

You Can't be Alternative and be the Same at the Same Time

KHA would like to thank the over 200 family members that attended our March 31st Open House. The year's Open House was a special one for KHA as we finally secured a permanent building site. For the last three years, KHA was located in temporary facilities at the Lily Pads Professional Center. This year, KHA also rented space in a dining hall at Camp Hoffman for half of the school year. One can imagine the difference that a cafeteria/multi-purpose room, offices, storage space, and sufficient classroom space has done for our program. All of this was made possible through the intense devotion and support of our non-profit sponsor organization, The Groden Center. In addition to facilities, KHA moved from 60 students last year to 120 students this year as we come closer to our 180 chartered maximum number of students. This increase in students allowed us to hire full time maintenance, health services, administrative assistance, a special education service provider, and three new grade level teachers assigned to the new students' homeroom classrooms (one of which is also fluent in Spanish). All of these full time services were not previously possible with a budget relying on 60 or fewer students. At our Open House on March 31st, in addition to touring our new school building, KHA gave families and community members a chance to learn about our school's inclusive, individualized, and challenging educational program.

As most South County citizens now know, KHA is a public charter school located in South Kingstown. Unfortunately, many South County residents are not being given accurate information on the mission, program scope, and economical value that KHA and other charter schools have to offer. For those in the community that did not have a chance to make it to our open house, the following information may shed some light on the mission and program at KHA.

KHA is dedicated to providing children with the opportunity for an inclusive, individualized, and challenging education that supports them to reach their full potential. KHA carries out this task in three direct ways.

First, families and staff collaborate to create an individualized learning plan for each student. This plan follows the student throughout her/his schooling at KHA and focuses on social, behavioral, academic, and emotional growth.

Second, KHA utilizes a school-wide academic schedule that allows for individualized academic growth in reading, spelling, and mathematics. Monday through Thursday mornings all students go to different instructors in the building to receive instruction by way of a highly organized reading and mathematics curriculum. By doing this, students who either have deficits or that excel in reading or math can be grouped appropriately within the general education curriculum. These multi-aged groupings change constantly throughout the year as students hit developmental strides at their own pace. A huge side benefit of these groupings is the independence and self-determination that students have over their own learning. In addition, because staff work with students from many different homerooms, this system requires a great amount of coordination and communication amongst staff.

Third, students who require special education services are included in the general education curriculum. Students ranging in disabilities from Asperger's Syndrome, Physical Impairments, Emotional Disturbance, Behavior Disorders, Speech/Language Impairments, and Learning Disabilities are fully included in the small group general

education setting. Due to the small group structure of the curriculum, many students that have disabilities are either not identified as requiring an IEP (services that lie outside the scope of general education) or they are exited from IEP services if they have transferred from a traditional public school (if the small group structure and individualized curriculum are enough for them to show progress in the general education program). Although KHA does have students that require an IEP due to the extreme resources needed to educate them, the school is proud to state that in the past 2 ½ years at least six students previously requiring Special Education services (most of whom were transfers from more traditional public education systems) have shown enough growth in KHA's General Education program that their IEP goals were accomplished and further special education services deemed unnecessary. Furthermore, many students that enter KHA in the early years that may have required specialized reading or math instruction in a traditional public school system (such as a resource room), are able to access the small group individualized program within KHA's General Education program.

It should be noted that KHA has chosen to offer this type of program despite the fact that the school operates on a much smaller budget than larger districts. For example, the per-pupil ratio for South Kingstown students (made up of state and local funds) is approximately \$12,113. For each South Kingstown resident child that attends KHA only 95% of the per pupil follows the student from South Kingstown (the district keeps 5% per charter school law). This equals out to approximately \$11,507 per student. One can imagine the difficulties that charter schools face when starting new and innovative programs, especially if they begin with a limited numbers of students. The very nature and funding of charter schools require that they be extremely economical and efficient with the taxpayers' dollar. One example of KHA using tax dollars wisely was our decision to hire a new classroom teacher who was also fluent in Spanish. KHA needed a new teacher due to two overcrowded classrooms and sought a teacher fluent in Spanish to create a multi-aged special interest classroom. It is hoped that some day KHA will be a partner with traditional school districts and be able to share some of the program structures and methodologies which has led to highly efficient administration as well as high performing educational outcomes.

Once again, KHA would like to thank those families who attended the Open House and we hope that this information will shed some light on KHA's program to those who were unable to attend. Charter schools were created to offer choice to families in public education. Many families choose KHA (both of high and low achieving students) because of the individualized curriculum, the small school atmosphere, and the adventurous spirit of charter schools. Other families may not choose a charter school due to its mission, building resources, or curriculum. This is the way the system was designed to work. If a charter school was not performing to the needs of the community, then it would certainly not survive. KHA is proud to say that we are considered a high performing school nationally serving a representative population of South Kingstown with approximately 20% of our students on free and reduced lunch (compared to 10% for South Kingstown), a diverse student body, and have over 300 families on our lottery list for the upcoming school year. Now that KHA has finally found appropriate facilities we plan to continue offering an alternative educational choice for families in South County and the state of Rhode Island and will continue to challenge all students to reach their full potential.

Daniel Parker
KHA Director