



Academy Hill Celebrates Its 35th Anniversary

In 1979, a group of parents and professionals from the Greater Springfield area looked to provide bright and curious children with opportunities for enrichment. At that time, families were forced to travel to Worcester or Hartford for similar programs. This dedicated and determined group founded The Ames Hill Center for Gifted Children, and organized Saturday and summer classes on the campus of the MacDuffie School for Girls for the next two years. In December of 1981, Wilbraham & Monson Academy invited the Center to merge with them, and to move onto the WMA campus. One year later, the organization was renamed The Academy Hill Center for Gifted Children, and Mary Crist was appointed its first Executive Director.

Well-known for its popular Saturday and summer classes, The Academy Hill Center was often encouraged to open a day school for advanced and inquiring students. In 1986, opening day enrollment for the new Academy Hill School was 51 students, but the roster grew to 55 by the end of that first, full academic year. Classes were originally held in two buildings on the Wilbraham and Monson Academy

campus. In 1993, the Board of Trustees of Academy Hill School voted to return to its original site on the fourteen acre MacDuffie School campus in Springfield. AHS was now able to house all students in one building, and to utilize the cultural and educational resources of the Greater Springfield area.

After several years on the MacDuffie campus, the Board of Trustees determined that the school's long-term goals could be better met by purchasing a larger building of its own. The 2000-2001 school year opened in a new facility, located on Liberty Street in Springfield. Academy Hill School remains on the Liberty Street campus to this day. In 2003, the Board of Trustees approved the extension of grade levels to include a middle school component. In 2013, the Board of Trustees voted to add an Early Learner (Pre-Kindergarten) classroom to the academic program. Academy Hill welcomed its first student from an alumna in 2019, and is now home to several alumni families. The current Head of School, Melissa Earls, is an alumni parent and in her 6th year as the school's leader.

Carol Rosenthal, who retired from

Academy Hill in 2017, was a founding faculty member of the independent day school. As AHS celebrates its 35th year, Rosenthal offers these thoughts: "When I became part of the founding faculty of Academy Hill, I had no idea what the school would mean to my family and to me. It became more than a school; it became our community. Both my children graduated from AHS and went on to academic and professional success in their chosen fields. While at Academy Hill, they learned how to learn; they were challenged personally; they experienced education that was tailored to their needs and interests." One of AHS's newer faculty members, Kindergarten teacher Alison Gauthier, talks of the school in similar terms, although her time never overlapped with Rosenthal's tenure. Gauthier says that "at Academy Hill, we are a community filled with love, and we keep the same end goals in sight: We want our students to leave AHS full of knowledge, shared core values, and a strong sense of community." Other members of the faculty commented on the eagerness of the students to learn; and how creativity, collaboration and risk-taking are trademarks of the instructional

program at Academy Hill.

Recent Academy Hill graduates are now enrolled at several independent secondary preparatory schools throughout New England, such as Deerfield Academy, the Loomis Chaffee School, Miss Halls School, Portsmouth Abbey, Suffield Academy, and Wilbraham Monson Academy, as well as at local public and charter high schools. AHS alumni currently attend a variety of colleges and universities such as Cornell University, Georgetown University, Hamilton College, Haverford College, Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, Vassar College, and Yale University. (Complete lists of secondary schools, colleges and universities can be found on the Academy Hill website.)

Academy Hill is accredited by the Association of Independent Schools in New England, and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools. For more information or to inquire about admissions, please visit www.academyhill.org, or call the school at 413-788-0300.

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