

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



ASPEN ACADEMY

Aspen Academy is a tuition-free, public charter school located in Savage, Minnesota. We enrich the lives of students and families in Savage, Prior Lake, Shakopee, Burnsville and the surrounding communities.

We provide an academic program focused on the Core Knowledge curriculum for our kindergarten, primary school (grades 1-5), and middle school (grades 6-8) classes.

THINK

Tenacity
High Expectations
Integrity
No Excuses
Kindness

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Introduction

Aspen Academy 4184 is a state recognized ‘High Quality’ public charter school which is in its 15th year of operation. The school serves students in grades K-8. Founded in 2008 by a group of parents who wanted a more academically challenging curriculum option in the southern suburbs of the Twin Cities, Aspen Academy started with 104 students in a church building serving grades K-3. Today, Aspen Academy is in its own building after two expansions serving over 600 students. Authorized by Friends of Education, Aspen Academy offers a rigorous academic education that follows Minnesota Academic Standards and uses Core Knowledge Sequence as the content foundation.

The mission of Aspen Academy is to provide students with a well-rounded, Core Knowledge based education which meets the intellectual, creative, and social needs of each child.

The mission is achieved through our daily vision in preparing students for future educational opportunities and life in a global society by creating an academically rigorous, literature-rich environment where class sizes are small, and a strong sense of community is built and valued.

Implementation of Purposes

WHEREAS, the primary purpose of the School is to provide an educational program for its students in order to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement; and WHEREAS, the secondary purpose(s) of the School’s educational program is/are:

- ☐ Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- ☐ Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes



2023-2024 Highlights

Almost two decades of growth and development has supported Aspen Academy in being a leader amongst public schools. We continue to identify and address the social and academic challenges of our students through diverse programs, services, and enrichment opportunities.

Our Title 1 programming allows us to serve more scholars than we have in past years. This programming is critical to our scholars who show gaps in foundational reading and math skills. In reading interventions, we served 75 students last year in small groups and pairs and 27 students in Title 1 math. These scholars all reported growth through their progress monitoring.



Kindergarten at Aspen Academy was a year filled with exciting milestones and memorable experiences for our young learners. One of the key highlights was the journey into the world of reading, where our students developed foundational literacy skills that will serve them well throughout their academic careers. We also celebrated our 100th day of kindergarten in a fun and creative way, with students dressing up as 100-year-old individuals, bringing laughter and joy to the entire school community. The spirit of creativity continued with a fun day of special Valentine's Day crafts. Several times per month, our kindergarteners had the

pleasure of welcoming their 3rd-grade book buddies, creating valuable mentorship and friendship opportunities.

First grade continued with their classroom transformation learning days with the favorite theme of being construction workers! The real life application of math and literacy skills always makes for a high level of engagement and learning. They applied their technology skills as they researched American Symbols, made a model at home, and using Flipgrid, recorded their presentations. First grade students also visited the Minnesota Science Museum to see their science curriculum components in action.

Second grade had a blast celebrating the day of "TWO's" 2/2/24! There were special math and literacy activities throughout the day that focused on the number two. Second graders also had a fun habitat unit. They were able to pick their favorite habitat and work with a group that shared their favorite as well and make a 3-D diorama and share them with the other second grade classes. Second graders took a field trip to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

Scholars in third grade attended Gibbs Farm for a field trip where they learned about Pioneer and Dakota life. They incorporated research and writing skills while working on the Native American Tribe project that went along with their social studies unit. Scholars also made a handmade artifact that went along with their tribe. Third graders worked with their kindergarten buddies on various reading skills throughout the year and became experts at recalling and sequencing information from a story. The final day of school was capped off with a talent show, showcasing a variety of different acts.

Fourth graders took a trip to the Minnesota State Capitol where they learned all about government decision making while being surrounded by breathtaking architecture and art. They even got up close and personal with the golden horses sculpture on the roof deck. Fourth grade students also visited the Minnesota History Center, where scholars learned all about Minnesota history through many interactive exhibits. Fourth graders had a magnificent talent show...talents ranging from dancing and singing all the way to card tricks and comedy. Scholars worked hard on a month-long Medieval Project displaying their knowledge of Medieval Times. Their projects included a speech, poster board, and a handmade object representing their topic. Parents were able to come in and learn all about Medieval Times from our knowledgeable students. Throughout the year, fourth graders had the best time working with their paired buddy from first grade each month. Fourth graders were able to take the concept of being a "leader" to a whole new level and were able to become "teachers." All scholars looked forward to helping guide their first grade buddy through given activities once a month.

Fifth graders attended their annual trip to Junior Achievement's Biztown in October. Students learned about financial literacy, how to write a resume and interview for a job, balance a checkbook, and work together to run a city! Fifth grade scholars also took a field trip to the Minnesota Science Museum, There they could experiment with many STEM activities, directly related to what they were doing in science class. The school year ended for fifth graders with the second annual Fifth Grade Bridging Ceremony, where students figuratively and literally walked across the bridge to middle school.

Our middle schoolers had an exciting year as well. Sixth graders enjoyed being able to attend the Eagle Bluff environmental learning overnight camp in March. Seventh graders took a field trip to the Minnesota History Center. Eighth grade students celebrated the end of the year with a trip to Mall of America, a special 8th grade lunch, and 8th grade graduation. All middle school students participated in a number of special events throughout the year. The Middle School Dance in January was Retro (1990's/2000's) themed with music, open gym, photo booth, karaoke, games, and food. Scholars also celebrated Pi Day in March with their annual Pi reciting contest, activities in math class, Nuk 'Em Tournament in PE, and of course--pie! In May, the middle school held its annual SciVentBerg Fair with 6th grade inventions, 7th Grade Rube Goldberg Machines, and 8th Grade traditional science projects. In the last week of school, middle school attended Valley Fair.

Governance and Management

School Management and Administrator Biographies

Melanie Jiskra, K-8 Principal/Executive Director

Ms. Jiskra has served as the K-8 principal for the past seven years and has officially taken on the role of Executive Director in addition to principal. She was named Executive Director in June of 2022. She has over 18 years of teaching and instructional coaching experience and 12 years in school administration. She earned her Masters of Education in Arts and Educational Administration through Saint Mary's University. She has been accepted into the doctoral program at Bethel University. Melanie has worked in traditional public schools, rural and urban settings, PreK-12, and elementary schools. Ms. Jiskra teaches aspiring principals through Saint Mary's University and trains Reading Corps Tutors across the state of Minnesota. Melanie's educational career highlights include being one of the three finalists for the 2022 MN National Distinguished Principal of the Year award, the recipient of the 2021 MESPA STEM Innovation Award, the recipient of the United States Department of Education 2019 National Blue Ribbon School award, and being a 2008 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Semi-Finalist.

Melanie's passion lies in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She leads professional development, handles the day to day onsite operations of the school and has implemented data driven decision making to all aspects of Aspen Academy intervention and instructional models. She has been a part of the partnership with the University of St. Thomas in the Charter School Residency program, is a selected member of the ServeMinnesota Education Stakeholder Committee, and has led Aspen Academy as a part of a research study with Reading Corps for the past two years. Her favorite part of the day still remains the morning when scholars arrive with smiles and a readiness to learn!



Mr. Rob Essig, Assistant Principal

Mr. Essig has been in education since 2012, where he has served as a classroom teacher for 7 years, a dean of students for 4 years and an assistant principal for 3 years. He joined Aspen Academy during the school year, transitioning from the high school setting, but continuing in the role of assistant principal while adding new roles such as building and grounds and school safety. Mr. Essig earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Child Psychology from the University of Minnesota. From there he went on to South Dakota State University to earn a Master's in Educational Administration and completed his Principal License from St. Cloud State University. Building strong relationships are a key part of what Mr. Essig aspires to bring each day so that students and staff feel welcome, supported and valued.

Mr. Eric Sandberg, Dean of Students

Mr. Sandberg is in his sixth year at Aspen Academy in his role as dean of students and his 13th year in education. His role includes coordinating our transportation, arrival and dismissal systems, school safety, and Aspen's THINK/PBIS efforts. Mr. Sandberg received his bachelor's degree in Social Studies Education from St. Olaf College and his Master's in Educational Leadership from Minnesota State Mankato. Currently Mr. Sandberg is taking courses towards his K-12 Administrator license through Saint Mary's University. Mr. Sandberg taught two years of high school social studies where he also coached various sports. After teaching,

Mr. Sandberg served as the Youth Development Coordinator for Faribault Public Schools for six years. This position entailed coordinating multiple youth programs across the district focusing on academic and enrichment goals. This position grew to include additional programming and responsibilities; mainly coordinating after school and summer STEAM programming for 600 students in grades 1-8. Mr. Sandberg has developed a community summer program at Aspen Academy for the past four years with great success. Mr. Sandberg makes it a goal each and every day to make a positive impact on as many scholars as he possibly can. He strives to attain that goal through his servant leadership and passion for education.

Development of Leaders

Melanie Jiskra, Principal, Executive Director

Professional Development Plan 2023-2024 Summary

Goal 1: Retain qualified staff - increase pay and insure teachers are in correct placements to maximize school growth and scholar success.

Goal 1: Met: Mrs. Jiskra continued to increase pay and insured teachers were in correct placements to maximize scholars' growth and success. This meant re-assigning some teachers into different grade levels or departments, offering looping opportunities, maximizing teacher strengths in leadership roles, and in some cases after coaching, non-renewal.

Goal 2: Safety plans are updated/completed and published to stakeholders.

Goal 2: In Progress: I sent the new assistant principal and current dean of students to the i luv u guys foundation training for crisis planning; connected with former police liaison on crisis management planning to lead the two administrators in completing the updated safety plan and reunification crisis protocol and plan. Currently, there are some final steps to finish up with role assignments and then sharing out of the relevant parts to families and public partners.

Goal 3: Sustain and/or grow enrollment.

Goal 3: Did Not Meet: Our enrollment continued to fluctuate throughout the year and we did decline. We worked on new marketing strategies and did see positive results starting to come to fruition from those decisions.

Goal 4: School of Excellence award application.

Goal 4: In Progress: Our SOE team has been meeting and are aligning our review and planning with our strategic plan.

Rob Essig, Assistant Principal

Professional Development Plan 2023-2024

Goal 1: I will acclimate myself with current laws and regulations in the state of Minnesota.

Goal 1: Met / In progress. I have attended MESPA, Air Quality and other conferences to stay up to date and informed on legislation related to charter schools. With the current legal changes taking place, I will continue to attend, read, and comply with laws that have been and are being implemented.

Goal 2: I will prioritize building needs.

Goal 2: Met. Our building needs have been a priority from daily maintenance to updating parts of the school that have been an afterthought. The school is up to date and is at a high level.

Eric Sandberg, K-8 Dean of Students

Professional Development Plan 2023-2024

Goal 1: To become an effective educational leader with the knowledge and skills to positively impact the student experience by continuing coursework towards administrative licensure.

Goal 1: In Progress: Mr. Sandberg has also continued his education by taking coursework to obtain his K-12 Principal Licensure through St. Mary's University of Minnesota. The anticipated completion date for the coursework is the summer of 2025. Mr. Sandberg is an aspiring principal member of MESPA. These memberships allowed Mr. Sandberg to stay up to date on best practices in education and educational leadership. Throughout the year, Mr. Sandberg continued to contribute to the administration team and to learn from the licensed administrators.

Goal 2: To become a more impactful leader to ensure the educational success of all students through equity work and increased knowledge of Special Education.

Goal 2: Partially Met: Mr. Sandberg continued to learn about best practices when working with students receiving special education services. This included participating in IEP meetings, learning more about the IEP process and timelines, as well as working closer with the special education staff regarding BIP's and behaviors. Mr. Sandberg also made it a point to include special education staff on committees and working groups to ensure their perspective and knowledge of the scholars they work with.

Goal 3: To continue to develop as a school leader that supports and promotes the work of high quality staff through effective leadership and feedback.

Goal 3: Partially Met: Mr. Sandberg observed and evaluated non-licensed staff for the 23-24 school year. As part of the evaluation process growth mindset focused conversations were had so that staff were empowered and focused on their growth. When areas of growth were agreed upon follow up and feedback was always given. This area is partially met as an area of growth for Mr. Sandberg is to increase his skillset of observing and practicing evaluations of licensed staff.

Eric Sandberg, K-8 Dean of Students

Professional Development Plan 2024-2025

Goal 1: To become an effective educational leader with the knowledge and skills to positively impact the student experience by continuing coursework towards administrative licensure.

Goal 2: To become a more impactful leader in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports by leading a team through training, implementation, and evaluation of Aspen's THINK model.

Goal 3: To continue to develop as a school leader focused on efforts around diversity and inclusion by promoting the growth and development of all students with an equitable lens.

Administrator Training

Month	Professional Development Topic
August	Legislative Legal Updates, PBIS Training, McKinney Vento Homeless Training, MTSS Training

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September	Seizure training, ALICE training review
February	MESPA - Principal and Assistant Principal attended 3 days of Leadership PD

School Board

The Aspen Academy School Board is the governing body that sets policy and provides oversight of the school through its five standing committees. The Aspen board is composed of no more than 5 parents, 3 teachers and 2 community members. Board elections take place every May and those elected are seated at the July meeting. Information about the election process is sent to parents and teachers in March with a deadline for responses. Candidates interested in running for a seat on the board are asked to respond to a slate of questions, as well as complete a Conflict of Interest form which is shared with parents and employees.

The annual election of board officers took place at the July 17th meeting. At that time, Andrew Price was elected Board Chair, Michael Faulise was elected Vice-Chair, Rob Allison was elected Treasurer and Stephanie Smitley was elected Secretary.

Board Member Name/Email	Type of Member	Term	Office Held	Committees	Meeting Attendance Rate
Michael Faulise michael.faulise@aspenacademymn.org	Parent	July, 2023 - June 30, 2026	Chair	Finance / Facility Strategic Marketing	54%
Andrew Price andrew.price@aspenacademymn.org	Parent	Jan 2021 - June 30, 2024	Vice-Chair	Finance & Facility Marketing Strategic Planning	100%
Robert Allison robert.allison@aspenacademymn.org	Parent	Jan 2021 - June 30, 2024	Treasurer	Finance / Facility	75%
Stephanie Smitley stephanie.smitley@aspenacademymn.org	Teacher	July 2022 - June 30, 2024	Secretary	Program Services Governance	83%
Brandy Mosser brandy.mosser@aspenacademymn.org	Teacher	July 2022 - June 30, 2024		Program Services Strategic Planning	100%
Rachel Mong rachel.mong@aspenacademymn.org	Teacher	November 2021- July 30, 2023		Program Services Marketing Governance	100%
Kristin Carlson krstin.carlson@aspenacademymn.org	Teacher	August 2023-June 30, 2024		Program Services	100%
Hani Mohamed hani.mohamed@aspenacademymn.org	Community Member	November 2023-June 30, 2024		Marketing	71%
Chris DiCapo chris.dicapo@aspenacademymn.org	Parent	July 1, 2023-June 30, 2026		Governance, Marketing	54%
Bryce Hotzler bryce.hotzler@aspenacademymn.org	Parent	October 2023-June 30, 2024		Finance/Facility	88%

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Special Board meetings during the 2023/2024 school year were held on: August 17th, working session January 18th and board retreat February 10.

The School Board has five committees which meet throughout the year. Committee meetings are published on the school's community calendar located on the school website, as well as on the board in the lobby outside of the main office and the weekly newsletter. The board agenda lists all five committees and has room for discussion by either the committee chair or the Director to address any matter that falls under the purview of the committee. In addition the Director provides the board with a monthly report that covers these areas. This report is also used as the vehicle for administration to report to the board its compliance with MDE and authorizer reporting.

The following is a list of committees, chair of the committee and meeting dates.

Committee	Committee Chair	2023-2024 Meeting Dates
Governance	Stephanie Smitley	July 21, January 31
Facility & Finance	Robert Allison	July 17, September 18, October 16, November 20, January 22, February 26, April 15, June 17
Strategic Planning	Andrew Price	January 15, 18, February 3, March 29
Marketing	Chris DiCapo	May 13
Program Services	Stephanie Smitley	February 8

The school board members completed the following trainings:

Date	Training Topic	Attendees
September 18	Special Education Update	Mosser, Price, Calson, DiCapo, Smitley, Faulise, Jiskra
October 16	MCA, Fall Fastbridge Data and Goals Review, Audit	Allison, Mosser, Price, DiCapo, Smitley, Jiskra, Carlson
November 20	World's Best Workforce Plan and Summary	Smitley, Faulise, Allison, Price, Carlson, DiCapo, Hotzler, Mosser, Jiskra
February 26	Winter Fastbridge Data	Mosser, Hotzler, Carlson, Price, Faulise, Smitley, Jiskra
June 17	Spring Fastbridge Data, Special Education Data	Smitley, Price, Mosser, Jiskra, Allison, Faulise, Mohamed, Carlson

Individual board member trainings:

Date	Training Topic	Attendees
January 2024	Governance, Employment, Financial	Tsibulko, Mohamed

Staff and Student Enrollment:

In the 2023-2024 academic year, Aspen Academy employed 48 full time licensed and 1 part time teachers. All teachers employed by Aspen Academy are licensed, or approved for licensing, and meet state requirements for public education instructors. In addition, Aspen Academy employed 48 non-teaching support staff. Aspen Academy had two staff that worked with an Out of Field Permission granted by the Minnesota Department of Education: Mandi Berndt for Grades 4-8 Latin, 0.2% FTE , and Danielle Kittredge for Grade 1, 1.0% FTE.

Aspen Academy teaching staff is selected through license review, interview with hiring team and final interview with administrator to review job description, policies, procedures, salary and benefits.

School Enrollment Process

Aspen Academy offers a free-access, well rounded Core Knowledge public education. Aspen follows all Minnesota statutes regarding the application and admission procedures for public charter schools.

Each year, applications are available fall/winter for enrollment the following fall. Procedures and deadlines are posted on www.aspenacademymn.org and explained during prospective parent open houses.

All applications received during the open enrollment period prior to the deadline will be on equal footing for the lottery. Applications are time- and date- stamped upon receipt. If more applications are received than space per grade level are received, the school holds a public lottery. In the fall of 2023 we started the application process for the 2024/2025 school year.

Applications were released online on November 1, 2023, with a due date of January 31, 2024, at noon. The lottery was held on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 5:00 PM via Zoom. Aspen provides sibling/foster and sibling/staff preference to families with currently enrolled students and children of staff. Applications received after the open enrollment period are numbered and responded to in the order in which they were received.

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School Enrollment History

Aspen Academy opened in the fall of 2008 with 134 students enrolled in grades K-3 and has grown to an enrollment of 618 students in grades K-8 by the end of the 2023/2024 school year. Aspen has experienced two significant milestones due to growth: the first was breaking ground to build its own school structure in 2012, followed by an addition to that structure during the 2017/2018 school year.

In 2023/2024, Aspen Academy served four sections in elementary grades, except for 5th grade, which had three sections. The middle school had two sections each for grades 6-7 and two sections for 8th grade.

The tables below show Aspen's historical and projected enrollment by grade level for each school year. Actual counts reflect two sections of 6th grade, not three, leading to updated projections that align with current data. Numbers represent actual average headcounts based on state-reported data.

Historical Enrollment by Grade Level

Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
2014-15	66	66	66	67	66	66	47	50	45	539
2015-16	66	66	66	65	64	64	39	23	30	485
2016-17	76	68	68	69	67	57	41	26	14	486
2017-18	85	86	64	67	65	59	27	38	23	512
2018-19	82	83	87	66	67	65	43	19	25	537
2019-20	111	88	92	84	67	70	39	31	14	596
2020-21	107	110	91	87	79	70	38	30	26	638
2021-22	95	107	95	87	82	74	60	34	25	659
2022-2023	87	82	99	86	83	80	50	50	23	640
2023-2024	79	88	81	93	86	74	47	35	35	618

Projected Enrollment by Grade Level

Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
2024-25 *actual 11/14/24	81	78	86	84	88	85	57	50	33	642
2025-26 *projected	88	88	88	88	88	88	50	50	25	653

Innovative Practices and Implementation

Aspen Academy continues to be a leader in innovative practices. For example, all students in grades Kindergarten through 5th participated in a multi-grade reading buddy program. Parent volunteers are always welcomed into the building and classrooms, helping with a variety of tasks. Band and choir held two in person concerts each, one in December and one at the end of the year. The students made amazing musical progress between the two concerts. CLIMB Theater performed for our students, empowering students through strong social emotional skills. In March, Aspen hosted its annual Festival of Nations, where families share culinary creations and perform dance, music, and art from their cultures. This is always one of our most well attended and memorable events. End of the year celebrations, such as the 5th Grade Bridging Ceremony and 8th Grade Graduation are capstones of these very important years.

The physical education teachers planned and supervised the Push, Pedal, Walk event for students. Students brought bikes and scooters to school and could push, pedal, or walk around the parking lot with their classmates. Many parent volunteers also helped make this day fun and safe! Our annual fall fundraiser culminated with this activity. The fundraiser was once again a successful financial resource for adding exciting and innovative spaces at Aspen. We exceeded our fundraising goal and were able to completely makeover our library space with new furniture and create a Maker Space in our computer lab.

Aspen continues to offer a plethora of after school activities, where students can sign up for engaging extracurricular fun. Options ranged from basketball, flag football, chess club, lego league, art club, knitting and crocheting, board games, Penguin Corps, and many more! Our teachers, staff, and families run these classes, sharing their time and talents with students. Aspen Afterschool Activities, or AAA, run every day of the week, in multiple sessions throughout the year. There truly is something for every scholar to engage in extracurricular interests and participation is high for these programs.

In 2023-24, Aspen added even more enrichment activities for our gifted and high achieving scholars. Students in grades 4-8 had the opportunity to participate in Math Olympiads, a team-based math competition. Many of our students placed individually in the top 25% nationally. A handful of students in grades 4-8 attended the Young Author's Conference in March. At this conference, students got to practice their writing skills, learn new skills from various Minnesota authors, and hear from a Newbery Medal recipient. All students in grades 2-8 participated in the Scripps Spelling Bee in their classes. The classroom level winners competed against each other in the All School Spelling Bee in January, and our school level winner qualified for and competed in the State Spelling Bee. Aspen also fielded a team for the Friends of Education Battle of the Books, in which the Aspen team placed 6th.

Aspen's THINK values continue to be the most influential in the school's success in meeting the mission and vision, the thread that runs through all that we do every day for every student is our continuing application of THINK (Tenacity, High Expectations, Integrity, No Excuses, and Kindness) principles. The THINK principles encompass developing those critical character traits that are necessary for reaching the district's mission and vision. With the implementation of THINK principles, the explicit teaching, modeling, and practice of the human values that make the world a better place not only leads to students reaching outcomes, but to developing agents of change who will have far-reaching positive impact in the world.

Curriculum

Language Arts

The Common Core ELA standards are the driving force for what we teach in reading and English language arts. To meet standards, Aspen Academy implements Collaborative Classroom Curriculum (CCC) in grades K-4 and Core Knowledge in grades 5-8. Collaborative Classroom integrates whole group, small group, and individualized learning in literacy. While using a wide variety of books for instruction, CCC is grounded in scientific literacy research, incorporating foundational skills, comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. CCC also includes an intervention component, SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words), that we have successfully used to guide learning for students who require a more focused instructional approach.

Core Knowledge is a curriculum which systematically outlines topics to be studied by each grade level, ensuring that no gaps in instruction occur; teachers know what students have experienced in previous years and build on the common foundation to deepen and enhance additional learning. It utilizes novels, plays, poems, speeches, and other written materials to teach the foundational skills of studying literature. Core Knowledge ELA has many cross curricular components with Core Knowledge science, social studies, music, and art.

Three times a year, elementary students are assessed on their early literacy skills, comprehension, and fluency. From the data, teachers are able to differentiate lessons and develop leveled guided reading groups to target specific skills and address standards that are not mastered. Additionally, universal screening is conducted in fall, winter, and spring for both elementary and middle school students. This screening is conducted through Fastbridge. Students not on target for seasonal benchmarks are identified with further diagnostic testing and provided additional support through

interventions. All students undergoing interventions have their progress monitored weekly for response.

Best-practice instructional strategies are utilized to bring the curriculum resources to life for Aspen Academy scholars. This includes training for all teachers on the Teach Like A Champion/ Uncommon Schools strategies, which involve teachers implementing habits of discussion, formative assessment, cooperative learning, and project-based learning. Support staff, including Title 1 and EL teachers, push into classrooms to support guided reading groups during core instruction, as well as having some pull out groups for intervention work. Aspen Academy utilizes a balanced literacy approach and guided workshop model within the classrooms. Through use of running records, universal and diagnostic screening, and common grade level assessments, teachers use data to determine flexible groups and instructional decisions.

Aspen Academy has continued to update their scope and sequence with Collaborative Classroom Curriculum in grades K-4. Collaborative Classroom has supported social emotional learning in addition to the guided reading workshop model for our youngest readers. Implementation of Collaborative Classroom in grades K-4 is now established, in addition to the intervention program of SIPPS, Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words, which aligns with Collaborative Classroom.

Aspen Academy continues to have literacy tutors from Impact, formerly known as MN Reading Corps, who deliver evidence-based interventions for young readers below target in grades K-3. Due to the strong partnership between Aspen Academy and Impact, we were approached to take part in a research study led by Impact researchers.

Math

Math instruction is designed to address the Minnesota Math Standards. Multiple curriculum resources are used to meet standards. Aspen Academy follows the Singapore Math philosophy, which is defined as instruction that supports students as they move through the stages of deeper math. The school uses Math in Focus as their curriculum, having adopted the newest edition in 2019 - 2020.

Teachers utilize the CPA (concrete, pictorial, abstract) approach, which allows for students to be introduced to concepts in a tangible, hands-on way and then deepens understanding and application as they progress to increasing levels of abstraction. Specific strategies Aspen Academy teachers implement include number bonds, bar modeling, and mental math. The important component in this math instructional approach is that, at any time, students are fluidly moving between the CPA levels with concepts. This creates a natural differentiated experience for students.

Aspen Academy uses the Math In Focus cumulative assessments to monitor student retention of the curriculum. Aspen recognizes that Math In Focus does not meet all of the Minnesota State Standards and therefore teachers have worked with the math specialist to design and implement instruction to meet those standards and incorporate those standards into the cumulative assessments. The cumulative assessments are designed to be standard-specific and rigorous and provide detailed data on each student.

Following these assessments, teachers and teacher leaders review the data and make instructional decisions. One important piece of the data meetings is planning “re-teaching” lessons for students who did not demonstrate mastery. The grade level will create and offer choices for how the re-teaching lesson(s) will be delivered. Following the re-teaching lesson(s), students are given a formative assessment to assess mastery, and the data review continues. In addition to the cumulative assessments, Aspen Academy utilizes the best

practice of triangulating data. Students also take the FastBridge math three times a year, and along with examining student work samples, the educational team is able to create an individualized learning plan for each student.

Aspen Academy also had two Math Corps tutors focused on scholars below target in grades K-3. Huge gains were shown in fact fluency which supported scholars in their problem solving and number sense. Grades 4-8 were supported by two additional Math Corps tutors, and students in these grades showed growth in their core math skills. Aspen’s Math Corp’s program and program’s results have resulted in two state visits (IA and NY) to visit and observe how we have implemented and embedded the interventions to receive the results we have seen.

Science

Our science teaching supports student interest, inquiry, and project-based learning and is aligned to the MN State science standards. With the Core Knowledge thread of science running through the classes, students are able to dive deeper each year into the biological, physical, environmental, and earth sciences.

For example, if we take environmental science throughout the scholar’s years at Aspen, kindergarteners learn how environmental changes affect the needs of plants, animals, and humans. Third graders would learn how the traits of different organisms make them more likely or less likely to survive in their environments. In fifth grade, students take on the role of ecologists to investigate and figure out what can be done to return an ecosystem to its original healthy state and by middle school, students are learning about wetlands and habitat loss and its impact on the greater environment. Additionally, our physical building location offers a backyard pond that connects inside learning to outdoor learning. During the winter season, students in grades K-8 set out bird feeders and learn to identify and classify the different bird species through observation. Our kindergarten students sprout plants in their classroom and then

plant them in the front of the school, while second graders develop an insect museum where their research and model insects are on display.

Students in the middle school grades apply their learning of cross-curricular areas during the SciVentBerg Fair. This project-based learning experience includes the use of a scoring rubric aligned to standards. Sixth grade students are responsible for conceiving, building, and demonstrating an invention. Seventh graders take their unit on engineering and simple machines to a new level by working together to build a complex Rube Goldberg machine. Eighth graders apply their knowledge of the scientific method to perform an experiment and gather data. They then analyze their results and draw conclusions by use of a scientific paper, display board, and oral presentation. Through these events, parents and community members join the school as competition judges. Students in grade 6 attend Eagle Bluff, an environmental camp for three days each year to experience hands-on lessons of various science projects in an authentic nature setting. Students build community through this camp and learn valuable skills to promote responsible behavior and treatment of our Earth and local environment.

Students are assessed through rubric scores on projects, classroom assessments, and, in grades 5 and 8, state standardized science tests.

Social Studies/History

Teaching in social studies/history/civic learning and engagement incorporates the depth of rich literature from the Core Knowledge curriculum, aligned to the state standards, and allows for students to have choice in ways to demonstrate their learning. Project-based learning is the major type of instruction utilized. In first grade, students learn about Early World Civilizations and created an American Symbol and used Flipgrid to teach their classmates about their symbol.

Third graders completed and presented research reports on different regional Native American groups. Students also wrote their own myths after

studying Roman and Norse mythology in our Ancient Rome and Vikings Units, integrating social studies and writing skills. Fifth graders completed a cross curricular writing and social studies research project on Civil War events and people.

The literary selections within each grade level for the social studies/history/civic learning and engagement are often set in those parts of the world and time periods being studied. Some of the texts used include: The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, King Arthur and the Round Table, and Lord of the Flies. Assessments include rubric scoring on projects and reports, along with classroom tests and Socratic seminars.

Other Curriculum Areas

Aspen Academy offers music, band, physical education and health, art, and Spanish as our specialist curriculum areas. All students in grades K-8 receive scheduled time with specialists. All of the specialist curriculum areas integrate the Core Knowledge curriculum into their classes. The elective classes we offer to middle schoolers are another area where students can expand their holistic learning and explore specific interests, rounding out students' daily schedules.

Art

We were thrilled to bring back art in the 2023-24 school year with the hiring of two new art teachers, who instruct our students in grades K-8. Our students' artwork once again decorates the hallways and welcomes visitors in our entryway. There has been an intentional increase in our culturally responsive approach in our art programming.

Music

Band is offered for students in sixth grade through eighth grade and meets twice a week. Musicians learn about reading and writing music notation, improvisation, and composers from different eras. The middle school band also integrates the Core Knowledge history periods into their music selection, studies, and performances. Band

supports state standards and essential skill acquisition every day as students perform alone and in groups. Band students evaluate music after concerts and small group performances to refine skills. Individual and group lessons are offered throughout the school day for mastery of skills.

Choir is another music option for students and has been steadily growing in popularity. Students build off of previous years knowledge in Music class and apply musicianship skills of reading rhythms and tonic solfa as well as standard choral octavos. In the past year the program has had both mixed choir, TTBB, and treble ensembles. In the past year students have worked individually on their voices by submitting videos of their singing and utilizing technology tools. Students have resumed singing together and are continuing to refine ensemble skills such as diction, blend, balance, articulation, and partwork.

General Music is offered for students in grades K-8. The MN state standards define the essential skills needed to be acquired by students. Through these grades, music study and learning happens through the different eras, which align with the Core Knowledge curriculum. Students in grades K-5 are taught through a Kodaly based approach. Music history of the medieval, renaissance, baroque eras are studied.

Physical Education/Health

Physical Education lessons in grades K-8 are skill based on the National Physical Education standards. Students in grades K-5 get PE class one time per week for 50 minutes, and students in grades 6-8 receive PE one time per week for 50 minutes. Students in grades 6-8 get health education once a week for 55 minutes. Topics covered in health include the social emotional curriculum of Second Step. The topics covered include goal setting and growth mindset, bullying and harassment, emotional health, and empathy. The usual health topics of personal health, nutrition and body systems continue to be covered. Gym teachers have intentionally incorporated more social emotional learning lessons into their PE lessons.

World Languages

Starting in fourth grade, students study Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes as part of their word study in ELA class. Latin and Greek specifically tie into grammar and vocabulary acquisition when connecting roots to words in English. Additionally, this reinforces the Core Knowledge subjects of mythology and Roman history that were taught in primary grades, while deepening and expanding students' understanding of these topics. Students also learn about prominent Roman mythology through reading and examination of related Roman art and architecture.

In middle school grades, Latin and Greek roots and Spanish cognates are explicitly integrated into the Core Knowledge ELA curriculum. Students use these roots and cognates to read, write, speak, and listen to grade level-appropriate texts. This further supports students in recognizing the Latin roots of their vocabulary in health, science, social studies, language arts, and math.

Due to the teacher shortage, our Spanish program for the 2023-24 school year was reduced to students in Kindergarten-5th grade. Spanish Elementary students receive Spanish instruction 1-2 times per week.. Elementary Spanish classes use the TPRS approach (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling), with stories, songs, activities and games to help students acquire the language. We aim to return Spanish instruction for all K-8 students next year.

Elective Classes

The 2023-24 school year brought the post-Covid return of electives for our middle school students. We offered a small number of electives and special interest classes, including Genius Hour, Life Skills, Community Service, and Study Hall. Students completed a wide variety of passion projects in Genius Hour, such as learning a new language, writing code, creating an app, writing stories, and crocheting a blanket. Students learned about time management, study skills, budgeting, and completed a vision board for their lives in Life Skills.

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Community Service classes organized a food drive and made pet toys for a local dog rescue organization. Electives have been very engaging and rewarding for both students and teachers, and we anticipate expanding our options in future school years.

Academic Performance

Aspen uses a variety of standardized assessments to measure student achievement and academic growth, including standardized tests (MCA III and FastBridge), interim testing, content area assessments, formal and informal teacher observations, and formative and summative assessments.

Aspen Academy compares performance with the State of Minnesota and with the neighboring district of Prior Lake/Savage according to the charter contract with Friends of Education. The following data will outline the performance of Aspen Academy with regard to the charter goals.

The new charter began on July 1, 2021 and therefore our updated goals are used and listed below for the 2023-2024 school year. Goals are in bold and results are italicized.

Charter Goal 1: State Assessments (weighted 50%)

Sub Goal 1.1: Absolute proficiency: At the conclusion of the FY 2025, the school-wide proficiency rate for the preceding four years will average no less than 13 percentage points higher than the state average for all students in reading, 20 percentage points higher than the state average for all students in math, and 18 percentage points higher than the state average for all students in science, the state average for each subject computed for the same grades as offered by the School.

*Results: **Goal not met:** Based on the past 4 years of the MCAs, averaged across grades and years, Aspen Academy was 11 percentage points higher than the state in reading proficiency, 9.4 percentage points higher than the state in math proficiency, and 9.6 percentage points higher than the state average in the area of science.*

*Based on the 2024 MCAs, Aspen Academy was 12.8 percentage points higher in reading proficiency (**goal not met**), 16.3 percentage points higher than the state in math proficiency (**goal not met**), and 8.5 percentage points higher in science proficiency (**goal not met**).*

MCA Subject	2018 Aspen	2018 State	2019 Aspen	2019 State	2021 Aspen	2021 State	2022 Aspen	2022 State	2023 Aspen	2023 State	2024 Aspen	2024 State
Math 3-8	79.3%	57.6%	73.9%	55.4%	55.0%	44.0%	59.6%	45.5%	58.9%	45.5%	61.8%	45.5%
Reading 3-8	72.2%	60.3%	69.3%	59.6%	64.2%	52.3%	61.9%	51.7%	63.4%	49.9%	62.7%	49.9%
Science 5 & 8	72.5%	51.7%	66.7%	50.4%	58.4%	42.7%	58.2%	41.3%	57.7%	39.2%	48.1%	39.6%

World's Best Workforce Charter Contract Target: All third-graders can read at grade level. In addition by the conclusion of FY 2025, the 3rd grade proficiency rates will be no less than 10 points higher in reading than the state average.

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Result: **Goal Met**

- Aspen Academy's MCA third grade proficiency rate was 12.6 points higher in reading than the state average.
- 80% of Aspen's 3rd graders were at or above target on the aReading assessment in the spring
- 75% of Aspen's 3rd graders were at or above target on the CBMreading assessment in the spring

Sub Goal 1.2: Comparative Proficiency: Each year, the school district will demonstrate higher school wide proficiency rates than the Prior Lake-Savage School District for reading, math and science (for the same grades as offered by the school).

Result: In progress - Aspen demonstrated higher proficiency rates in Reading and Math content areas in 2024, but lower in science. This was an increase from 2022, where Aspen Academy obtained higher proficiency rates in the area of Science only, and different from last year's result of higher proficiency in Reading and Science.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments - Historical Proficiency Results

Subject	2018		2019		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	AA	PLS	AA	PLS	AA	PLS	AA	PLS	AA	PLS	AA	PLS
Math 3-8	78.1%	76.9%	73.9%	74.5%	55.0%	51.9%	59.6%	60.5%	58.9%	59.4%	61.8%	60.6%
Reading 3-8	71.6%	72.7%	69.1%	71.3%	64.2%	56.9%	61.9%	62%	63.4%	60%	62.7%	60.4%
Science 5 & 8	72.5%	69.9%	66.7%	68.3%	58.4%	46.8%	58.2%	51.5%	57.7%	49.7%	48.1%	53.3%

*AA = Aspen Academy, PLS = Prior Lake Savage

An important part of this academic goal is the comparison of Aspen Academy to the district in which it lies, Prior Lake Area Schools. Below is a table showing comparison of demographic information.

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Demographic Comparison: Aspen Academy, Prior Lake, Shakopee and Burnsville Schools

****Data pulled from MDE Report Card (11/12/2024)**

Demographic Category	Aspen Academy K-8	Prior Lake/Savage Elementaries (K-5)	Prior Lake/Savage Middle Schools (6-8)	Shakopee Elementaries (K-5)	Shakopee Middle Schools (6-8)	Burnsville Elementaries (K-5)	Burnsville Middle Schools (6-8)
English Learner	8.7%	5.0%	2.4%	21.2%	11.8%	27.8%	20.1%
Special Education	15.3%	14.3%	11.8%	19.3%	15.7%	18.0%	16.8%
Free and Reduced Lunch	31.7%	19.7%	18.5%	45.8%	40%	68.6%	69.2%
Native American	1.4%	2.2%	2.4%	1.5%	1.4%	2.1%	2.6%
Asian	15.0%	5.5%	5.4%	10.2%	10.9%	5.9%	7.4%
Black	22.3%	5.7%	6.3%	16.2%	14.9%	29.3%	27.3%
Hispanic	4.5%	4.7%	4.5%	16.1%	15.6%	26.5%	24.7%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.1%	.1%	0%	0.1%	0.1%	0%
Caucasian	50.5%	75.4%	74.3%	46.8%	50.2%	28%	30.4%
Two or More Races	5.6%	7.2%	5.5%	8.6%	6.6%	8.2%	7.5%

Sub Goal 1.3: Growth: At the conclusion of FY2025, the average number of progress points generated by all students based on changes in their achievement levels, for the immediately preceding four years, will average no less than 2.30 in math and reading combined, as published by the Minnesota Department of Education NorthStar system.

Result: (Goal Met): No Data published by the MDE NorthStar System from the 2020 and 2021 school year; therefore we do not have the immediate four years of data. However, from the 2022 to 2024 school year, Aspen Academy generated the following:

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Combined Progress Points
Reading	2.58	2.47	2.56	2.54
Math	2.39	1.95	2.3	2.21
Combined	2.49	2.21	2.43	2.38

From 2022 to 2024, an average of 2.54 progress points were generated for all students in the area of reading (**Goal Met**) and 2.21 progress points in the area of math (**Goal Not Met**). The combined progress reports for reading and math for the preceding 3 years is 2.38 (**Goal Met**).

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Result: Aspen Academy demonstrated higher proficiency rate for all 3rd graders in Math, all 4th graders in Reading and Math, all 5th graders in Math, all 6th graders in Reading, 7th graders in Math, and all 8th graders in Reading, Math, and science.

	Reading		Math		Science	
	AA	PLS	AA	PLS	AA	PLS
Grade 3	62.4%	64.6%	76.3%	75.0%		
Grade 4	61.6%	55.3%	72.1%	70.4%		
Grade 5	65.8%	70.5%	50.7%	49.8%	47.9%	62.9%
Grade 6	70.2%	66.5%	36.2%	61.2%		
Grade 7	48.6%	56.8%	54.3%	53.5%		
Grade 8	54.3%	48.7%	54.3%	53.8%	48.6%	43.6%

*AA = Aspen Academy, PLS = Prior Lake Savage

Sub Goal 1.4: Achievement Gap Reduction

World's Best Workforce Charter Contract Target: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

- Each year, for reading and math, the average number of progress points generated by School students based on changes in their achievement levels, for students identified in the FRP subgroup, will exceed two.
- Each year, the School will demonstrate higher school-wide proficiency rates than the Prior Lake-Savage School District for reading, math, and science (for the same grades as offered by the School) for economic subgroups; and higher than the Shakopee school district for racial subgroups.

*Result: **Goal Met** In 2024, Aspen Academy generated 2.05 progress points for students in the FRP subgroup in the area of reading and 2.14 progress points in the area of math.*

Each year, the School will demonstrate higher school-wide proficiency rates than the Prior Lake-Savage School District for reading, math, and science (for the same grades as offered by the school) for economic subgroups, and higher than the Shakopee school district for racial subgroups.

*Result: **Goal Met***

F/R Lunch

Science

Reading

Math

Met 34.6%/30.3%

Met 46.2%/44.5%

Met 47.9%/35.7%

(Aspen Academy / Prior Lake Savage)

Goal Met - The proficiency rates that are in bold indicate where Aspen Academy has higher proficiency rates for those subgroups. Aspen Academy proficiency for all subgroups is higher than Shakopee in the area of reading, math, and science.

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	Reading		Math		Science	
Racial Subgroups	AA	Shakopee	AA	Shakopee	AA	Shakopee
Hispanic/Latino	64.3%	29.9%	57.1%	22.2%	NA	NA
American Indian/Alaska Native	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Asian	82.3%	56.5%	83.9%	48.1%	60.0%	42.7%
Black/African American	43.4%	39.4%	39.8%	27.8%	29.2%	25.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
White	64.2%	63.5%	63.6%	55.8%	53.1%	43.0%
Two or more races	62.5%	56.1%	75.0%	47.6%	NA	NA

*AA = Aspen Academy

Charter Goal 2: Nationally Normed Assessments (25% weight)

World's Best Workforce Charter Contract Target:

All students are ready for career and college.

Each year, the School will administer a nationally-normed assessment in at least grades 4 and 8. For 4th grade students who remain in the School through 8th grade:

- If their 4th grade national percentile ranking was less than 70%, at least 50% of the students will increase their national percentile ranking.

*Result: **Goal Met** - There are seventeen continuously enrolled (from 4th grade to 8th grade) scholars at Aspen Academy during the 2023-2024 school year.*

Ten scholars were below the 70th percentile in the area of reading in the fall of their 4th grade year. 50% of those students increased their national percentile ranking in the area of reading based on their fall 2023 administration of the nationally normed assessment.

Seven scholars were below the 70th percentile in the area of math as 4th graders. 71% of those scholars increased their national percentile ranking in the area of math based on their Fall 2023 administration of the nationally normed assessment.

Charter Goal 3: Ready for School (15% weight)

World's Best Workforce Charter Contract Target: All children are ready for school.

Each year through FY 2025, 95% of all the School's kindergarten students continuously enrolled since the first day of school will be able to:

- **generate all sounds of the first 26 phonograms (letters a-z) by April 1 of each year.**
- **count to 32 by June 1 of each year**
- **identify all 26 upper and lower case letters by February 1 of each year**

Result - In progress

- *By April 1st, 84% of scholars could generate all sounds of the first 26 phonograms*
- *On a fluency measure, kindergartners grew an average of 50.4 sounds in a minute from fall to spring*
- *By June 1st, 95% of scholars could count to 32*
- *An increase over the 2021-2022 percentage of 27*
 - *By February 1st, 84% of scholars could identify upper case letters and 74% of scholars could identify lowercase letters*

Charter Goal 4: Professional Development (5% weight)

100% of teachers will receive professional development training annually through FY2025, as determined by School records.

Month	Professional Development Topic
August	Aspen Philosophy, Core Knowledge, HR, Technology, Infinite Campus, PBIS-THINK and reTHINK Values and Expectations, Guided Math, Standards Based Grading, Data Driven Instruction, Collaboration and Communication for Leaders, Math in Focus, Amplify Science, Legal Updates, CPI Verbal Interventions, Sensory Room, Benchmark Assessment Training, ALICE, Math in Motion, SIPPS, PCA, CFSS Support Worker
September	SPED/SST/Early Interventions, PLC* - 2 times this month
October	PLC* - 2 times this month
November	McKinney Vento Act - Homeless Training; Northern Lights Training, PLC* - 3 times this month
December	
January	Secure Materials- Security Training (MCA), PLC* - 2 times this month
February	PLC* - 2 times this month; MESPA - Principal and Assistant Principal attended 3 days of Leadership PD
March	MCA requirements, PLC* - 2 times this month
April	PLC* - 1 time this month
May	PLC* - 1 time this month
June	

****All Licensed Staff PLC topics: Student Engagement (integrated Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY techniques with best instructional and classroom management practices); Guided Math strategies and implementation, Social Emotional Learning, SPED Resources (FastBridge progress monitoring, curriculum implementation, and data tracking techniques), Culturally Relevant Classrooms, and Scientifically Based Reading practices.**

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Charter Goal 5: School Culture (15% weight)

The School will implement an Academic Governance Plan & Calendar to critically evaluate and strategically lead the School's academic performance and improvement. The School shall include a summary of its findings in the School's board minutes no less than twice annually through FY2025.

*Result: **Goal Met:** The School has created a Board calendar to ensure the governance plan is kept up to date monthly on timely implementation of requirements. In addition, the Academic Calendar is created to include assessments and updates to the board on a regularly scheduled basis.*

Sub Goal: Retention. *Each year, the School will increase its student retention rate until it achieves a minimum of 90% student return rate for students entering into grades 1-5 and 60% return rate for students entering grades 6-8, and a minimum 70% teacher retention rate for those teachers the School asks to return.*

Aspen Academy's goal is to retain as many of its students as possible in middle school. Typically, Aspen sees a dip in retention in the 5th to 6th grade year, which is a result of families deciding to start middle school with their district of choice due to concern over open enrollment restrictions at the high school level, academic elective options, and athletic sports options. Aspen changed its middle school model a couple of years ago to add grade 5 to hopefully retain our middle school students. However, after running the program for a couple of years, we returned our grade 5 students to elementary. In the 2023/2024 school year, grades 6-8 are considered middle school, with a retention rate of 66.22%. The goal is still to increase retention between fifth and sixth grade.

*Result: Elementary 87.6%: **In Progress.** Middle School: 66.22%: **Goal Met.** Our school wide retention rate is 80.85%.*

Historical Student Retention

Grade	2018-2019	%	2019-2020	%	2020-2021	%	2021-2022	%	2022-2023	%	2023-2024	%
K Returning to 1st	68/87	78%	66/83	80%	93/111	84%	96/107	90%	80/95	84%	72/88	81%
1st Returning to 2nd	85/93	91%	68/83	82%	77/88	88%	91/110	83%	93/107	87%	80/88	90%
2nd Returning to 3rd	85/91	93%	79/87	91%	76/92	83%	80/91	90%	79/95	83%	74/88	84%
3rd Returning to 4th	65/73	89%	59/67	88%	73/84	87%	75/87	86%	71/87	82%	85/88	96.5%
4th Returning to 5th	71/73	97%	63/67	94%	58/67	87%	69/79	87%	71/82	87%	77/88	87.5%
5th Returning to 6th	35/70	50%	53/65	82%	24/70	34%	49/68	72%	46/74	62%	47/75	62.67%
6th Returning to 7th	41/49	84%	24/43	56%	30/39	77%	32/38	84%	47/60	78%	43/50	86%
7th Returning to 8th	20/26	77%	13/19	68%	24/31	77%	23/30	77%	21/34	62%	25/50	50%
Average	470/562	84%	425/514	83%	455/582	78%	521/610	85%	508/634	80%	503/615	81.79%

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Teachers and non-licensed staff are reviewed two to three times during the school year. This past year, we had a number of staff members that left during the academic school year. Of the 46 licensed staff members, we had Taylor Jiskra, Jackson Miller, and Mandi Berndt, resign during the school year.

Aspen Academy invited 44 staff back for the 2024/2025 school year. Of those offered positions, 13 chose to resign for the following reasons: taking a different position, taking a position closer to home, retiring, flexibility and not returning to teaching due to family changes.

Results: Retention rate of staff (licensed and support) asked to return was 82.35%

2023/2024 LICENSED STAFF

Name	File Folder No.	Assignment	Year Hired	Resigned	Non-Renewal	Returning Fall 2024
Emily Skahen	492714	Kindergarten	2022			Yes
Darby Thomas	422730	Kindergarten	2008			Yes
Jackson Miller	1003881	Kindergarten	2021	X		No
Kelley Felkey	465966	Kindergarten	2024		X	No
Jennifer Japel	449625	Kindergarten	2017			Yes
Marilyn Torvik	308819	Grade 1	2013	X		No
Jenna Petersen	1016178	Grade 1	2022			Yes
Alicia Wolf	1018003	Grade 1	2022			Yes
Kristin Behrens	348313	Grade 3	2011			Yes
Taylor Jiskra	501772	Specialist	2020	X		No
Cara Wiese	421058	Grade 2	2013			Yes
Veronica Woodward	472318	Grade 2	2018			Yes
Sarah Mateen	468894	Grade 2	2023	X		No
Mitchell Hopkins	506310	Grade 2	2021	X		No
Hannah Graham	487715	Grade 3	2021			Yes
Diane Sterna	403650	Grade 3	2010	X		No
Amanda Wolf	513141	Grade 3	2020			Yes
Shania McElroy	1018338	Grade 4	2022			Yes
Stacie Milton	1006500	Grade 4	2021			Yes
Kirsten Tyler	472335	Grade 4	2013			Yes
Rachel Benedix	1025942	Grade 4	2023			Yes
Shelby Schneider	1004185	Grade 5	2022			Yes
Rebecca Veer	516262	Grade 5	2020			Yes
Kristin Carlson	430651	Grade 5	2022			Yes
Shannon Mahaney	1009485	6-ELA/SS	2022			Yes
Name	File Folder No.	Assignment	Year Hired	Resigned	Non-Renewal	Returning Fall 2024
Jodi Ovrebo	411237	MS Math	2019			Yes

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Deb Olson	404745	6-Science/Math	2021			Yes
Sandra Bergen	330117	6 - Social Studies	2023			Yes
Austin Pitschneider	1009764	MS Science	2023		X	No
Nate Sickmann	500350	PE K-8/Health	2018			Yes
Emily Van Wyhe	1014623	Band	2023	X		No
Abigail Weidner	1007428	ELA	2023			Yes
Zach Jiskra	507543	PE/Health	2019	X		No
Barry Gross	417902	Music - K-8	2014			Yes
Amy Jacobson	451230	Spanish - K-8	2012			Yes
Beth Gale	371916	5-8 Art	2023			Yes
Abbigael Linkert	1026970	K-4	2023			Yes
Mandi Berndt	488896	ELL/Latin	2019	X		No
Katelyn Pieper	1009939	SPED - K-4	2021			Yes
Brandy Mosser	411676	SPED K-4	2019	X		No
Nicole Grams	448751	SPED	2016			Yes
Kaitlyn Schmitz	512024	SPED	2023			Yes
Anne Keroff	497453	SPED	2022			Yes
Phillip Poole	1013483	SPED	2019			Yes
Stephanie Smitley	433554	In House Substitute/Math Support	2017			Yes
Rachel Humensky	1017188	In House Substitute	2022	X		No
Sara Berge	424332	In House Substitute	2021			Yes
Danielle Kittredge	1006500	In House Substitute	2022			Yes
Talen Senum	1023776	In House Substitute	2023			Yes

Support Staff

Name	Assignment	Year Hired	Resigned	Non-Renewal	Returning
Teresa Drees	Paraprofessional	2022	X		No
Maia Caldwell	Paraprofessional	2021			Yes
Kayla Bramhall	Paraprofessional	2018			Yes
Ethan Devary	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Canyon Thunstrom	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Tim Spika	Paraprofessional	2018	X		No
Manisha Pradhan	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes
Morgan Walters	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes
Stacey Foust	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes
Angie Juergens	Paraprofessional	2021			Yes
Noah Jiskra	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes

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Jennie Teichman	Paraprofessional	2021			Yes
Emily Larson	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes
Anna Larson	Paraprofessional	2024			Yes
Rochelle Mickelson	Paraprofessional	2024			Yes
Shania Lindsey	Paraprofessional	2022	X		No
Maria Paulson	Paraprofessional	2022			Yes
Afifa Ahmed	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Emely Contreras	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Noelle Webster	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Elizabeth Hanson	Paraprofessional	2023			Yes
Jasmin Brusas	Eagles Nest/SIPPS	2021			Yes
Katherine Smith	SIPPS Interventionist	2021			Yes
Jodi Herlick	Special Education Coordinator	2018			Yes
Lorien Parson	Reading Interventionist	2021			Yes
Nathan Tuma	Counselor	2021	X		No
Nereyda Mina	Custodian	2018			Yes
Thomas Foust	Custodian	2023			Yes
Thomas McEachern	Custodian	2023			Yes
Jean Brening	Receptionist	2018			Yes
Julie Martini	Enrollment/MARSS	2019			Yes
Lydia Cedarberg	Admin Assistant	2023			Yes
Rachel Mong	Curriculum Coordinator	2020			Yes
Jed Martini	IT Support	2023			Yes
Kortney Krampotich	SPED due process	2023			Yes
Sara Berkness	Nutrition Services	2020			Yes
Shawna Wellman	Nutrition Services	2023			Yes
Molly McGrath	Nutrition Services	2019			Yes
Hessouwe Bodjona	Health Office Support	2023			Yes

Administration

Name	File Folder No.	Assignment	Year Hired	Resigned	Non-Renewal	Returning
Melanie Jiskra	380483	Director/Principal	2017			Yes
Rob Essig	463786	Vice Principal	2023			Yes
Eric Sandberg	462825	Dean of Students	2019			Yes

Marketing and Recruitment Efforts/Dissemination of Information-2023-2024 School Year

Throughout the 2023-2024 school year, Aspen Academy employed a comprehensive marketing and recruitment strategy to share information about the school and charter school offerings.

A variety of communication was utilized to reach diverse audiences, including potential families from all socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds.

Marketing Committee

Aspen Academy established a dedicated marketing committee that convened regularly throughout the year.

Communications/Marketing Coordinator

In support of communication and marketing efforts, Aspen Academy employed a communications/marketing coordinator. The focus of these efforts was to target a wide range of families, including those from low-income households, students of color, and families of students at risk of academic failure.

Prospective Family Tours

Aspen Academy hosted over 40 prospective family tours throughout the school year and summer, with multiple families attending each session. These tours were actively promoted through various channels, including Facebook, Instagram, local festivals, and the school's website. The tours provided parents and their children with the opportunity to learn more about Aspen Academy and the benefits of charter school education. Tours were offered multiple times each month, with private tours available for families unable to attend scheduled sessions or those needing accommodations for anxiety or overstimulation.

Community Engagement and Media Outreach

To keep the local community informed, Aspen Academy distributed press releases to local media outlets, including the *Prior Lake American* and *Savage Pacer*. These press releases highlighted the school's continued innovation, such as its work with open-source software, as well as key events like the annual Festival of Nations, the Young Authors'

Writing Conference, and the Math Masters Competition, where Aspen scholars participated.

In addition, Aspen Academy sent 15,000 postcards to homes in Prior Lake, and another 15,000 to families in Savage and Burnsville. The National Junior Honor Society participated in the Prior Lake Fall and Spring Festivals to showcase the unique qualities of Aspen Academy. Additionally, Aspen Academy placed advertisements at the Savage Cub Foods, with confirmed views reaching:

- Monthly Impressions: 255,931
- Unique Impressions: 37,678
- Total Impressions Since May: 1,023,722

Online Media Presence

A focused effort was made in 2023-2024 to strengthen Aspen Academy's online presence. The school increased real-time updates on events, celebrations, and classroom activities through photos and video clips shared on Facebook. This increased engagement resulted in a growth of followers to 1.3K, with average likes reaching 30 and average views surpassing 400.

Aspen Academy also maintained profiles on Niche.com, Schooldigger.com, and GreatSchools.org, receiving positive ratings across various categories. Notably, Aspen Academy was ranked as follows on Niche.com (as of 11/27/24):

- A- in Diversity
- A in Academics
- A+ in Teachers
- Ranked #2 for Best Public Middle School Teachers in MN (#2 of 331)
- Ranked #3 for Best Public Elementary School Teachers in MN (#3 of 798)
- Ranked #9 for Best Charter Middle Schools in MN (#9 of 98)
- Ranked #10 for Best Charter Elementary Schools in MN (#10 of 122)

Aspen Academy's overall reviews resulted in a 70% excellent rating. The school's materials and

communications practices ensured inclusivity, and at no point did these efforts lead to socioeconomic, demographic, ethnic, or racial segregation. Multiple formats of communication were available to ensure broad access to all community members.

Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility

During the 2023-2024 school year, 197 students, or 31.7% of the student population, submitted paperwork to qualify for free and reduced lunch.

This represented a significant increase from the previous year, where 27% of the student body qualified.

Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Plan-2023-2024 School Year

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11, school boards are to adopt a long-term, comprehensive strategic plan to support and improve teaching and learning. This plan addresses the following five goals:

1. All children are ready for school.
2. All third-graders can read at grade level.
3. All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
4. All students are ready for career and college.
5. All students must graduate from high school.

Aspen Academy, #4184, is a public charter school serving students in grades K-8.

World's Best Workforce/CACR Contact Information:

Melanie Jiskra, Principal

952-226-5940

Melanie.jiskra@aspenacademymn.org

2024-2025 District Advisory Committee:

Melanie Jiskra, Director/Principal

Rob Essig, Assistant Principal

Dr. Lorien Parson, Title I Coordinator

Dr. Erin Haley Strub, MTSS Coordinator

Rachel Mong - Curriculum Coordinator

Sophia Raffaele - Special Education Teacher

Jenna Thurston- Primary-First Grade Teacher

Stephanie Smitley - Math Interventionist, Parent,

Board Member

Beth Gale - MS Art Teacher

Sarah Konkol - Third Grade Teacher

Alicia Dibb - Parent

Summary Meeting: 11/18/2024 - 4:15 pm

New Plan Development: 11/18/2024 - 4:15 pm

Public Meeting: 11/18/2024 - 4:15 pm

Board Approval: 11/18/2024 - 6:00 pm

2024-2025 Goals

1. All Students Are Ready for School

2020-2025 ASPEN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL GOAL

Each year through FY 2025, 95% of all the School's kindergarten students continuously enrolled since the first day of school will be able to:

- generate all sounds of the first 26 phonograms (letters a-z) by April 1 of each year.
- count to 32 by June 1 of each year and
- identify all 26 upper and lower case letters by February 1 of each year.

BUILDING SITE /Local Literacy Plan Goals 2024-2025

Kindergarten:

- By Spring, 80% of our kindergarten scholars will be in the low risk category for the overall earlyReading composite.
- By Spring, 85% of our kinders will know 13 or more sight words by Spring assessment.
- Kindergarten scholars will increase their number of letter sounds with an average growth from Fall to Spring of 41 letter sounds. (this year 50)

- In the Fall, the target for the Letter Sounds benchmark assessment is 3 correct in 1 minute. In the Spring, 100% scholars in the “high risk” category for Letter Sounds in the Fall will score above 27 letter sounds in the Spring, moving into the “some” risk category.

2. All Students in Third Grade Achieving Grade-Level Literacy 2020-2025 ASPEN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL GOAL

Every year Aspen Academy will outperform, by overall percentage, the district of Prior Lake/Savage, in science, reading, and math.

By the end of the 2024- 2025 school year, Aspen Academy will score:

- **3rd grade proficiency rates will be no less than 10 points higher in reading than the state average on the MCAs.**
- **No less than 13 percentage points higher than the state average for all students in reading.**

BUILDING SITE /Local Literacy Plan Goals 2024-2025

First Grade:

- By Spring, 75% of our first grade scholars will be in the low risk category for the overall early reading composite.
- By Spring, 75% of our first grade students will be at or above 65 sight words by Spring.
- By Spring, scholars with Fall scores in the some and high risk categories on the Sight Words benchmark assessment will score above 40 words on the sight word assessment.
- By Winter, scholars with Fall Test of Nonsense Words scores in the "some risk" category will increase an average of at least 3 points on the Nonsense Words benchmark.
- By Spring, scholars with Fall scores in the "high risk" category, will increase at least 5 points on the Nonsense Words benchmark assessment.
- Scholars will increase their average growth from Fall to Spring of 12 nonsense words correct per minute. (this year 13)

Second Grade:

- By Spring, 75% of our second grade scholars will be in the low risk category for the overall aReading composite.
- By Spring, 2nd grade scholars in the “some” or “high” risk category in the Fall will have an

average increase of at least 34 words correct per week (1 word per week).

- By Spring, 70% of second grade students will be at or above the Spring target of 101wpm on the CBMreading.
- Scholars will increase their correct words read per minute by 40 words from Fall to Spring. (this year 43)

Third Grade:

- By Spring, 80% of our third grade scholars will be in the low risk category for the overall aReading composite.
- By Spring, 3rd grade scholars in the “some” or “high” risk category in the Fall will have an average increase of at least 34 words correct per week (1 word per week).
- By Spring, 83% of third grade students will be at or above the Spring target of 125wpm on the CBMreading.
- Scholars will increase their correct words read per minute by 40 words from Fall to Spring. (this year 3)

3. Close the Achievement Gap(s) Between Student Groups 2020-2025 ASPEN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL GOALS

- All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed. Each year, for each reading and math, the average number of progress points generated by School students based on changes in their achievement levels, for students identified in the FRP subgroup, will exceed two.
- Each year, the School will demonstrate higher school-wide proficiency rates than the Prior Lake-Savage School District for reading, math, and science (for the same grades as offered by the school) for economic subgroups; and higher than the Shakopee school district for racial subgroups

4. All Students Career and College Ready by Graduation 2024-2025 ASPEN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL GOAL

Each year, the School will administer a nationally-normed assessment in at least grades 4 and 8. For 4th grade students who remain in the School through 8th grade:

- If their 4th grade national percentile ranking was less than 70%, at least 50% of the students will increase their national percentile Ranking

5. Prepare students to be lifelong learners

- Aspen Academy will offer programming that prepares students to acknowledge and value lifelong learning and practice independence and self-advocacy.
- In Life Skills class, students will learn the value of goal setting, time management, interpersonal skills, and growth mindset.
- In Genius Hour, students have the opportunity to independently explore an area that they personally would like to learn more about through the completion of a passion project.
- In Health, students will learn the importance of and strategies for caring for their own physical and mental health.
- In Social Studies, students will evaluate from the past experiences of others how to take different perspectives and overcome systemic barriers to success
- In Communication Arts, students will learn to think critically about the information sources they consume and how to recognize and compensate for bias.
- In Fine Arts, students may choose from courses such as creative writing, visual and performing arts, band, and choir, which reaches learners who are artistically motivated.
- In Math, students will learn dynamic problem solving techniques and how to apply the knowledge they already have to new situations
- In Science, students will expand on problem solving techniques learned in math by following scientific methods to solve and prove that something is true.
- Through Second Step, students will be explicitly taught how to navigate social and emotional scenarios that may affect their friendships, perspective-taking, school experience, and future goals
- Students have Study Hall or WIN Time within class to work on what they need to be successful academically, such as completing missing assignments, asking a teacher for help, or reading independently.
- Students are provided a weekly missing assignment report and are responsible for advocating for themselves by obtaining another copy of the assignment or turning in an already completed assignment.
- Teachers will emphasize the importance of a growth mindset and overcoming academic and interpersonal setbacks, building resilience, independence, and confidence in students

Operational Performance

Aspen Academy began its charter school contract with Friends of Education on June 11, 2007 and had its first five-year renewal on June 1, 2016 and recently had its second five-year renewal on June 15, 2021. Friends of Education monitors Aspen Academy in the areas of programming, reporting and academic performance. In the area of programming, Friends of Education continues to provide oversight and support for both Core Knowledge implementation and the Singapore Math program. Friends of Education requires monthly financial reports which also includes a board approved budget and audit report. They also monitor the school's reporting to the Department of Education. Aspen Academy also reports student academic performance to Friends of Education four times a year. These reports include data and trends for both nationally normed tests as well as state required tests. Friends strongly encourages the use of data to guide instruction and the monitoring of student test scores and checks with the school to find out what steps are being taken toward meeting these goals.

Aspen Academy is sponsored by:

Friends of Education
Beth Topoluk - Liaison
11100 Wayzata Blvd
Suite 800
Minnetonka, MN 55305
Phone: 952-745-2718

Financial Performance

Key financial highlights for the 2023-2024 fiscal year include the following:

Total net position at June 30, 202 was (\$3,473,408).

Overall General Fund revenues were \$7,827,421 compared to \$7,774,986 of expenditures.

Days cash on hand as of June 30, 2024, was 64 days.

Debt service coverage ratio as of June 30, 2024, was 1.13.

Future Plans

Aspen Academy will continue to focus on the growth of our student enrollment. Some families still ask about the option of a high school. The census data clearly shows that we have a decline in school aged children in the upcoming years, therefore we are focusing on offering more opportunities for our incoming K scholars preschool summer opportunities for school readiness skill exposure. The youngest students entering into school have minimal school readiness skills in social, emotional, academic, and behavioral domains. There is a growing need for early childhood to support the preparation of our Pre-K scholars. There is also a group watching the possibility of our middle school grades seeing an increase as the local district has had some referendum issues. The middle school has seen a slight increase in enrollment this year, however, we are reviewing if the programming is robust enough, is offering enough options, and is the most effective use of resources for student achievement. In lieu of doing a lot with a more shallow focus (K-8) in comparison of doing less better and deeper with greater rigor (K-5) we may have a more effective way of delivering programming to meet individual needs. We will continue to look at the current strategic plan as it was designed in 2019 and much has changed since then - a pandemic, demographic changes, level of community engagement/involvement, etc. There are a lot of options to explore to stay competitive and a school of excellence.

In preparation for the last year of the current strategic plan, Aspen Academy held a reality scan with our current families about what is established at Aspen, what is new and what is outgoing. From the families' perspectives, we then asked them to prioritize what was most important to them in each of the categories. From this evening, we have

developed further communication and feedback options from families in the design of the updated strategic plan. With reflection, planning, and dreaming, we have applied for the Minnesota School of Excellence designation. It has been a process that has supported us in gathering feedback, collecting data, reflecting and forward and future planning.

The school has completed training with "I Love U Guys" and has updated the language using Standard Response Protocol. This information was communicated to staff and is the common language for Aspen Academy in all safety related instances. Administration is working with local establishments to partner with as a safety response school. The next steps will include full scale evaluation drills using the Standard Reunification Method.

MTSS, Multi-Tiered Support System, continues to be a strength for Aspen Academy. With the early interventions and progress monitoring in place, we have added a dedicated curriculum coordinator to support the work of teachers and interventionists. We strive to keep everyone up to date on best practices, researching evidence based curriculum, and planning professional development. This is a critical area we continue to develop for Aspen Academy.

Aspen Academy is extremely proud of its scholars and the dedicated teaching and support staff. Moving past the pandemic pivots, there is a renewed sense of appreciation for the start of the return of 'normalcy' of a traditional school year. We view the end of the 2024 school year with a dedicated focus on making the day to day work mirror the mission and vision of the school. We are a community of learners, from adults to scholars, striving to reach and exceed the expectations of rigor and excellence.

ASPEN ACADEMY 2024 Annual School Report

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