director Kristin Friesen has felt the impact of expansion as she has seen an increase in the number of inquiries and applications.

"Many school districts had students back on-site for the first time in fall 2021, and at that time, they were able to identify students with special education challenges and needs. By spring 2022, school districts started making referrals," she said. "I think it's a function of so many more students being back on-site in a public setting and demonstrating that they need a smaller, private school setting."

In a recent national poll by the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, 71% of 1,000 parents said the pandemic had taken a toll on their child's mental health, and 69% said the pandemic was the worst thing to happen to their child.

Families, local school counselors, therapists, psychologists, and more are responding to the impact as student inquiries and referrals to the O-School increased significantly during the spring.

"There has been a flurry of prospective families and school districts who have toured the O-School this spring to solidify school placements for summer and fall," Friesen said. "The guests always respond positively to the school environment, and it is a pleasure to let them see firsthand students and faculty hard at work in both the classrooms and the therapy suites."

In response to the increased admissions inquiries, Friesen has several plans to help the O-School better respond to the growing need this upcoming school year, including a streamlined process and open houses for school districts.



71% OF 1000 PARENTS: The pandemic took a toll on their child's mental health



Camp O: Fun Under the Sun

The O-School held its inaugural session of Camp O in early August, as the young campers had fun under the sun and more. Camp O is a new summer program for students ages 6-15 who need a little extra support to experience the joys of summer camp.

The two-week camp embeds critical social-emotional programming in fun activities, all geared toward ensuring participants make friends and great memories while having skilled guides at their side to help them navigate tricky social situations that they have struggled with in the past.

This year Camp O campers participated in various themed activities including crafts day, line dancing, and Camp O-Lympics. To see some of the amazing adventures and fun activities campers enjoyed, visit the Camp O Facebook page at facebook.com/oschoolcampo.



Transition Learning Center

Launched in the fall of 2021, the Transition Learning Center (TLC) prepares students for life after high school. The full-day program is designed for students ages 17 to 21 who have, or nearly have, satisfied their high school academic requirements, have post-secondary aspirations, and can benefit from extra skill development to achieve these goals. To learn more about these programs, contact the O-School's Director of Transitional Services and Programs, Carmen Roberts, at croberts@oschool.org.

Discovering the Diagnostic + Evaluation Center



The O-School is excited to announce that the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center (DEC) has already begun working with schools and families to administer thorough evaluations for students in need. The DEC will continue to expand in order to help more students and families access appropriate services and supports.

To learn more about how the new DEC could be a resource to your child or the students you serve, contact the O-School's Clinical Director Karen Fried at kfried@oschool.org.



Yellow Door Benefit Gala, an On-Site Hit



This spring, the O-School Yellow Door Benefit Gala was held on-site for the first time, and more than 150 people attended the event after a two-year pause. Entitled “Relaunched. Re-Imagined. Relaxed.”, this year’s gala embraced the theme of summer camp in honor of Camp O.

“We were very pleased with the turnout,” said O-School Director of Institutional Advancement Tim Hammerly. “Many supporters, friends, and members of the local community came together to celebrate the return of the Yellow Door Benefit Gala and the launch of our new program. We are especially grateful to our many supporters and sponsors.”

During the gala, attendees were offered behind-the-scenes tours of the O-School. The journey through the building, led by O-School Admissions Director Kristin Friesen, gave visitors the opportunity to walk the halls, visit classrooms and other spaces, and learn about the O-School.

“It was a wonderful way to use the space. The building was magnificent, and we were able to maximize being inside and outside during the event,” Dr. Kon noted. “It was such a resounding success that we will likely hold next year’s event on-site as well.”

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Students Experience Growth in New Ways via Theatre and Art

Learn more in our latest blog: <https://bit.ly/3z5mrVQ>

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Student Bus Drills

Students practiced bus evacuation drills this past spring as part of their annual drill reviews. Other drills students learn and practice during the school year include fire, tornado, and violent intruder, all of which are thoughtfully designed and implemented to keep the community safe while remaining true to the O-School's basic principles of maintaining each student's mental health needs front and center.

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