



Enriching children from the roots up

2011 ANNUAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION:

Aspen Academy was founded in 2008 by a group of parents who wanted a more academically challenging curriculum in the southern suburbs of the Twin Cities. Several of the parents had their children enrolled in other charter schools in the area and were strong supporters of the Core Knowledge curriculum but wanted something closer to home. After many community meetings to determine parent interest, and determining academic need in the community, the parents received permission from the Department of Education to open a charter school and secured Friends of Education as the authorizer.

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

Aspen's vision is to prepare our 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.

GOVERNANCE:

The Aspen Academy School Board meets on the third Tuesday of each month. Agendas are posted as required by law in our office and on our website. Minutes are posted to the website after they are approved at the next month's meeting. Aspen has six standing board committees and one ad hoc committee. They are:

- Strategic Planning
- Finance
- Program Services
- Governance/Legal
- Marketing
- Facility
- Board Elections and Responsibilities

Aspen currently has a Board comprised of 4 parents, 2 community members, and 3 teachers. There is currently one open parent seat on the board which the Board expects to fill in the November 2011 election. There is also a Board Advisory Committee of 1. Current board members include:

Ryan Fritze ryan.fritze@aspenacademymn.org

- community board member, joined in June 2010
- serves on the Facility Committee
- BA in Education with an Emphasis in History and a minor in American Indian Studies, licensed for 7-12 History
- Employed as a support teacher for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Education Center
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, and Employment
- Board meetings attended: 9/12 (75%)

Kate Johnson kate.johnson@aspenacademymn.org

- teacher board member, joined in January 2010
- Board Treasurer
- serves on the Finance Committee and Elections Committee
- BS in Elementary Education with a Math endorsement, and a founding teacher at Aspen Academy
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, and Employment
- Board meetings attended: 11/12 (91.6%)

Molly Lujan molly.lujan@aspenacademymn.org

- teacher board member, joined in January 2011
- serves on the Marketing Committee
- BS in Elementary Education and Middle School Math endorsement, and a founding teacher at Aspen Academy
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, and Employment
- Board meetings attended: 6/6 (100%)

Rachel Mong rachel.mong@aspenacademymn.org

- founding parent board member
- Board Vice Chair
- serves on the Board Elections and Responsibilities and the Marketing Committees
- BA in Sociology and professional experience in Business and Financial Services at Janus Funds and Alliance Capital
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 12/12 (100%)

Jeff Reistad jeff.reistad@aspenacademymn.org

- founding parent board member
- Board Chair
- serves on the Strategic Planning Committee
- graduated from the Business Management and Economics Program at Augsburg College in Minneapolis
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 9/12 (75%)

Kelly Rosenow kelly.rosenow@aspenacademymn.org

- founding teacher board member (term ended Dec 2010)
- served on the Marketing Committee
- BS in Elementary Education
- taught first grade at Aspen
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 6/6 (100%)

KJ Singh kj.singh@aspenacademymn.org

- parent board member (term ended Dec 2010)
- served on the Finance Committee
- holds a masters in Business Administration from Marquette University

- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 4/6 (66%)

Maggie Rowan maggie.rowan@aspenacademymn.org

- founding teacher board member (term ended Jun 2011)
- served on the Program Services Committee
- BS in Elementary Education, licensed media specialist
- taught second grade at Aspen, Curriculum Coordinator
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 12/12 (100%)

Sarah Walsh sarah.walsh@aspenacademymn.org

- community board member, joined the board in June 2011
- Certified Financial Planner, Mankato State
- serves on the Finance and Strategic Planning Committees
- Trainings attended: none
- Board meetings attended: 1/1 (100%)

Laurel Smith laurel.smith@aspenacademymn.org

- parent board member, joined in May 2010
- serves on the Facility Committee and Governance Committee
- BA from Hamline University and graduated from the U of M School of Law. She has experience in employment law, corporate law, and contract review and negotiation.
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance, Employment
- Board meetings attended: 11/12 (91.6%)

Stephanie Smitley stephanie.smitley@aspenacademymn.org

- founding parent board member
- Board Secretary
- serves on the Governance Committee
- BA in Psychology and a Masters in Elementary Education, licensed for K-6.
- Trainings attended: Finance, Governance and Employment
- Board meetings attended: 12/12 (100%)

The Board Advisory Liaison is Aspen parent, teachers, and former board member
Maggie Rowan maggie.rowan@aspenacademymn.org

ADMINISTRATION and FACULTY:

Aspen Academy is staffed by a Director who holds an MAEd in Elementary Education, is licensed as a K-12 Principal, and is currently working on Superintendent Licensure with expected certification in Winter 2012. Aspen also has a Dean of Students, a Curriculum Director, and a Business Manager. The school contracts with Innovative Special Education Services (ISES) for its Special Education Director, has a licensed Special Education teacher on staff who is EBD and Autism certified, and contracts for

the services of special providers such as speech therapist, OT, PT, etc., as needed. All staff, area of certification, and license number are noted below.

Ellen Abney **License # 373116** **Sixth Grade**
Hired originally as a building substitute, she was hired full time in Jun 2011 as a sixth grade teacher. She is licensed for PreK and grades K-6.

Sarah Allen **License # 437190** **First Grade**
Hired in Aug 2010, she holds a Bachelors in Elementary Education. She is licensed for grades 1-6. She holds an additional licensure in K-12 ESL.

Mary Barrette **License # 438471** **Fifth Grade**
Hired in Aug 2009, she holds a Bachelors in Elementary Education and a minor in Language Arts. She is licensed for grades 1-6 in both MN and WI and is also licensed for 5-8 Language Arts in WI.

John Becker **License # 430959** **Kindergarten**
Hired in Jun 2011 as a kindergarten teacher, he has previous kindergarten experience and previous Core Knowledge charter school experience. He is licensed for grades K-6.

Kristin Behrens **License # 348313** **Second Grade**
Hired originally as a building substitute, she was hired full time in Jun 2011 as a second grade teacher. She is licensed for grades K-6.

Sarah Blanchard **License # 418852** **Special Ed**
Hired in Aug 2009, she has a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology. She has a degree in K-12 Emotional/Behavioral Disorders and holds an Autism Certificate.

Jeff Bessire **License # 441932** **Physical Education**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, he has a Bachelor of Science degree in PE and a minor in coaching.

Dawn Coats **License #424829** **Fourth Grade**
Hired in Jun 2011, for fourth grade, she has taught previously in Ohio, Washington state, and Lakeville, MN. She is licensed for grades 1-6.

Heidi Gonzalez **License # 403103** **Music**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she majored in instrumental and vocal music and is certified for Music Education K-12.

Kim Grinde-Van Engen **License # 435339** **Art**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she is licensed for Visual Arts K-12.

Katie Hoen **License #439428** **Fifth Grade**
Hired in Jun 2011 for fifth grade, she previously taught second grade in southern MN. She is licensed for grades K-6 and 5-8 Math.

Tina Holum **License #417780** **ELL**
Hired in Jan 2011, she is licensed for ELL and established the ELL program for Aspen Academy. She resigned this position in June 2011.

Emily Jaeger **License #447847** **Second Grade**
Hired in Jun 2011, she has previous experience in second grade and previous charter school experience. She is licensed for pre-primary and grades K-6.

Kate Johnson **License # 428421** **Second Grade**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and a minor in Math. She is licensed for grades K-6 and 5-8 Math.

Molly Lujan **License # 426258** **Kindergarten**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Marketing and a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education with Middle School Math. She is licensed for K-6 Elementary Ed and 5-8 Math.

Lindsey Kesanen **License # 436986** **First Grade**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she holds a Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education with a minor in Learning Disabilities. She is licensed for grades 1-6. She serves as the re-licensure representative for Aspen.

Kristina Houglum **License # 461702** **Kindergarten LTS**
Hired in Jun 2011 as a long term sub for a teacher on maternity leave, she is licensed for grades K-6 and 5-8 Middle School Math.

Kelly Rosenow **License # 3717666** **Fourth Grade**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she taught first grade, then moved to fourth grade. She resigned from her position in May 2011.

Maggie Rowan **License # 363494** **Curriculum Coordinator**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she has a degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Spanish and is also licensed as a Media Specialist. She has 15 years' teaching experience and previous charter school experience. She is currently enrolled in a graduate program for her Masters of Curriculum and Instruction.

Tiffany Ryan **License # 414849** **Third Grade**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a minor in Math. She is licensed for grades 1-6.

Cathy Salo **License #324764** **ELL**
Hired in Jun 2011 with previous charter school experience, she is licensed for 7-12 English Language Arts and K-12 English as a Second Language. She also has a background in Communication Arts/Literature.

Beth Smolinski **License # 442625** **Third Grade**
Hired in Aug 2008 as a founding teacher, she holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with a minor in Spanish. She is licensed for grades 1-6.

Diane Sterna **License # 403650** **Fourth Grade**
Hired originally as a building substitute, she was hired full time in Aug 2010. She is licensed for PreK and grades K-6.

Cynthia Sherar **License # 285485** **Director**
Hired in Apr 2008 as the founding Director, she has a BS in Elementary Education with a minor in Spanish from the University of Minnesota. She received her Master of Arts in Education and Administrative Licensure from Hamline University. She is licensed to teach grades 1-6, has experience teaching grades 3-5, and holds a K-12 administrative license.

Sarah Tegtmeier **License # 459450** **First Grade**
Hired in Jun 2011 for first grade, Sarah has previous experience as a Kindergarten teacher. She is licensed for grades K-6 and 5-8 Middle School Social Studies.

Laura Tomlinson **License # 460309** **Spanish**
Hired in Jun 2011 with experience teaching in northern MN, she is licensed for K-12 Spanish.

Darby Thomas **License # 422730** **Kindergarten**
Hired as a founding teacher in Aug 2008, she has a BS in Elementary Education with a minor in 5-8 Science. She also has a Master of Arts degree from St. Catherine. She is licensed for K-6.

SCHOOL ADMISSION and ENROLLMENT POLICIES:

Aspen Academy does not discriminate against students of any race, color, national origin, religion, or sex, or against students with disabilities. Furthermore, Aspen Academy's enrollment policy, as defined below, is designed to 1) meet the requirements of all state and federal statutes; 2) ensure equal access to the school, particularly for students with special needs; and 3) serve at-risk (defined as those eligible for free and reduced lunch) as well as all other students.

Aspen Academy limits class sizes to 20 for Kindergarten and 22 for all other grades. These limits were set at the Jan 2009 Board meeting, the only exception to this being classes that were grandfathered in at a higher class limit. Larger classes grandfathered in must drop below current class limits before new students will be accepted.

During the school year, when it is not open enrollment and we *are* accepting enrollment applications, parents submit a form available from the office or on our website. The Director must see each enrollment form and signs/dates them. The family is then

notified as to whether there is immediate space available or if they are placed on the wait list and, if so, what number they are on the wait list.

Upon acceptance when space is available, the family is given an enrollment packet that includes all the forms necessary for the student to attend Aspen. If that family has siblings they wish to enroll, but there is not currently an opening in the sibling's grade, and the family wishes to have the sibling placed on the wait list, because Aspen Academy offers sibling preference, those siblings will be placed on the wait list ahead of any student who does not have an enrolled sibling but after any student already on the wait list who does have an enrolled sibling. As per changes in MN law, we will now also offer preference to children of Aspen employees.

Our open enrollment period is posted on our website, usually during February. During this time we accept any and all enrollment forms by U.S. mail or hand-delivered. We do not accept fax or email submissions. Forms are dated as we receive them, but for purposes of the lottery, all are on equal footing; it is not first-come, first-serve. However, forms received *after* the closing of open enrollment but before the lottery are dated and time-stamped and held until after the lottery. They will be placed on the wait list in the order received and these parents are informed of this at the time they turn in their enrollment form. The lottery is open to the public although parents do not need to attend. On the day of the lottery, names are drawn for open spaces, starting with the upper grades first working down to Kindergarten last, and placed in open slots. With the option of morning, afternoon, or extended-day Kindergarten, we do ask parents to state their preference and we slot them accordingly. If their preferred section of Kindergarten fills up, we slot them in their second or third choice, ensuring them a spot during the lottery process and explain that after the lottery is over, we will contact them and find out if they want to keep that spot or pass it on to someone else.

Once the lottery is over, we send out a letter to all parents, letting them know they received a spot or what their number is on the wait list. If the parent changes their mind and decides they do not want to enroll, we ask that they state this in writing so we can be confident in offering the spot to the next family on our wait list.

Student Demographics

Based on year-end totals for the 2010-2011 school year, enrollment and attendance was as follows:

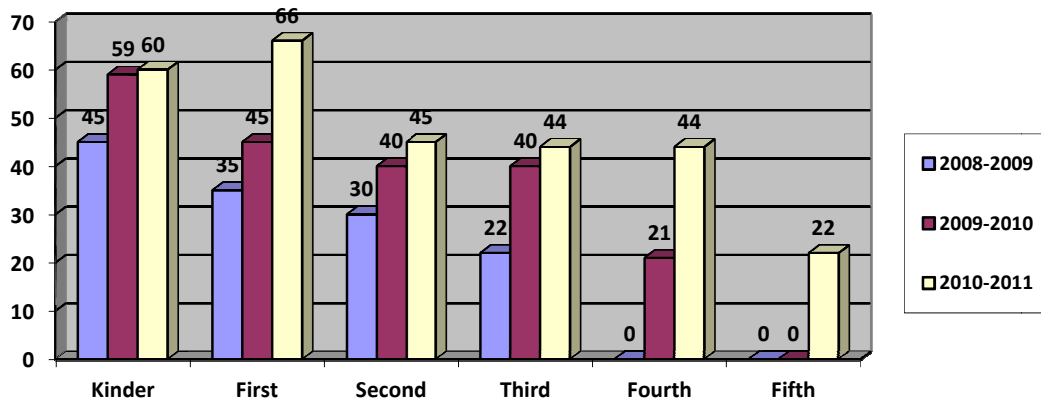
Kindergarten	60 (3 classes)	95.5% attendance
First Grade	65 (3 classes)	96.6% attendance
Second Grade	45 (2 classes)	97.2% attendance
Third Grade	44 (2 classes)	96.5% attendance
Fourth Grade	43 (2 classes)	97.8% attendance
Fifth Grade	22 (1 class)	97.6% attendance
Total	279 students	96.7%

An enrollment comparison is shown below that includes the following years and data:

- 2008 / 2009 – our opening year, based on year end student enrollment totals
- 2009 / 2010 – our second year of operations, based on year end student enrollment totals
- 2010 / 2011 – projected totals based on completed registration packets returned to the school

It is important to note the growth within grade levels for each successive year, but also that each class, as it moves from one year to the next has increased its enrollment until all classes are operating at, or nearly at, class limits set by the Aspen School Board. The Kindergarten class limit is set at 20, all other grades at 22. This will change for the 2011-12 school year with all grades set at a class limit of 22 including Kindergarten.

FIGURE 1: ENROLLMENT GROWTH



Steps to increase in enrollment included:

- The addition of a third kindergarten class in 2009-2010. This, in turn, meant that we added a section of first grade in 2010-2011 as these three Kindergarten classes moved up.
- Regular prospective parent tours and regular contact with local media about events in the school.
- The distribution of Aspen “business cards” to all enrolled families for them to hand out to friends and neighbors. The school is consistently told by new families they heard of Aspen via word of mouth.
- Small class sizes and strong test scores.
- Revamping of our website to make it more attractive and user-friendly.
- Establishing an Aspen Facebook page as a means to stay in contact with parents as well as advertise to an increasingly younger and more media-savvy parent set.
- Responsiveness to parent survey feedback.

Other demographic information relating to Aspen’s student body is as follows:

	FY 09-10	FY 10-11
Limited English Proficiency	1%	1%
Free and Reduced Lunch	3%	1%
Special Education	4%	9%
Native American	0%	0%
Asian	2%	4%
Black	1%	1%
Hispanic	1%	1%
Caucasian	96%	94%

Aspen’s increase in ELL student population has risen proportionately with its student enrollment and has largely been students whose first language is Russian. Aspen has hired a full-time ELL teacher who is providing services for these students. However, this changing demographic has not been the case with Free and Reduced where school-wide enrollment has out-paced students identified for F&R. This, in spite of efforts to seek out and identify such students. For example, every newly enrolling family is given information on F&R and the paperwork to fill out so they may determine qualification for the program.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM:

Core Knowledge Overview – The Core Knowledge curriculum is based on the work of Dr. E. D. Hirsch. The curriculum is content-rich and provides a coherent academic foundation intended to develop culturally-literate students. It has four main components:

- **Solid** – It builds on a body of lasting knowledge in core subjects rather than the current educational fad. There is a heavy emphasis on literary classics and literacy skills permeate all subject areas.
- **Shared** – It helps students gain familiarity and understanding with a broad range of knowledge taken for granted by speakers and writers.
- **Sequenced** – It provides a clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, but also helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps that characterize much current schooling.
- **Specific** – Rather than vague standards that say students will demonstrate knowledge of people, events, and ideas of (*insert your choice of topic*), Core Knowledge specifies important knowledge in language arts, history and geography, math, science, and the fine arts. And because Core Knowledge covers all curricular areas (as opposed to districts that purchase each curriculum

from a different company) cross-curricular connections are built in. When our second graders are reading Greek myths in Literacy, they are learning about Greek history in Social Studies, and studying Greek architecture in Art.

The Aspen Academy teaching staff has spent significant time plotting out the grade level scope and sequence maps which are available on the Aspen website at www.aspenacademymn.org under the Scope and Sequence tab.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES:

Individualized Curriculum Plans—Aspen Academy has put in place a philosophy and system by which we offer individualized learning for all our students while still adhering to the Core Knowledge curriculum. This is manifested in several ways. First and foremost is our implementation of Data Driven Instruction (DDI) by which students are evaluated both formally and informally throughout the year on their progress toward mastery of MN state standards. Informal assessments include teacher observation of student work and participation of class activities. Formal assessments include Running Records, leveled reading assessments, and DDI assessments. Students are also assessed to determine where they should be individually placed in our Spelling and Phonics curricula. All of this information comes together to help create an Individual Curriculum Plan or ICP for the student. The teacher and parent meet at conference time to discuss the ICP and determine who will be responsible for which part of the ICP. As the student gets older, he or she may be given responsibility for part of the ICP as well.

Latin / Grammar—This subject was introduced as planned in 4th grade and we are now entering our third year of instruction with our sixth graders. Our intent is not to make students fluent in Latin but rather give students a better understanding of the English language...root words, prefixes, and suffixes. It is also used as the vehicle to teach high-level grammar skills. Aspen Academy is in the process of aligning its Latin curriculum with the portions of the MN Language Arts Standards that address grammar to better ensure that students are meeting these standards and teachers are efficiently teaching them.

Singapore Math—This program uses concrete model-building methods to demonstrate concepts and ensure mastery before moving on, something new to many students and their families. Students were grouped based on MAP scores, classroom work, and teacher observation. The school is also able to offer additional help to students when Specialists are scheduled to assist in specific classrooms during periods they are not teaching in their area of specialty. We also provide Targeted Services for students who were working well below grade level.

Science—We continue to purchase the supplies for each science unit that allow students as many hands-on opportunities as possible when doing science. In lieu of finding prepared textbooks that cover all Core Knowledge science topics at each designated grade level, we have purchased single-subject text books for each unit in

each grade. As part of our commitment to integrating Literacy in all areas, we have also purchased thousands of dollars of supplemental books (both fiction and non-fiction) for each science unit. Parent volunteers have spent considerable time preparing the “science bins” for each teacher—a 66 gallon bin for each unit that has a notebook containing the grade level science standards, Core Knowledge learning outcomes, teacher lesson plans, and other resource materials.

Social Studies—In addition to following the CK curriculum for Social Studies, Aspen has made use of United Streaming, an online video service used with Smart Boards. This allows teachers to download pictures and video clips on almost any topic and is heavily used in Social Studies. Aspen has purchased both fiction and nonfiction books that supplement the Core Knowledge Social Studies topics so that when students want to expand their learning, there are resources to do so.

Specialists—Aspen offers Art and Music in line with the Core Knowledge curriculum, as well as Physical Education and Spanish. In addition to teaching in their areas of Specialty, these four teachers also assist in the general ed classroom during free blocks of time to assist with students needing extra help in the areas of Math and Reading.

Special Education—Our program saw further development this year with the on-going revision and updates of our TSES manual. Our Special Ed teacher supervises student and program paras and coordinates contracted service providers such as the speech therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and school psychologist. We continue to partner with Innovative Special Education Services (ISES) for our Special Education Director.

Extra Programming—Aspen offers three forms of extra programming.

- Our before and after school program which is usually attended by 10-15 students on any given day. Part of this program includes homework supervision.
- We also offer the option of extended-day kindergarten. There is a fee for this optional program which provides enrichment for the morning’s Core Knowledge topics, but it is not the “fast track to second grade”.
- Our extra-curricular activities. These have included a “sports clinic” put on by the PE teacher, arts classes put on by the Art teacher, and a chess club and a science club sponsored by parents. There is parent interest in expanding this program.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES:

Latin—With the enrollment of new students at grades 5 and 6, it became necessary to figure out how to bring them into the Latin program alongside their grade level peers who had had 1-2 years Latin having been previously enrolled in the school. After gathering staff input, the decision was made to have the 4th and 5th grade teachers schedule Latin at the same time during the day. This would allow them to group together all 4th grade students and the few new 5th grade students – with the two 4th grade teachers in charge of this group. Then the 5th grade teachers would teach the 5th graders who have had a year of Latin, but would be able to split this group by ability.

Sixth grade would be split into two groups: the new students who are beginners, and returning students who have had two years of Latin. Both groups will be handled in the sixth grade classroom by the teacher with assistance from the Curriculum Director if needed. In future years, we can continue to group 4th and 5th grade under this model, but in moving to a full-fledged middle school, we would be seeking an actual Latin teacher who would be able to run Latin 1, 2, and 3, addressing the needs of all level middle school students, regardless of length of enrollment.

Targeted Services—Aspen does not qualify as a Title I school, but does offer a Targeted Services program to which students may be referred for help in Reading or Math. During our first year we served 13 students (roughly 1% of our students). Our second year, we served 33 students, grades K-4. By the end of the year, 87% were reading at or above grade level. While services at grades K-1 focused primarily on reading skills, programming for the second grade and above focused more on class assignments so students would not fall behind. However, in evaluating the program, it was felt there needed to be more clearly defined criteria for which students were referred, and by which students were served. Referrals for things like “organizational skills” were no longer accepted. Under the new criteria, only 16 students were identified and served, with needs relating more directly to Math and Reading performance.

Technology—Aspen Academy has two laptop carts, each with a full classroom set of laptops. However, we have no computer lab in our current facility. This presents programming and scheduling challenges when it is time to do school-wide computer testing such as NWEA MAP. Although we have been able to do testing twice a year both years, it comes with considerable accommodation on the part of all teachers. Once in a larger facility, this should not be an issue. As we expand, it will be key to bring in someone with technology expertise on staff so the building has high quality, on-site help. We did hire someone, on a consultant basis, to make sure all staff machines were updated and in good working order.

Spanish—In response to parent input, we moved to a schedule in which all students had Spanish for three 30 minute periods/week. There was parent dissatisfaction with the Spanish program that came through on the parent survey that had to do largely with the way the teacher was structuring her program. This has been addressed and the new Spanish teacher will be focusing more on oral fluency than workbook memorization.

Special Ed—Our biggest challenge has been with the coordination of contracted service providers, especially for IEP meetings. We have excellent providers who provide high-quality services for our students, but scheduling meetings within the deadlines mandated by law require diligence.

Facility—Aspen’s biggest challenge this past year has been its search for a new facility. The City of Prior Lake only allows schools in areas zoned for residential, yet there are no existing buildings in residential areas large enough to house a school. Most investors are hesitant to invest the dollars needed to build a school from the ground up. This required that the school “hold over” in its existing site for a 4th year. Our current landlord has been extremely accommodating and teachers have done an excellent job

in making adjustments to make the facility work. However, the administration and board is doing everything in its power to make a new facility a reality as soon as possible.

FINANCES:

Aspen Academy remains strong financially through careful oversight of its internal procedures, monitoring of its budget, and parent fundraising. Requests for purchases and purchase orders are reviewed by at least two staff. Requests for payment are reviewed by a minimum of two staff before being sent to our accounting firm, Beltz, Kes, Darling and Associates (BKDA) for payment to vendors. Credit card purchases, the check register, and the budget are reviewed by the Director and School Board monthly. Aspen has a \$150,000 line of credit that has never been tapped into.

Aspen has an annual audit, prepared by an independent audit firm, LarsonAllen LLP, 220 South Sixth Street, Suite 300, Minneapolis, MN 55402. The audit was clean, with no irregularities or findings. A copy of the audit can be requested by contacting the school office.

As would be expected, Aspen’s largest expenditure is teacher salaries and benefits, followed by rent and curricular needs. Nonetheless, Aspen ended its fiscal year with a surplus of \$380,000 or a fund balance of 45%, showing fiscal strength at a time when many other school districts are struggling. The school is rapidly growing, as evidenced by the increased enrollment and addition of new staff. Aspen Academy has an active parent group that fundraises for the school. This has included Scrip gift cards, Butterbraids, and the purchase of Spiritwear clothing. A breakdown of revenues and expenditures, along with actual and projected fund balances is noted below.

FUND	2009-2010 Actual Revenues & Transfers IN	2009-2010 Actual Revenues & Transfers OUT	June 30, 2010 ACTUAL Fund Balance	2010-2011 Actual Revenues & Transfers IN	2010-2011 Actual Revenues & Transfers OUT	June 30, 2010 PROJECTED Fund Balance
General Unreserved	\$1,625,259	\$1,254,511	\$471,110	\$1,848,928	\$1,704,226	\$615,813
Food Service	\$41,425	\$61,046	0	\$47,458	\$52,458	(\$5,000)
Comm Serv Unreserved	\$19,776	\$8,920	\$14,965	\$15,501	\$15,501	\$14,966
Total – All Funds	\$1,686,460	\$1,301,751	\$486,075	\$1,911,887	\$1,772,185	\$625,779

AUTHORIZER INFORMATION:

Aspen Academy is sponsored by Friends of Education.
 Liaison—Beth Topoluk
 Ex0-01-A
 200 Lake Street E
 Wayzata, MN 55391-1693
 952-745-2717

Aspen Academy began its charter school contract with Friends of Education on June 11, 2007. Friends of Education monitors Aspen Academy in the areas of programming, reporting, and academic performance.

- **Programming**—Friends continues to provide oversight and support for both Core Knowledge implementation and the Singapore Math program. Occasional unannounced visits are made to the school to check on programming and meet with the Director to discuss the progress of the school. They continue to be a resource for Aspen and there is positive communication in both directions.
- **Reporting**—Friends requires financial reports which include a board approved budget and audit report. Friends also monitors reporting to the Minnesota Department of Education. In addition, they request board agendas and minutes and, on occasion, send a representative to attend board meetings. Friends also monitors MDE reporting and requests information on enrollment and attendance.
- **Academic Performance**—Friends has strongly encouraged the use of data to guide instruction and the monitoring of student test scores and checks in periodically to find out what steps are being taken towards this end. They have sponsored a one-day workshop for their schools using Singapore Math, and a two day workshop with Paul Brambrich-Santoyo of the “Uncommon Schools” network which focuses on using the right data to effectively guide instruction.

On June 28, 2011 Aspen Academy received a five year charter renewal from Friends of Education based on its academic and financial performance.

STATE REPORT CARD:

MCAIIs—Aspen Academy shows strength in the MCA test data. Scores are reported in terms of how many students (percentage of students) meet or do not meet “proficiency”. Parents may ask what constitutes proficiency. The MCA measures whether or not students meet “state standards” which can be found for each grade level at the Minnesota Department of Education website under the tabs “Academic Excellence → Academic Standards.” Each standard has “sub-stands” and the test may offer 3, 4 or 5 questions, asked in various ways, about any of the sub-stands. Students are scored as “Does not meet” the standard, “partially meets” the standard, “meets” the standard, or “exceeds” the standard. Aspen Academy has shown excellence in the area of MCA scores as shown in the graphs below. Generally, the two right-hand columns/numbers are combined when reporting how well a school or grade level performs on MCAs. For example, one would combine the 15.9% “meets” score in Reading in the graph below with the 77.3% “exceeds” score in Reading and say that 93.2% of Aspen 3rd Graders meet or exceed proficiency on the Reading MCAs. Or simpler yet, Aspen 3rd Graders scored 93% on the Reading MCAs.

FIGURE 2: Third Grade Proficiency on 2011 MCAs

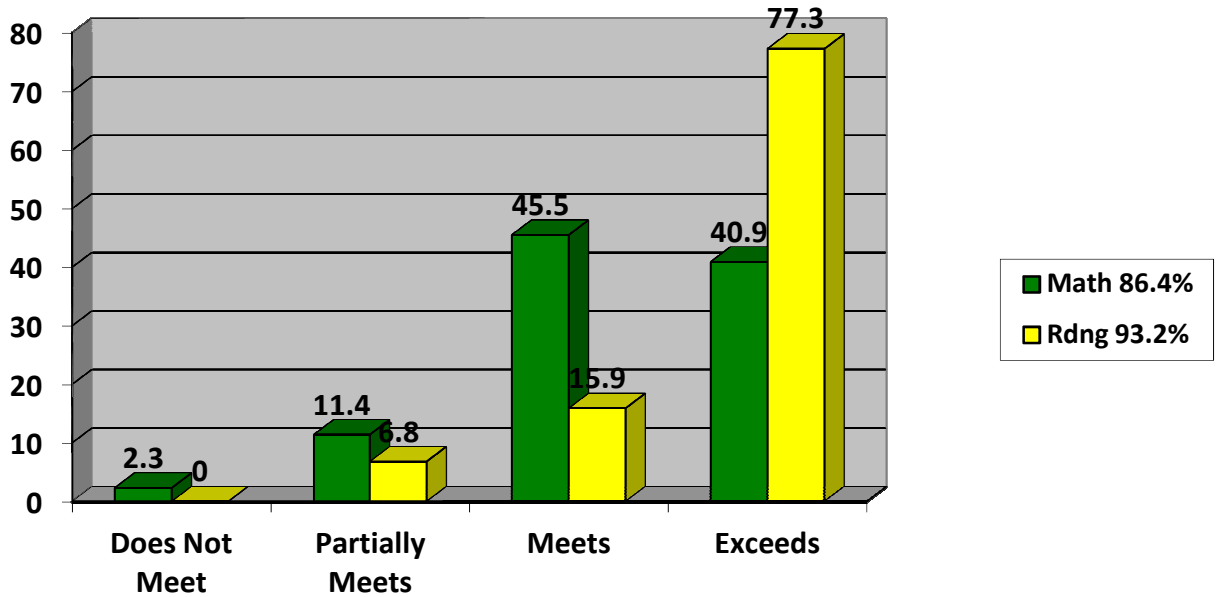


FIGURE 3: Fourth Grade Proficiency on 2011 MCAs

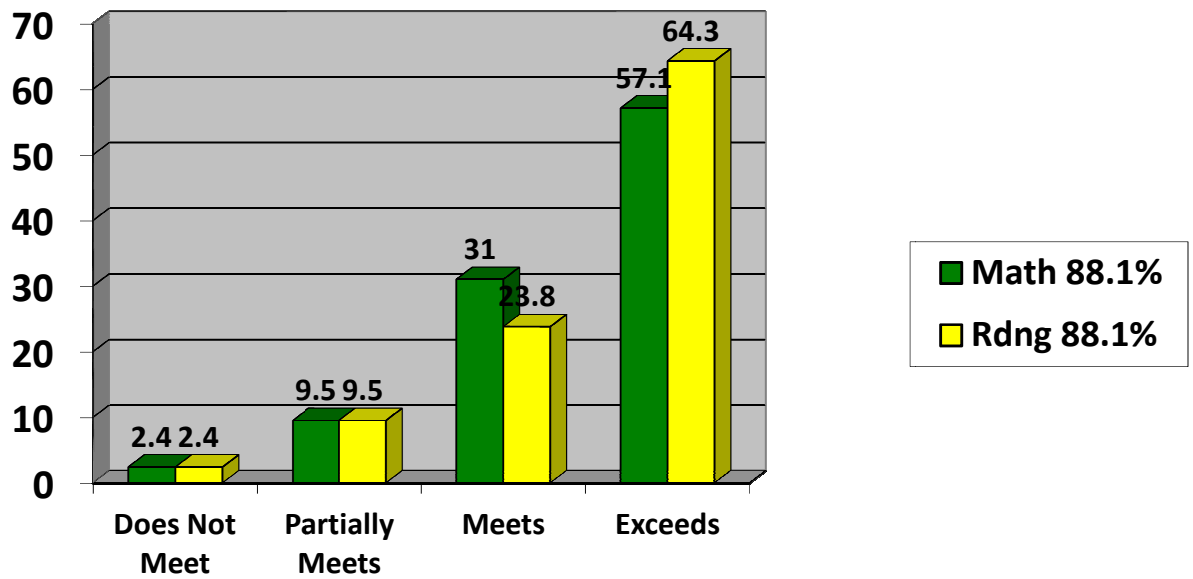


FIGURE 4: Fifth Grade Proficiency on 2011 MCAs

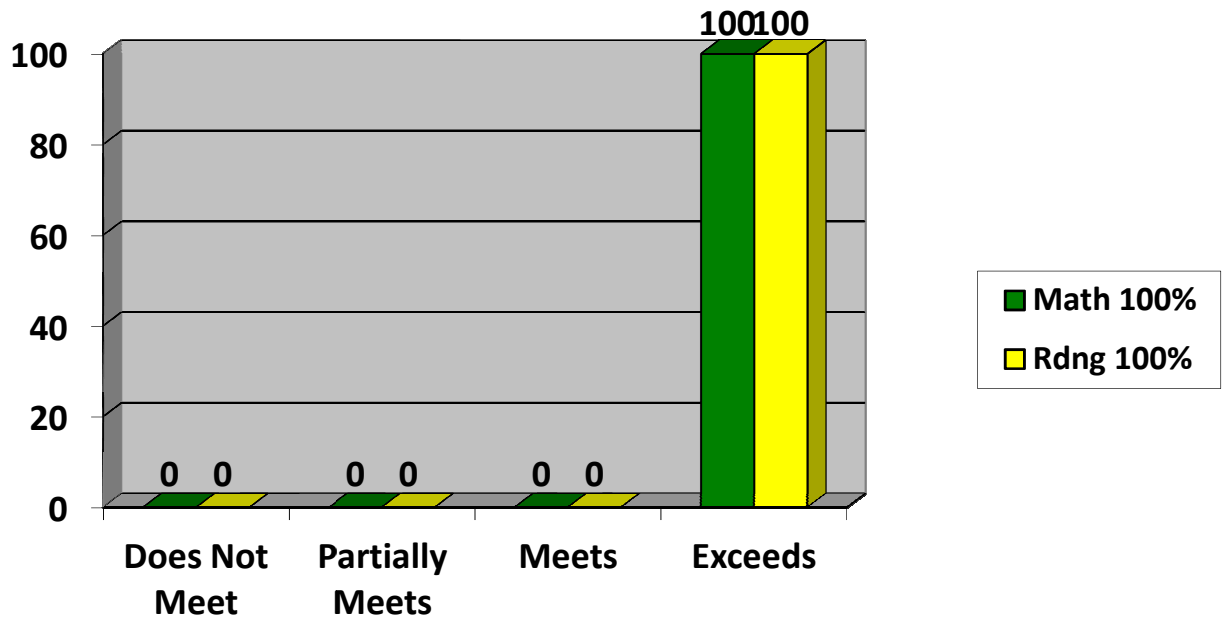
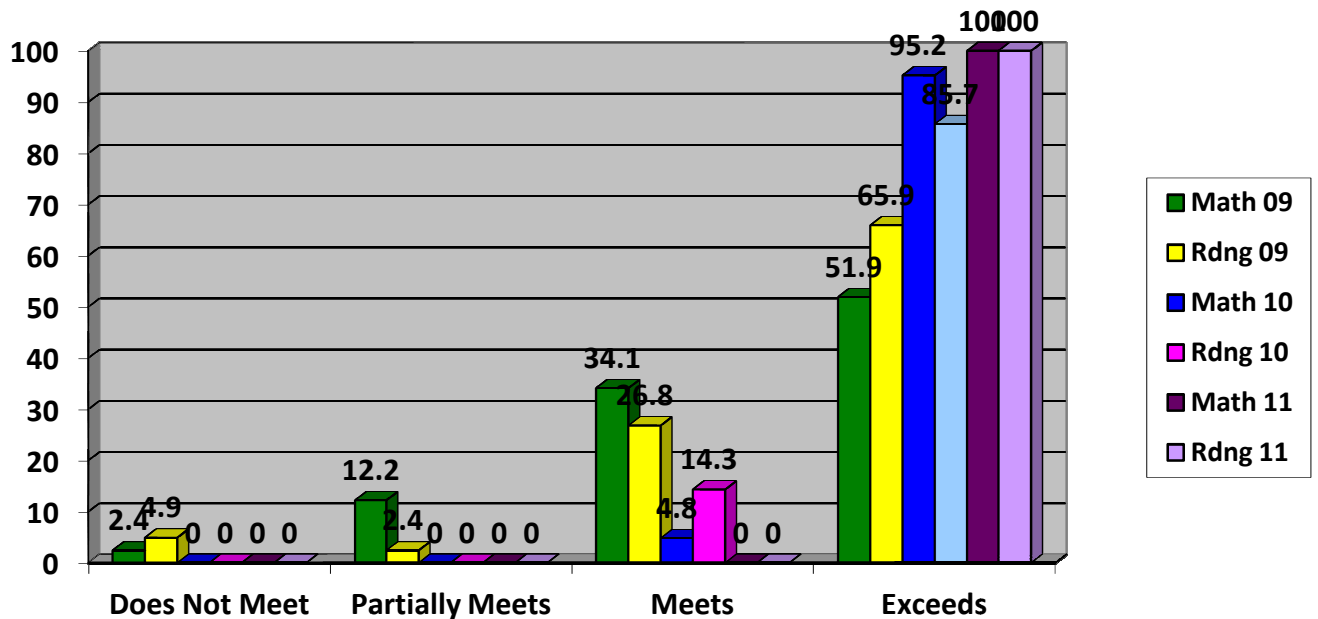


FIGURE 5: Growth in MCA Proficiency for the Class of 2018
(Students who took MCAs in 2009/Grade 3 → 2010/Grade 4 → 2011/Grade 5)



In this instance, it is desirable to see bars decrease in the left hand columns and increase in the right hand columns. Such movement shows that students **increased** in proficiency rather than just paced one year's growth over one year's time.

In an effort to improve student test scores, Aspen Academy also made the decision to switch from assessing students with the NWEA MAP tests and instead start using the Comprehensive Testing Program or CTP test. This decision was made for several reasons. After carefully comparing NWEA MAP tests, the CTP test, and other assessments, it was determined that CTP was better aligned with the Data Driven Instruction that Aspen is heavily invested in, as well as being gauged to suburban norms more so than MAP tests are. Students coming from affluent, suburban homes often score better on standardized tests than their age peers nationally giving parents a skewed sense of performance ability. Then, when these students take later tests such as ACT, SAT, or other college-related assessments and are in a more similar ability pool, they may not appear to perform as well. *Knowing how our students will perform compared to other suburban students is imperative because these are the students our graduates will be competing with on college entrance exams and for college scholarship monies.* For Aspen Academy to be known as a school of academic rigor, and for our students to excel, knowing specific, standards-related areas for academic improvement will be crucial for getting our students into the better colleges in the country. Ideally, we want to close the gap with the suburban public schools or surpass it.

FIGURE 6: 2011 GRADE 1 CTP RESULTS

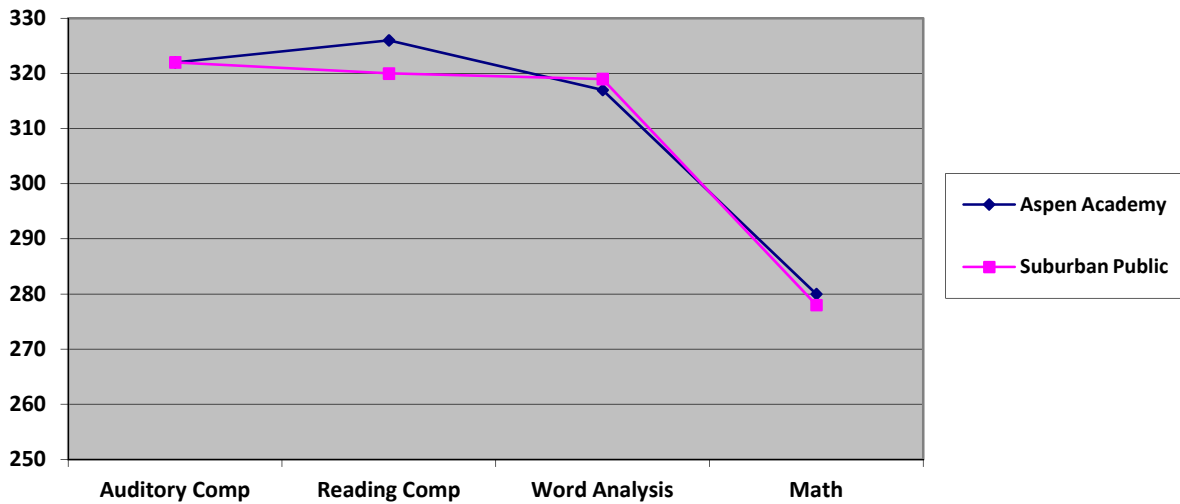


FIGURE 7: 2011 GRADE 2 CTP RESULTS

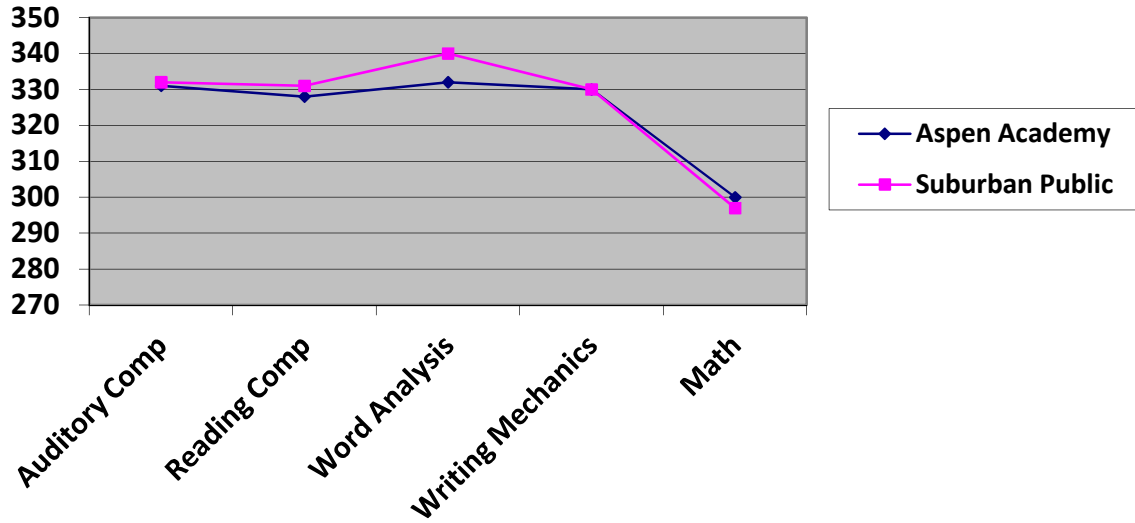


FIGURE 8: 2011 GRADE 3 CTP RESULTS

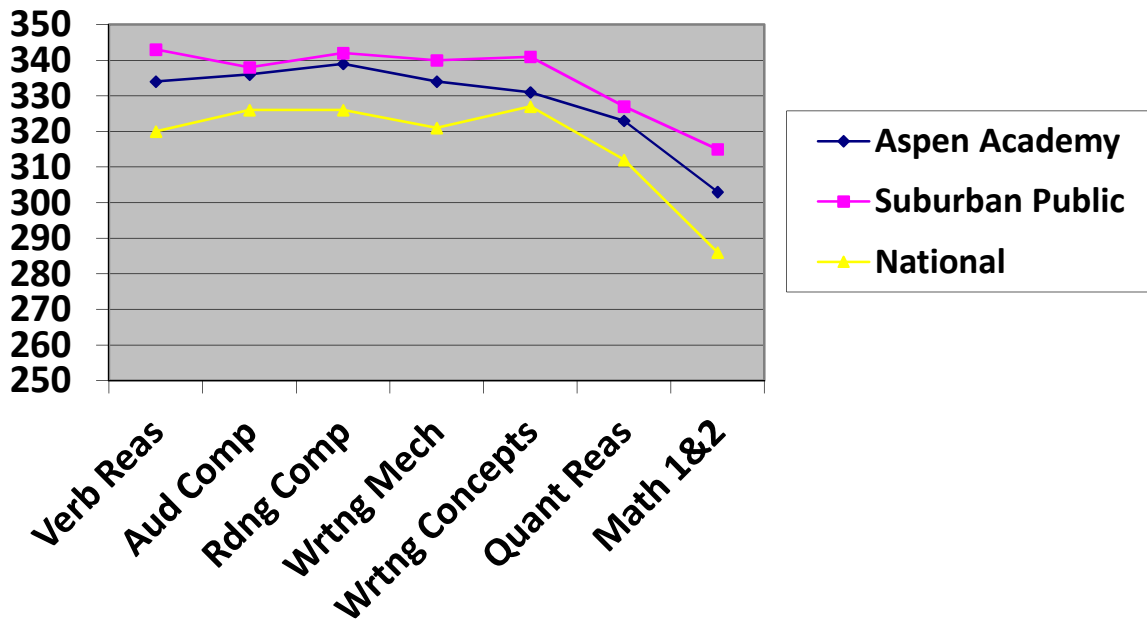


FIGURE 9: 2011 GRADE 4 CTP RESULTS

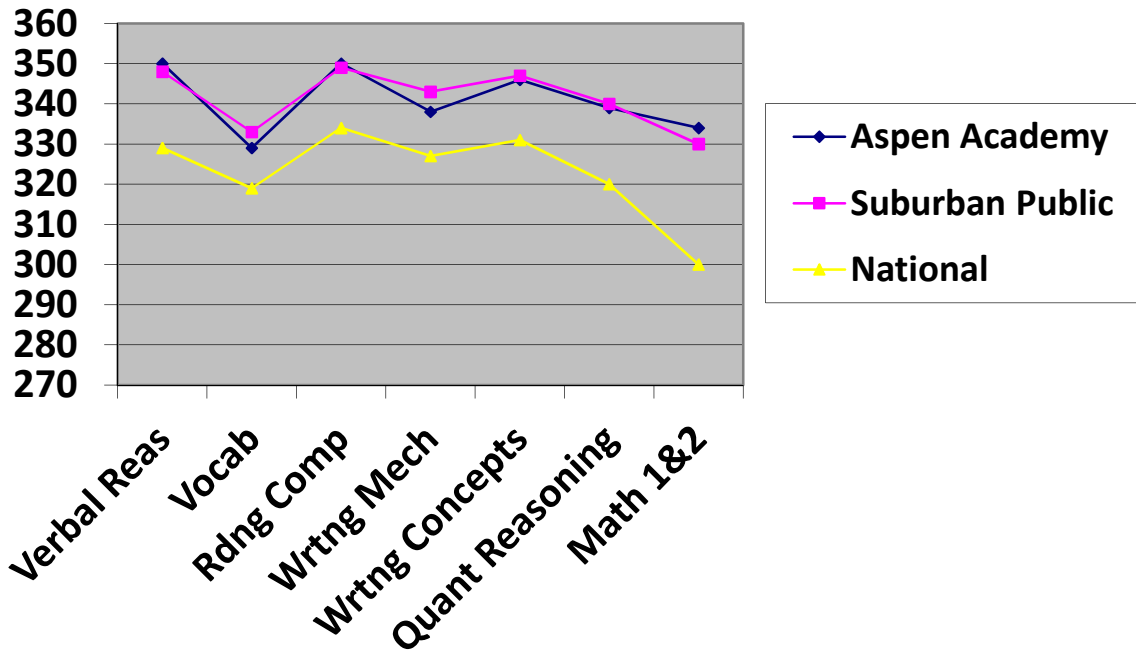
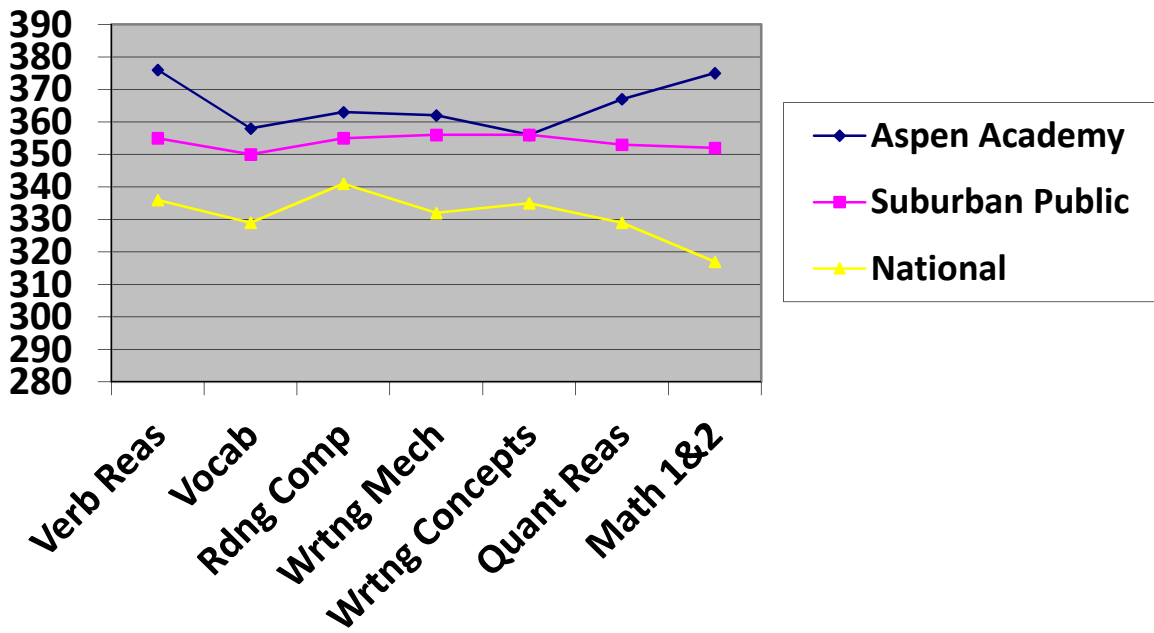


FIGURE 10: 2011 GRADE 5 CTP RESULTS



In looking at the data, there are several important points for staff and parents to consider. First and foremost is that although Aspen Academy considers itself a school of academic rigor, when compared to other suburban schools of similar demographic makeup, we are on par, or even slightly below those schools. We see Aspen move to equal footing by 4th grade and out-pace schools by 5th grade. This is not unlike what is seen with gifted education – students who come from very enriched home environments and do well at the younger grades, and then appear to “level out” when their age peers begin to catch up academically in the upper elementary grades. Aspen will need to support the work of the teachers at the lower elementary grades as this builds the foundation for the MCAs which are first given in 3rd grade, so the school can continue the positive trend seen by 5th grade. Parents will also need to view the data differently, especially parents who are used to seeing their children perform in the 98-99%. Part of the reason for moving to the CTP testing was to provide the teaching staff with more detailed information on areas our top performing students could improve and stretch themselves academically. Norming their children against a higher performing subset will give them the information they are seeking.

DATA DRIVEN INSTRUCTION

Aspen Academy has been a participant and leader in Friends of Education’s initiative to implement Data Driven Instruction (DDI), based on the work of Paul Bambrick-Santoyo. Staff attended Paul’s workshop (with some attending twice) to learn to create rigorous formative and summative assessments based on state standards in Math and Reading in each grade level. These assessments are administered periodically throughout the year and then data collected from them is put in the form of a spread sheet that allows teachers to closely track students’ progress (or not) towards meeting state standards. All assessments have been created for Math and Aspen is now in the process of further refining those assessments. The school is in the process of creating the assessments needed for Reading and has purchased leveled reading materials that will assist staff with those assessments.

All staff are “on board” with this initiative and understand the value it provides in helping students move forward academically, as well as allow them to individualize instruction for their students. In an effort to support DDI, Specialists have taken on the responsibility of teaching the Sayings and Phrases component of the Core Knowledge curriculum as well as the Character Development program in order to provide grade level homeroom teachers added time to devote to DDI. Aspen Academy has also shared materials and expertise with other Friends schools relating to DDI. Three extra half days were added to the school’s annual calendar to allow teachers time needed to review DDI data as proscribed by the program.

SCHOOL GOALS FOR 2010-2011

Our school-wide goals are taken from our charter renewal with Friends of Education and are described below. Friends of Education has chosen to compare Aspen Academy with Jeffers Pond Elementary School in Prior Lake due to the similar demographics between the two schools.

FIGURE 11: DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISON BETWEEN ASPEN ACADEMY and JEFFERS POND

	ASPEN ACADEMY	JEFFERS POND
Limited English Proficiency	1%	1%
Free and Reduced Lunch	1%	1%
Special Education	9%	10%
Native American	0%	0%
Asian	4%	3%
Black	1%	2%
Hispanic	1%	2%
Caucasian	94%	93%

At the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels, our MCA scores compare with Jeffers Pond and the state-wide average as follows:

FIGURE 12: MCA COMPARISON BETWEEN ASPEN ACADEMY, JEFFERS POND and STATE, GRADE 3

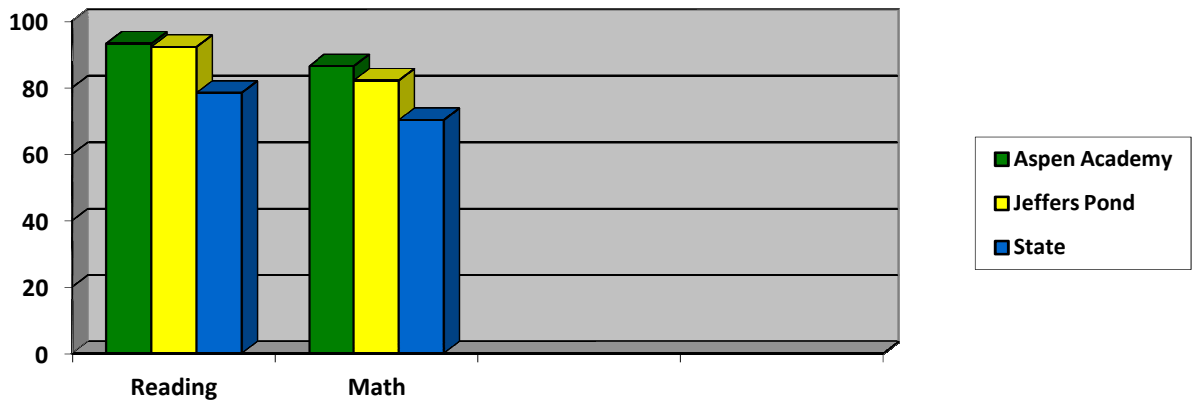


FIGURE 13: MCA COMPARISON BETWEEN ASPEN ACADEMY, JEFFERS POND, and STATE, GRADE 4

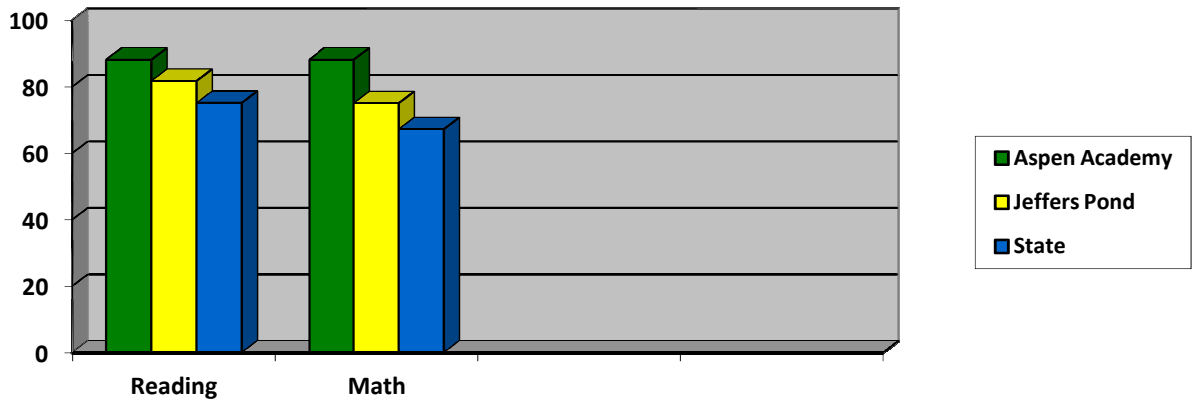
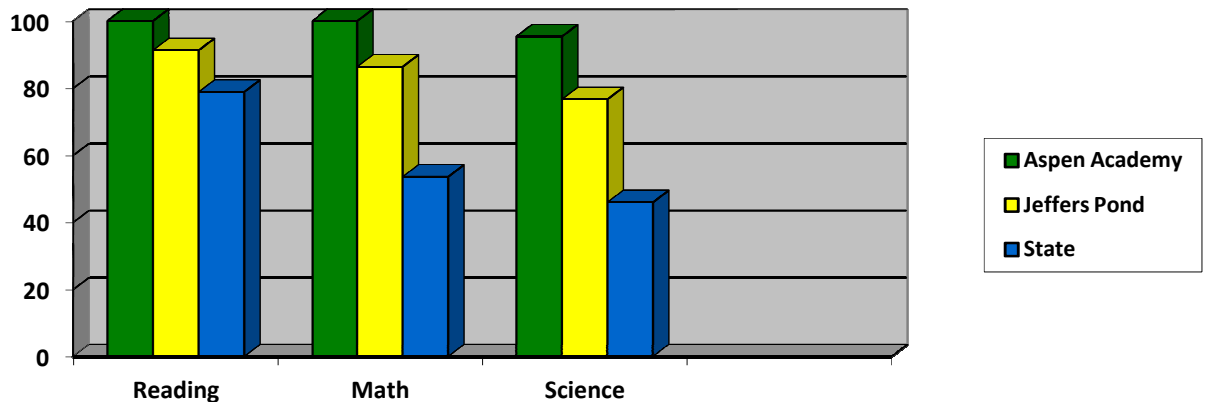


FIGURE 14: MCA COMPARISON BETWEEN ASPEN ACADEMY, JEFFERS POND, and STATE, GRADE 5



GOAL # 1: State Assessment Tests (Math MCA-IIs)

Sub Goal # 1A: Math Comparative Proficiency: Each year, the School will demonstrate higher grade level and school-wide proficiency rates than Jeffers Pond Elementary School, and the Prior Lake School District.

Sub Goal # 1B: Math Growth, Non-proficient Students: The percentage of non-proficient students who achieve High Growth will be at least 75% each year.

Sub Goal # 1C: Math Growth Adequacy: Each year, the percentage of students at the School who achieve High Growth will exceed the state average percentage of students who achieve High Growth (for the same grades as offered by the School), and the percentage of students at the School who achieve Low Growth will be less than the state average percentage of students who achieve Low Growth (for the same grades as offered by the School).

GOAL # 2: State Assessment Tests (Reading MCA-IIs)

Sub Goal # 2A: Reading Comparative Proficiency: Each year, the School will demonstrate higher grade level and school wide proficiency rates than Jeffers Pond Elementary School, and the Prior Lake School District.

Sub Goal # 2B: Reading Growth – Non-proficient Students: The percentage of non-proficient students achieving High Growth will be at least 75% each year.

Sub Goal # 2C: Reading Growth Adequacy: Each year, the percentage of students at the School who achieve High Growth will exceed the state average percentage of students who achieve High Growth (for the same grades as offered by the School), and the percentage of students at the School who achieve Low Growth will be less than the state average percentage of students who achieve Low Growth (for the same grades as offered by the School).

GOAL # 3: State Assessment Tests (Science MCA-IIs)

Science Comparative Proficiency: Each year, the School will demonstrate higher grade level and school wide proficiency rates than Jeffers Pond Elementary School, and the Prior Lake School District.

Goal # 4: Nationally Normed Test

The School will administer a nationally-normed assessment, approved by the Board, in at least grades 4 and 8. At least 80% of all School students taking the assessment in grade 4 will increase their national percentile rank by grade 8.

Goal # 5: Data Driven Instruction

Sub Goal 5A: Math: 100% of grade level teachers will implement Data Driven Instruction for Math which includes the assessments, plotting data, and the use of data in guiding instruction. The staff will review results with the Director or their DDI leader within 48 hours following the assessment and will invite Friends to attend these meetings. Staff will re-teach the necessary components the week following the assessment.

Sub Goal 5B: Reading: 100% of grade level teachers will implement Data Driven Instruction for Reading which includes the assessments, plotting data, and the use of data in guiding instruction. The staff will review results with the Director or their DDI leader within 48 hours following the assessment and will invite Friends to attend these meetings. Staff will re-teach the necessary components the week following the assessment.

Goal # 6 : Professional Development

100% of teachers will receive professional development training annually, as demonstrated by school records.

NON-PROFIT STATUS:

Aspen Academy is listed as a 501(c)3 charitable trust with the MN Attorney General's Office.

Any questions regarding this report can be sent to:

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