



May 11, 2023

Dear Laura Jeffrey Academy Community,

Another year has passed and we are feeling even better than we did about the last. If we had to describe the 2022/2023 school year in one word it would be: improvement. Simply put, things are the same, but better. We have been able to cultivate a school community and program at LJA that has continually improved for all involved. We have been able to maintain the integrity of our mission, while at the same time better serving scholars (current and future), their families, staff, and the greater LJA community. Many efforts and initiatives, during the school day, and outside of school hours have led to those upward trajectories. Staff and students have shared how very happy they are with the new “normal.” Leadership couldn't agree more! Ensuring our Return to Learning plan is proving to be successful. Scholars and families have supported LJA staff in taking extra steps and procedures to keep students and staff in-person with face to face instruction. It is a joy to have our halls filled with the laughter of our scholars and find that our classrooms are lively spaces of curiosity and questioning. In the words of one of our current 7th graders, “Laura Jeffrey Academy is not just a school, it's a community” and we are all better for getting to be back together this year.

Leadership has reflected upon the goals we set for ourselves after the 2021-2022 school year:

1. increasing our enrollment
2. Increasing our visibility within the broader community,
3. Strengthening our extended LJA community,
4. Expanding our course offerings, both during and outside of the school day, and
5. Continuing to let student choice and voice drive the decisions LJA makes on their behalf.

Over the years LJA has seen a steady decline in enrollment for a plethora of reasons, many out of our control. The Leadership Team, LJA staff, and the greater LJA community made a commitment to shift that trend for the 2022/2023 school year. In order to begin that shift, it was vital for us to retain the students that we already had. Through relevant curriculum, fun and engaging classroom environments, autonomy, family connections, and a school that feels safe, LJA was able to retain almost all of the students who attended this year. Currently 96% of LJA families have indicated that their scholar(s) are returning to LJA next year. Of the few families that will not be returning for next year, none reported that decision to be due to dissatisfaction with our program and that it had more to do with making choices that made more sense for their family or unforeseen circumstances.

LJA's continued work with our marketing firm, hired by LJA's Board of Directors, provided us with the resources to increase our visibility in the community and support the goal of increasing enrollment to ensure sustainability. Through online advertising, search engine optimization and

an increased social media presence, LJA has become more visible in the community which has led to an increased interest. Our current projection for 2023-24 enrollment is 110 scholars, almost 30 more than our current 83 scholars enrolled. This increase in enrollment will lead to hiring additional teachers and educational assistants. Accomplishing the goal of increasing visibility and enrollment is bigger than its ties to the vitality of our finances. We know that LJA is a special school and we are thrilled that more families in our community get to experience it.

LJA recognizes the strength in its community. The more support we allow others to give us, the stronger we will be. This year saw the further development of the Laura Jeffrey Academy Parent Association, LJAPA, who have supported with new family picnics, fundraisers, teacher appreciation week, conferences, and supporting enrollment initiatives. Families supported one another in getting to school by running and participating in a LJA carpool. Due to generous donations from community members, classroom libraries have been restocked, dirt provided for our courtyard gardens, which STEM scholars use for learning, and Give to the Max helped fund our J-Term programming.

Leadership continued to address learning loss and social emotional engagement through the expansion of school day and out of school day learning opportunities. LJA hosted its first ever summer school with remaining COVID money. The August programming included 12 days of summer programming for new and returning scholars. Scholars were able to participate in field trips throughout the Twin Cities and four academic courses: Math and the Arts, Story Book Making, Urban Farming and Recycled Art. The Minnesota Department of Education granted LJA an extension on the use of COVID funding to offer yet another summer in which we are able to provide programming. This June LJA is offering 10 days of summer school focused on Minnesota Parks. Scholars will be visiting local, regional, state, and national parks, as well as continuing learning in the building.

During the 2022-23 school year, LJA piloted a Spanish program. It was taught by one of our former EAs who is a native Spanish speaker. Scholars and families alike have shared many positive experiences with this course offering.

We also continue to build relationships with communities and organizations outside of our walls. Those partnerships include, but are not limited to the following: Project Scientist, Wilderness Inquiry, Friends of the Boundary Waters, Friends of the Mississippi River, and Urban Boat Builders are a few to highlight. These outside organizations have supported LJA scholars and staff to provide additional resources and learning opportunities to bring real world application to the classroom such as building longboards during J-Term.

One of the most coveted aspects of LJA is J-Term. J-Term was created at LJA 10 years ago with the hopes to boost student engagement and hands-on learning while promoting new social interactions between scholars and staff during one of the coldest months of the winter. This year, in addition to our usual book clubs and math classes, we had a focus on Financial Literacy and creating reliable budgets. Scholars also had the choice to explore the following J-Term

courses: Knitting, Outdoor Winter Survival, Children's Book, Theater, and Longboarding through a partnership with Urban Boat Builders.

LJA also received a grant from PrairieCare, to support LJA's social emotional learning by providing additional resources for scholars, in and out of the classroom space. LJA is hopeful that this pilot program will become permanent with the goal of advisors, families and scholars co-creating social emotional learning plans at the beginning of the year, and supporting each scholar's growth as the year progresses. The use of the HeartMath tool will support scholars in seeing their growth and give them the authority to take charge of their emotional health and wellbeing.

Our final, and most important goal, was our continuation of letting student voice and choice drive the decisions that we make. The 2022-23 school year marked the sixth year of Laura Jeffrey Academy being an educator led school. We believe that being educator led has helped lead our school in becoming more and more student centered. The Leadership Team continued its work in tandem with the other committees (School Culture, Family and Community, Curriculum and Instruction, and Grants/Development) to run the school. We continue to believe that this model is most conducive for the environment that we are trying to cultivate within our school community and reflects our commitment to our mission and founding principles.

All of the aforementioned improvements have allowed scholars and staff to continue to flourish. Looking ahead to next year, Leadership looks to continue our momentum with enrollment and increase our community partnerships. Leadership will work hard to ensure the integrity of LJA stays strong and focused on our mission - empowering STEM scholars to be creators, thinkers, and problem solvers in a collaborative school environment.