



WELCOME TO SPA



SPA

ST. PAUL ACADEMY  
AND SUMMIT SCHOOL

**OUR MISSION:  
SHAPING THE MINDS AND THE  
HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE WHO  
WILL CHANGE THE WORLD**

**OUR VALUES:  
COMMUNITY | EXCELLENCE  
BELONGING | KINDNESS | PURPOSE**

ST. PAUL ACADEMY  
AND SUMMIT SCHOOL



# A MISSION-DRIVEN SCHOOL

BY DR. LUIS OTTLEY, HEAD OF SCHOOL



When you join us at St. Paul Academy and Summit School, you become a part of a community that is committed to shaping the minds and the hearts of the people who will change the world. Here, we believe in the power of education for the greater good, guiding our students to make genuine and lasting impacts both inside and beyond the classroom.

Our commitment to scholarship and deep learning is at the heart of everything we do, and our teachers are both masters of their disciplines and experts in meeting children wherever they are in their journey. They work hard every day to create learning environments in which students are both challenged and celebrated, whether in a Kindergarten reading lesson or a capstone research seminar in Grade 12.

The SPA experience is not just about lessons and achievements. At SPA, every interaction, lesson, and activity is infused with our five core values: community, excellence, kindness, belonging, and purpose. We foster an environment where every student feels valued, heard, and connected to the larger community. As a member of this community, you'll be a part of a mosaic of diverse voices, backgrounds, and dreams. This rich tapestry not only ensures that everyone finds their place but also that we continuously learn from each other.

The 2024-25 school year is my third as SPA's Head of School and my 33rd in independent school education, and I have a clear sense of what makes me proud to be a Spartan: our genuine and meaningful commitment to our mission, and to caring for the minds and hearts of our students. As you navigate this next phase of your student's academic journey, you'll find that this mission is woven into every corner of our community. Our mission gives us purpose and is at the heart of our five values, as they are outlined on the back of this brochure. Most of all, it reflects our deep beliefs in the talents and capabilities of our students. I hope you will join us as we continue living out our mission every day.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Luis Ottley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L".

Dr. Luis Ottley  
*Head of School*



# EXCELLENCE COMES IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES

Academic excellence is at the heart of the SPA experience. A survey of recent SPA alumni/ae indicated that 94% of recent SPA graduates report feeling better prepared for college work than their college classmates.

This kind of preparation reflects the power and appeal of the Accountable Classroom. There is no back of the classroom at SPA. Small class sizes allow our teachers to help students find their strengths and passions so that each one can excel in their own ways. As a result, SPA students are recognized for excellence across an array of academic pursuits—in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and nationwide. Students are challenged by what we believe is the best academic curriculum in the state. Caring support is a constant, but students will come to know hard work and high standards before they graduate.

At SPA, one size does not fit all and we don't teach to the test. In the earliest grades, children spend two years with the same two-teacher team, allowing for a longer developmental arc and deeper understanding of each child's needs. In the Upper School, we've chosen not to follow the Advanced Placement program so our classes can go well beyond the AP curriculum in depth and complexity. More than two-thirds of SPA students who elect to take AP exams earn a score of 4 or 5 and more than 90% earn a score of 3 or above.







# 61

**NCAA ATHLETES IN THE  
LAST 5 YEARS, INCLUDING  
10 PLAYING DIVISION 1  
COLLEGE SPORTS**

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## top ten

**THE UPPER SCHOOL  
MATH TEAM HAS FINISHED  
IN THE TOP TEN  
EVERY YEAR FOR  
THE PAST TWENTY YEARS**

# 48

**NATIONAL  
MERIT  
FINALISTS  
SINCE 2020**

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**THE *RUBICON* STUDENT NEWSPAPER HAS BEEN AWARDED  
A COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION  
“CROWN AWARD,” ITS HIGHEST HONOR,  
EVERY YEAR FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS**

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**THE UPPER SCHOOL ROBOTICS  
TEAM HAS QUALIFIED FOR THE  
STATE TOURNAMENT EVERY  
YEAR FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS**

# 5

# 95

# 37

**AWARDS FOR  
ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC  
RESEARCH EARNED  
BY SPA STUDENT  
PROJECTS AT THE  
2024 MINNESOTA  
STATE SCIENCE FAIR**

**“SPOTLIGHT” AWARDS  
FROM THE HENNEPIN  
THEATRE TRUST FOR  
SPA THEATRICAL  
PRODUCTIONS IN THE  
LAST FIVE YEARS**

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# 124

**STUDENT-ARTISTS HAVE  
BEEN HONORED BY THE  
MINNESOTA SCHOLASTIC ART  
AWARDS SINCE 2020**

# ENGAGEMENT LEADS TO BETTER LEARNING

**The Accountable Classroom has proven to be an extraordinarily effective approach that appeals to teachers and students because it's such an engaging learning experience. The approach depends on a student-teacher ratio of 8:1 that allows unique talents to be discovered and realized. It's a place where children of all ages learn they have a responsibility to engage and contribute—every day, every class, and every activity—because the school is only as good as the students and teachers make it, together. The discourse teaches students to respect the ideas of others, even as they begin to recognize their own talents.**

**Whether it's around a Harkness table during an Upper School seminar or a circle of kindergarteners on the floor, the constant at every age is an expectation of accountability within an intimate learning environment.**

## A Student's Experience In The Accountable Classroom

**BY ANANYA NARAYAN '20**

Harkness discussions are an essential part of the SPA classroom experience, and they embody SPA's culture in a lot of ways. The physical table itself speaks to the collaborative nature of SPA classes—it fosters a sense of community.

For the most part, Harkness discussions are student-led. Usually the teacher will introduce a topic for discussion or ask a question, but from there we have the freedom to explore anything about the topic that might interest or confuse us. Students will comment on a reading or issue, build on a classmate's comment, and make their own claims. I love that teachers encourage us to ask each other questions, and teachers also make sure that the quieter voices around the table get to have their say too.

Around a Harkness table, the focus is on the students, and it's our responsibility to make sure the conversation is a platform for furthering our understanding of the subject. That is the beauty of Harkness discussions. They lead you to places you never thought you'd go.





## A Teacher's Perspective

BY ANDREA SACHS, PH.D.

One of my favorite places to be is sitting around a Harkness table discussing American history with my students, watching them wrestle with the complex, often contradictory elements of our nation's past. The arrangement of the table—with everyone in the “front row”—reminds students daily that they all play a role in the collective learning experience.

Teaching at the table requires good peripheral vision and a light hand on the reins. I often begin the class with a structured activity: a free-writing activity, a provocative question, or a puzzling primary document. Once things are moving along, I can back up and let the students take command of the conversation. I see my role as helping students navigate the “sweet spot” between consensus and discord, clarity and complexity, and comfort and challenge. Conversations can get dull when everyone agrees with one another, so I might probe a bit to see where the unanimity breaks down. Even better is when a bold student steps in to play devil's advocate and sparks a productive debate. Because historical discussions usually involve stakeholders whose stories are being distorted or overlooked, my role as a teacher is to invite students to uncover and empathize with less visible perspectives.

Good Harkness table conversations embody the balance of safety and challenge that SPA is constantly striving to attain. We want to make all students feel fundamentally valued and affirmed, ready to articulate their ideas and ask their questions. The face-to-face conversations around the table support that goal, gently encouraging students to take risks and grow intellectually. It's very gratifying to know that our graduates leave SPA with a high level of intellectual strength and agility. They head to college with a sense of inquiry and a habit of embracing challenging topics and exploring big ideas.

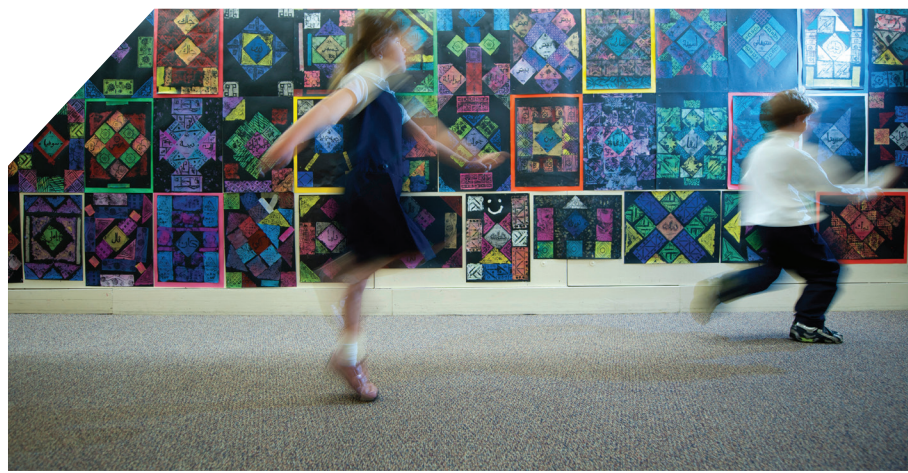
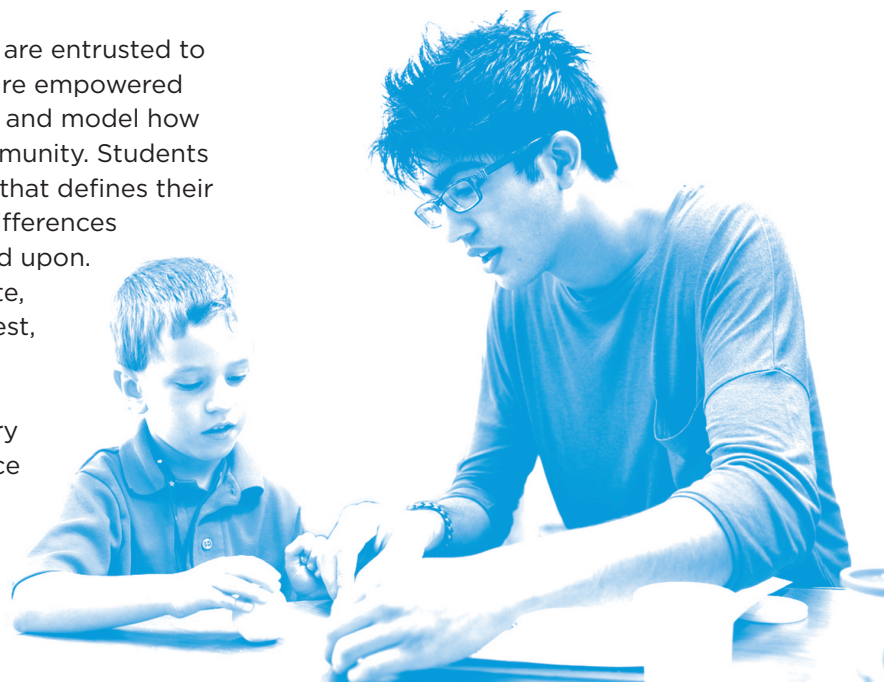




# BY THE STUDENTS, FOR THE STUDENTS

It's remarkable what can happen when students are entrusted to shape their community. Guided by adults, they are empowered with age-appropriate opportunities to articulate and model how people should live and work in our school's community. Students play a major role in defining the social compact that defines their experience at SPA. The result is a place where differences are celebrated and entitled attitudes are frowned upon. People are judged based on what they contribute, not what they have. Here it's good to try your best, and smart is cool.

The students have helped create an extraordinary community that balances the quest for excellence with a warm, supportive environment where children and young adults flourish—emotionally and intellectually.







## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

At the heart of SPA's diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) work is the belief that an educational community is at its best when it includes and values all voices, perspectives, and experiences. At SPA, maintaining an inclusive environment is inherent to our mission and evident in our community: 39% of children enrolled at SPA in 2024-25 are students of color. Our faculty and staff also represent a broad range of diverse identities with regard to race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation. The school strives to support students in the development of skills that promote collaboration across, and understanding of, diverse identities. Everyone's voice is essential here, and we work hard to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive, and every family finds a place to belong in our community.

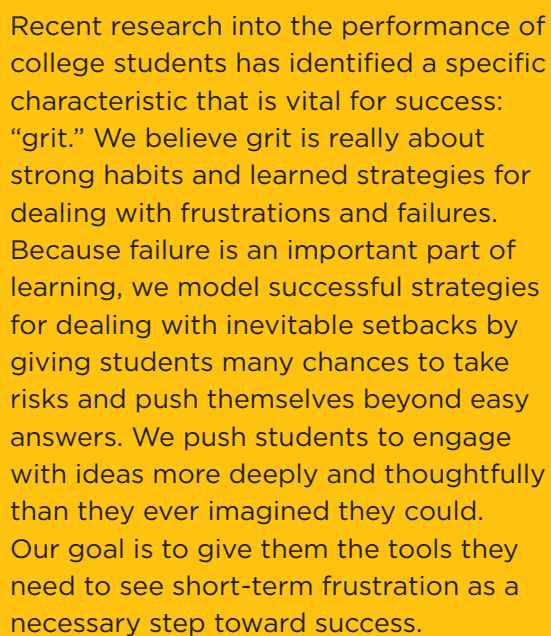
**Our vision is a diverse school where all feel a sense of belonging, and our commitment to this vision is enduring.**

We expect every member of our community to contribute intentionally to a culture in which all can thrive in every aspect of school life. We value our individual identities, lived experiences, diverse perspectives and shared commonalities, and acknowledge that these are essential for a healthy and inclusive community. We work to create this community through brave, respectful dialogue, and through equitable and inclusive actions and policies that respect the dignity and humanity of all.





# THE TRUTH ABOUT GRIT



Recent research into the performance of college students has identified a specific characteristic that is vital for success: “grit.” We believe grit is really about strong habits and learned strategies for dealing with frustrations and failures. Because failure is an important part of learning, we model successful strategies for dealing with inevitable setbacks by giving students many chances to take risks and push themselves beyond easy answers. We push students to engage with ideas more deeply and thoughtfully than they ever imagined they could. Our goal is to give them the tools they need to see short-term frustration as a necessary step toward success.







## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RESILIENCE

**BY JILL ROMANS, PH.D.,** ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Students who develop a sense of self-esteem built on resilience and perseverance—rather than on high achievement alone—are more likely to feel confident during difficult learning tasks. In this manner, resilience as a character trait is an important part of student success. Students who learn early on to derive confidence from within are much better prepared to approach difficult situations. In contrast, students whose self-esteem is derived from external judgments, such as grades, are less poised to take risks and are often afraid of failure at the expense of true learning.

**RESILIENCE IS A HABIT OF MIND AS MUCH AS IT IS A CHARACTER TRAIT. AT SPA, A KEY GOAL IS TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP THESE TOOLS OR HABITS OF MIND.**

SPA students develop the ability to persevere, to navigate ambiguity, and to ask good questions. They learn that often there is no one right answer, and that each answer leads to a new set of questions that deepen understanding. Resilience in this context is the ability to persist, to have difficult conversations respectfully, to negotiate and collaborate, and to test out different possible solutions.

In today's culture, students are looking for immediate feedback and information. We teach them to step back, gather new information, seek to understand the validity and relevance of that information, and dig deep. At SPA, students become comfortable with taking their time—they learn to ask questions, take risks, and understand that true learning is an ongoing process.

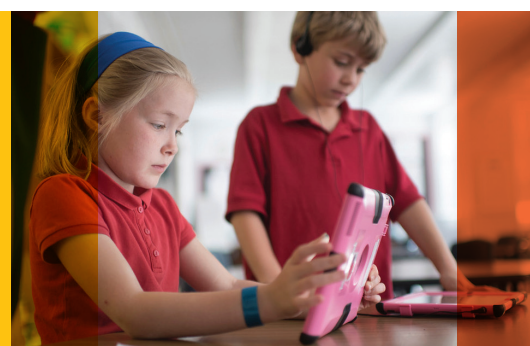


We believe that education should be a catalyst for the imagination. With supple minds that can synthesize, invent and build, SPA graduates are better poised to contribute ideas that will move the world forward.

# ORIGINAL THINKING

The curriculum at SPA integrates creativity and reasoning in novel ways, engaging students across disciplines. SPA's highly regarded math program begins with Singapore math in the Lower School and includes a focus on mathematical proof with students in the Middle and Upper Schools. An experiential and inquiry-based approach is a common denominator in math and science at all levels.

At the Lower School, the "Makerspace" is a classroom dedicated to hands-on creation and experimentation. Middle School students take part in week-long "Winterupt" challenges like reimagining and re-designing the recreational area on the Randolph Campus. The state-of-the-art Hugh K. Schilling Math and Science Center, which opened in 2018, is home to the Upper School's innovative coursework and programs in math, science, engineering, computer science, and robotics.



THE SCHILLING MATH AND SCIENCE CENTER  
COMPRISES ALMOST 40,000 SQUARE FEET OF  
CLASSROOM, LABORATORY, AND COMMON SPACES.





# ORIGINAL EXPRESSION

A spirit of creativity is palpable on both campuses and all classrooms. Visual art and music occupy an important place in the school's curriculum from the earliest grades. Performing arts are also a vital part of the SPA experience, as the Huss Center for the Performing Arts attests. The music program is integral to studies from the earliest grades. In all forms of creative expression and performance, students learn about the virtues of both independent and collaborative work.

Just as important, taking creative risks teaches the importance of courage as a prerequisite for artistic expression and truly creative thinking of all kinds.

TECHNOLOGY IS INTEGRATED INTO THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM BEGINNING IN KINDERGARTEN. INDIVIDUAL IPADS ARE ASSIGNED BEGINNING IN GRADE 3, AND THE COMPREHENSIVE 1:1 LAPTOP PROGRAM BEGINS IN GRADE 6.





PASSION



# LIGHTING THE FIRE

We view passion in a very specific way at SPA. It's not just a sense of enthusiasm and energy, although that is never in short supply. For us, passion flows from meaningful, deep engagement. That kind of engagement comes from teachers and coaches who really know their students and take the time to understand their natural proclivities and talents. Passionate engagement is the hallmark of people who make a difference in the world and an important part of our culture.



## Reflections From Recent Graduates

SPA regularly surveys recent graduates to determine how they felt about their education and how well it prepared them for college and beyond. Here are sample comments from our graduates:

**"I value the fact that SPA didn't teach to a test. I think SPA definitely gave me the tools to answer difficult/unanswerable/interesting questions and to use resources to figure out an answer."**

**"SPA INSTILLED A SYSTEMIC CURIOSITY WHICH SETS ME APART FROM MY PEERS."**

"SPA gave me the comfort to speak up in classes. It trained me well to maneuver in discussions: listening, building on the ideas put forth by others, and injecting new ideas to the discussion."



# PASSION IN SPORT

BY RANDY COMFORT  
UPPER SCHOOL  
DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS



Competitive athletics enhances the student experience by enabling engagement with peers in ways that cannot be replicated in the classroom. The life lessons learned through sports play a profound role in how students will contribute to society throughout their lives. That's why we're proud that from basketball to fencing, soccer to Alpine skiing, there's a spot on the team for every SPA student. Each year we average 90 teams in 17 sports. Among Upper School students, nearly 70% compete on at least one SPA team.

The passion that surrounds sport seeps into our culture. It provides a venue in which people come together and it can also serve as a catalyst for success in the classroom. The discipline and structure required to play competitive sports reinforces students' abilities to effectively navigate the challenges they will face throughout their lives.

**"MY ABILITY TO  
WRITE CLEARLY  
AND THINK  
CRITICALLY HAS  
BEEN EXTREMELY  
VALUABLE TO ME  
IN COLLEGE AND  
IN MY LIFE BEYOND  
COLLEGE AS WELL."**

"I was much more prepared than my college peers. I was astonished to learn some of my college friends have never written research essays. But I think the most important thing SPA taught me was how to fall down, and then pick myself up again."



# OUR VALUES

## COMMUNITY | EXCELLENCE | BELONGING | KINDNESS | PURPOSE

**COMMUNITY:** Our school community is built on the deep bonds formed between our students and their teachers, their peers, and the adults who support and care for them throughout their educational journey. These relationships, and the sense of community and camaraderie they inspire, are the foundation of the SPA experience.

**EXCELLENCE:** Excellence at SPA is characterized by the joy we take in learning and teaching, fostering curiosity, and engaging deeply in ideas. We encourage students to do and be their best both in and out of the classroom.

**BELONGING:** We expect every member of our community to contribute intentionally to a culture in which all feel a sense of belonging and can thrive in every aspect of school life. We work to create this culture through brave, respectful dialogue, and through equitable and inclusive actions and policies that respect the dignity and humanity of all.

**KINDNESS:** Kindness is a hallmark of our community. There is a sense of genuine warmth and welcome here, one that is palpable in our classrooms, hallways, and community spaces. We care for each other with appreciation and respect, and work to care for ourselves as well.

**PURPOSE:** Our purpose, both individually and collectively, is making the world a better place. When combined with a genuine commitment to creating a better world, learning becomes remarkable. In developmentally appropriate ways, we empower and inspire students to make a positive impact in their classrooms, in their communities, and in the world.



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