

2024-2025 Annual Report



Following Nature's Wisdom



The 2024-25 annual theme, "Following Nature's Wisdom," inspired values of presence, evolution, beauty, strength, and service. It highlighted lessons embedded in the natural world encouraging a harmonious and heartfelt experience for our students, staff, and families. In the wake of Hurricane Helene, this theme garnered new importance, reminding us of the resilience embedded in nature's ecosystems, supporting our shared grieving and rebirth.

The natural world is inherently diverse much like our classroom communities. We foster spaces that help our children and community adapt to challenges, embrace responsibility, and respond with compassion. This year's annual report celebrates the many ways these values were cultivated through the domains.

Throughout this year, our staff engaged a creative practice entitled *Soul Collage*, a visual and spiritual representation of individual and collective reflection and attunement. This type of critical identity awareness also bloomed some innovative programs in our classrooms. For example, our fourth grade students explored the nine year change through a new Transformations course, rooted in the sacred and celebratory aspects of childhood transitions. Our sixth graders wrote personalized State of Grace documents, further nurturing their self-awareness and pollinating a culture of belonging throughout our Middle School.

In partnership with the Board of Directors, Rainbow also made significant strides building the foundation for our Green Heart Campus Plan. Much like the germination of a seed, the energy necessary to break ground is often unwitnessed. Still, it is of critical importance and has better positioned us for action in the coming year.

The devastation of Helene was significant and truncated many of our fall celebrations and opening of the year rituals. Within the sorrow, we found each other. Families met on campus during the closure and created space for play and connection. When we reopened without potable water, parents helped to collect, distribute, and replenish safe drinking water for our classrooms. Applying their developmental expertise, teachers redesigned curriculum to help students process the trauma, re-enter school safely, and re-engage the culture of wonder, learning, and joy inherent in their classrooms.

This year's Annual Report celebrates the bounty of our community within and beyond hardship. A reminder that much like the natural world, when tended with care and consciousness, we flourish.

Susie Fahrer

Susie Fahrer
Executive Director

Mission, Vision, and Holistic Journey



We develop accomplished, confident, and creative learners who are prepared to be compassionate leaders in building a socially just, spiritually connected, and environmentally sustainable world.

Our Method

We provide an engaging, nurturing learning environment to educate the whole child using the seven domains.

We inspire academic excellence with a program in harmony with the stages of child development.

We model within our community the kind of world in which we aspire to live.

The Heart of Rainbow



The Rainbow Seven Domains™ of the Whole Child



Rainbow Seven Domains™



 1st Place Winner!



Best Preschool



 2nd Place Winner!



Best School



PHOTO BY CALEB JOHNSON

RAINBOW COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Best Preschool; second place Art Education Program;
second place School (Precollege); third place After-school Program



“Finding employment at the Rainbow School is the best thing that could have happened for my teaching career.

Never have I felt so challenged yet so supported by the amazing administration team and my co-workers. It is genuinely a place of joy, love, and learning, and is truly child-centered. I look forward to continuing to learn, grow, and develop my skills in the

realms of classroom management, Rainbow Seven Domains™ curriculum writing, and deep collaboration with peers at this wonderful stalwart of the West Asheville community.”

- Graham Carson, Preschool Lead Teacher

Mental Domain



The heart of our programming fosters academic rigor through student-centered, developmentally appropriate pedagogy that encourages thinking dispositions for twenty-first century learning. The holistic lens on learning ensures students develop the confidence and self-reflection necessary to engage scholarship that extends beyond a single textbook, content area, or skill set.

Teacher Quality
98%
Parent Satisfaction



Philosophy and
Approach to
Education
100%
Parent Satisfaction

Standardized Test Scores

96%

An average of RCS/OMS students in grades 4-8 scored at or above national norms for all tested academic areas as reported by their Comprehensive Testing Program Scores

Teacher
Education
198

Internal Professional
Development Hours

Teachers participated in 198 hours of internal professional development focusing on themes of culture building, Helene recovery, curriculum, and best practices in the field of education.



Sharing Our Mission With Others

**Green River Preserve
Equity Workshop**

Bali Mitchell
(they/them)

June 3, 2025
10-12

rainbow
community
school

RAINBOW
INSTITUTE

Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, Bali Mitchell, offered an equity workshop to Green River Preserve employees through the Rainbow Institute (RI). RI offers training and support to enhance the holistic well-being of individuals and institutions. Through holistic practices and research, we inspire institutional shifts in culture, systems, and programming for schools, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses.

I'M SO EXCITED TO BE HERE.

Watchable by rainbowlearning.org

7 Domains of Learning Every Parent Must Know: With Early Childhood Educator Kate Brantley

Our P-3 Division Head, Kate Brantley, was invited to join Dr. Ellie MacGregor in a podcast where they explore the importance of a holistic approach to education, the significance of nature play, and the impact of technology on child development with a highlight on the Rainbow Seven Domains™ of learning. Scan the QR code on the left to watch!

128+
Specialized
Professional
Development Hours

Select teachers and staff participated in 128+ hours of specialized professional development including courses on Nonviolent Communication, Building Bridges of Asheville, Nurtured Heart Approach, trainings at the Institute of Multisensory Education, participation in the Children of the Universe Project, and more.

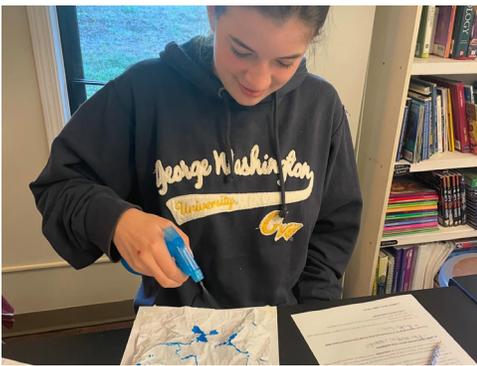


Omega 7/8 PIP Presentations

Every year, our Personal Interest Presentations (PIP) create a platform to celebrate the depth and breadth of our students' ability to ask meaningful questions, explore logical solutions, and present their learning. Students in 4th-8th grade all research and present their projects, with the capstone experience of a TED Talk in eighth grade. Our eighth graders shined and raised the collective awareness for topics such as:

- How to Improve Yourself with Exercise
- Strange Medical Beliefs from Historic Europe
- The Art of the Arch
- How to Make or Break Your Habits

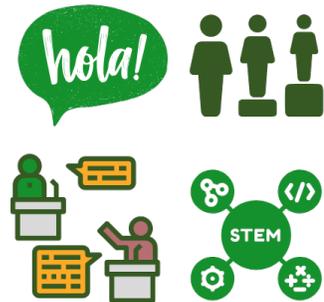
The Science of Our Watershed



Omega students used GIS computer modeling to simulate storms in our Upper French Broad watershed. They also mapped out Rainbow's five acre parcel to analyze runoff, infiltration, and evapotranspiration. Students compared simulations that used conservation practices

such as porous pavement, green roofs, rain gardens, and vegetative basins. They generated graphs and evaluated changes in infiltration, runoff, and evapotranspiration due to these conservation practices.

Middle School Electives



Omega students participated in mental domain elective coursework including Spanish, Equity, Debate, and Foundations.

STEAM Experiences



Second grade had a reverse field trip from Zaniac and learned the mechanics of building catapults.



Third graders explored wheels, axels, pulleys, and levers as part of a design challenge for their Simple Machines unit.



Omega Math 1 students tested their innovation skills with an epic design challenge. After planning and building their own rockets, students launched their creations and collected data for evaluation and further analysis.

Spiritual Domain



The capacity to entertain meaning within and beyond the individual and collective experience is at the heart of our contemplative practices. Students learn to cultivate a sense of “center” to prime their learning, encourage humane connection with others, and consider impact beyond the immediate environment.



Daily centering practice equates to a minimum of 81 hours spent in contemplative practice annually in every classroom.



Our seasonal fires served as a foundational touchstone for living our annual theme and attuning to the spiritual rhythms of the seasons.

Fall Equinox

Students created gifts from nature and shared them with the class below them, creating a cycle of interconnection so often mirrored in the natural world. Additionally, a collective mandala was created celebrating the inherent beauty of nature’s artifacts.



Winter Solstice

Students gathered to reflect on the pace of the winter season, embracing the natural pause of the darker days, and welcoming back the light. Storytelling, song, and fellowship marked this seasonal transition. To begin the day, Omega 7/8 students integrated into *Open Hearts, Open Spaces*, cultivating the inherent transformation from childhood to adulthood explored during adolescence.



Spring Equinox

The final fire circle culminated with an appreciation for rebirth, reminding us that every day is a fresh chance to achieve your full potential. Students created seed bombs and held the earth in their hands.





Emotional and Social Domains

The focus on emotional and social development through the ages creates a balance of self-awareness and actualization along with empathy and compassion for others.



Counseling Program Updates

In support of access and equity, our Counseling Department expanded our capacity to bill insurance for in-school counseling support.

Fourth Grade Transformations

Rainbow has always considered the fourth grade year to be a magical and momentous period in a child's development. Often coined, "The Nine Year Change," children begin to explore their own identity and autonomy at school and at home. Executive Director, Susie Fahrer, and our 4-8 Division Head, Trey Thompson, piloted five lessons titled, *Transformations*. These lessons more fully integrate our fourth graders into the magic and mystery of this time in their lives. The lessons provided a strong foundation for habits of learning as well as habits of conscious care for self and others that are critical to healthy identity development at this stage of growing independence. *Transformations* lessons will continue as an integral part of the fourth grade experience moving into the 2025-26 school year.



Sixth Grade Entrepreneurship Projects

Our sixth grade entrepreneurs created their own socially-conscious businesses. Students designed and created their own products, which were sold via an online marketplace and at the Spring Fling. Each student selected a local agency that aligned with their business model and social values to donate a portion of their profits.



Sixth grade students donated a total of \$376 from the sales of their products to non-profit organizations including:

*Asheville Greenworks
Brother Wolf
Habitat for Humanity
Rainbow Community School
Red Cross
Riverlink
YWCA*

Podcasting Elective

Last fall, Omega students in the Podcasting Elective collected stories of resilience from our school community about experiences during Hurricane Helene. They visited the Blue Ridge Public Radio station downtown over several weeks working with their staff to help edit those oral histories. The end result was an incredible podcast featuring the voices of Rainbow students from preschool through eighth grade, as well as from members of our staff and faculty.

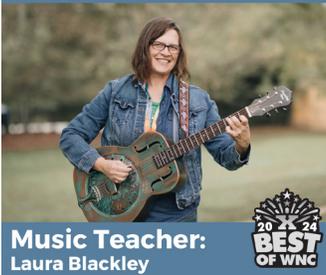




Creative Domain

Engaging the arts and STEAM education empowers our students to explore learning through a variety of lenses, mediums, and perspectives. The beauty and diversity fostered through the creative domain seeds our inspired school experience.

2nd Place Winner!



Music Teacher:
Laura Blackley



Middle School Electives



Omega students participated in diverse creative elective coursework including **Rock Band/Chorus, Rainbow Radio, Art I, Drawing & Painting, Ceramics, Printmaking, Appalachian Art, Yearbook, IMAGINE: Props & Performers, and IMAGINE: Music.**

A Celebration of Nature



The theme of our winter music program mirrored the overarching theme of the school year: *Following Nature's Wisdom*. It was an especially sweet and poignant program honoring the natural world, with some classes choosing to highlight rivers and trees through original and adapted songs.

"We sing for the trees and the things they have seen the storms and the sun and the red, gold, and green"

- *We Sing for the Trees*, by Laura Blackley

2nd Place Winner!



Art Education Program



IMAGINE: *Color Comes Back*

Each spring our community comes together for IMAGINE, a celebration of the arts at Rainbow that combines original song, theater, storytelling, music, and dance. Each Imagine script is interwoven with a storytelling thread that ties the performances together. This Imagine performance was particularly notable for it's return to a fully scripted play format featuring middle school actors and a beloved storyline, adapted to reflect a journey seeking the Rainbow Seven Domains™ with obstacles from the dreaded Color Snatcher.



"Now I see that I have been home all along. As we plant our seeds and root into the earth, we make our home with the love we share and the friends we make."

- Dorothy's Closing Line: *Color Comes Back*



Physical Domain

Our bodies help to define the multi-sensory experience of learning. Providing intentional outlets for movement, health education, and physical exploration engages one of the most critical modalities for educational wellness.

Special Events Highlighting the Physical Domain



Our annual **Gratitude Gallop** gave runners and walkers of all ages the opportunity to do their personal best.



4th-8th graders spent a perfect snowy day of joyful physical activity on our annual **Ski Trip** to the Cataloochee Ski Area.



Field Day provides a multitude of fun-filled physical activities including team sports and games, water play, and Dr. Bronner's Magic Foam Experience .

Middle School Electives



Along with traditional Physical Education courses for preschool through fifth grade, physical elective offerings for our middle schoolers in the 2024-25 school year included fitness training, soccer skills, ultimate frisbee, basketball, pickleball, roller rock, and team & field sports.

Weekly Physical Activity



Students participate in a minimum of 3.25 hours of physical activity and play a week through daily recess and other scheduled activities. Many classrooms exceed this amount in support of hands-on lessons and movement integrated into learning objectives.

Swim Lessons



During the winter months, our kindergarteners and first graders traveled to the Asheville Jewish Community Center for swimming lessons where they learned water safety, swimming skills, diving, and so much more. These swimming classes are a right of passage for our lower elementary students and provide a meaningful platform for building confidence within the physical domain and beyond.



Natural Domain



Commitment to nature play and environmental stewardship protects the inherent connections children have with other living beings and their surroundings. It cultivates wonder and inquiry and eventually leads to a sense of protection and personal responsibility toward human impact on the environment.

Middle School Electives



Middle school students had the opportunity to choose from three natural domain electives including Wilderness Skills, Upcycled Clothing, and Writing in Nature.

Child-led Learning



Magic happens when teachers follow children's interests! Excited by the discovery of mushrooms after a rain, our littlest learners embarked on a full unit study of mushrooms and how they grow. They learned about mycelium, the web-like structure of fungus under the soil that functions like roots, and made a yarn web at circle time to represent the web of mycelium underneath the soil. The class was offered a mushroom growing kit and educational experience from Gwen Englebach of Black Trumpet Farm. They learned about mushroom safety (not all are edible) and grew their own grey oyster mushrooms to harvest and eat.

Preschool Gardens



Preschool received new raised garden beds through the work Lead Teacher, Lauren Levine, did in partnership with the Farm to ECE Grant, Buncombe County Partnership for Children, and the NC Cooperative Extension program. These beds have provided learning experiences throughout the year.

Omega 7/8 Field School



Omega 7/8 piloted Field School, a sequence of four Fridays in which students spent time outdoors to learn experientially from the natural world. Each Friday built upon the previous lessons, beginning with on-campus lessons on packing, teamwork, and Leave-No-Trace ethics. Then, it was off to Catawba Falls for an exploration of how we go about building a socially just, spiritually connected, and environmentally sustainable world. Each week featured a trip to outdoor locations that introduced new skills and means of connecting with the natural world.

Engaging Summer Camps



7 weeks of camp



29 summer camps



139 campers served



campers receiving financial assistance or discounts



Specialty Camps by Domain for Rising 4th-8th Graders



Mental

Dungeons & Dragons



Creative

Arts Exploration
Theatre
Rock Band
Wood Working
Creative Crafts



Natural

Surf & Turf
Nature
Upcycled Fashion

Summer Camp Staffing



Scampers Camp sessions (grades K-2 and 2-4) offered a low counselor-to-child ratio of 1:5 and included two specialty teachers, one alumni leader, two high school alumni, and one to two middle school volunteers. Specialty camps for 4th-8th graders were lead by one specialty teacher and one alumni counselor.



93%

93% of our camps are staffed by current and former RCS teachers, alumni, and student volunteers.

Camp Themes for K-3rd Graders

Nature, Games, & PE
PE Games & Crafting
PE Games & Table Games
PE Games & Creature Crafting
Nature Exploration & PE Games
Slime & Crafts
PE Games & Story Creation



Building a Culture of Belonging

“...resilience can ripple outward, changing the lives of people, families, neighborhoods, and communities in positive ways.”

- Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*



Bali Mitchell
Director of Equity, Inclusion,
and Belonging

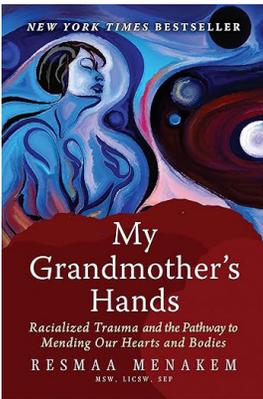
Dear Community Members,

The impact of Hurricane Helene on our area was both tumultuous and historic. While dealing with a multitude of emotions, the Asheville community came together to help people and provide support in whatever capacity they could. During this time, Rainbow Community School families and staff also came together and met regularly on our playground to check in, share resources, and connect with one another. It reminds us of Resmaa Menakem's quote from the book read in Equity Circle this year, *My Grandmother's Hands*. It reminds us how our resilience, kindness, and compassion can spread from one person to another, until the impact encompasses an entire community.



“Love is a choice we can make every day.”

- Shonda Rimes, *Year of Yes*



The theme of the 2024-25 school year was to “Follow Nature’s Wisdom”. Nature reminds us to slow down and notice things... from the small details to the broader, breathtaking views. Equity Circle took the year to redirect that intentional observation inward by reading *My Grandmother’s Hands*, which focuses on the spiritual aspect of equity work. The book guides us to reflect on the body and notice how it reacts to stressful situations and how it feels when we are grounded and peaceful. Focusing on the spiritual domain during Equity Circle helps model how equity is genuinely present in all of the developmental domains. The somatic practices and explanations outlined in the book can be shared with all our community members from our youngest preschoolers to our grandfriends.

This year, Equity Circle held an event entitled *Black Joy* during Black History Month. The Black Joy event featured a viewing of *Black Barbie: A Documentary*, which celebrates the Black people who were involved in creating the first Black Barbie in 1968. While the documentary does mention trials and tribulations faced by Black Americans, the focus was on the importance of representation and how the development of Black Barbie impacted its creators and others. A highlight of this event was a discussion held by a small group of students and their family members, in which they processed and discussed the documentary with one another. These intergenerational discussions provide everyone with a more in-depth understanding about how to engage in big topic conversations when our knowledge and experience with the subject may vary significantly. It also encourages people to continue to have conversations like these at home.



“I need to see my own beauty and to continue to be reminded that I am enough, that I am worthy of love without effort, that I am beautiful, that the texture of my hair and that the shape of my curves, the size of my lips, the color of my skin and the feelings that I have are all worthy and OK.”

- Tracee Ellis Ross

With the 2024-25 school year behind us and another year ahead of us, my heart is full of hope. I hope that we continue to follow nature’s wisdom by being mindful to slow down and be intentional about what we notice. I hope that observation turns inward and we not only notice how racism (along with other biases, -isms, etc.) has impacted the very cells of our bodies, but that we work to heal our bodies collectively and individually. I hope we continue to think about and celebrate Black Joy. I hope you will all join us in further embedding these principles into our culture.

Thanks for being in community with us,

Bali Mitchell (they/them)

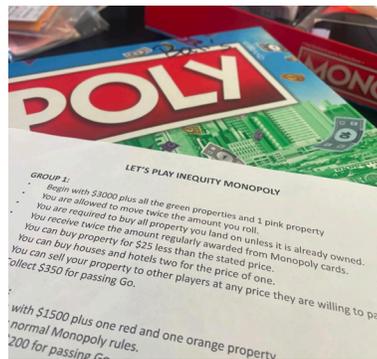
Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Additional Opportunities for Engagement

Equity Circle Mission Statement: *Equity Circle strives to dismantle systems of oppression through actionable steps grounded in community building, curiosity, empathy, continued learning, & accountability. We recognize inequity as an institutionalized issue; we work to institutionalize the solution.*

(Adopted 2022-23)

Student Engagement: In addition to the *Pollyanna* curriculum and equity work done within the classrooms, P-8 students had opportunities to engage in *Affinity Groups*. Omega students also had opportunities to engage in an *Alliance Group* and *Equity Electives*.



Intergroup Monopoly helps Equity Elective students actively learn how various past laws that gave certain people advantages can still have an impact on people of today. Each person at a board receives different rules that give some an advantage and others a disadvantage. These rules get dissolved half way through for "Equal Opportunity"; however, the students soon realize that it is still extremely difficult for them to "catch up" to their peers who had an advantage at the beginning of the game. This experience inspired rich and ongoing conversation and discussion for our middle schoolers.

Love in Action

The mission of Love in Action is to strengthen our Rainbow family by providing equitable access to resources for members of our community.



sourcing specific needs

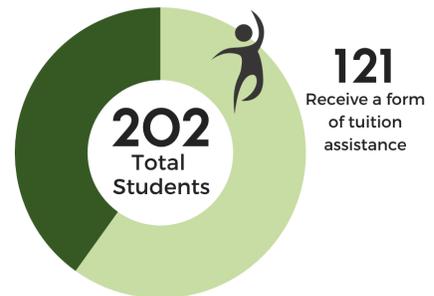


after school scholarships



club scholarships & discounts

Tuition Assistance



Sources of Tuition Assistance:

- RCS Financial Aid
- Staff Discounts
- Opportunity Scholarships
- Disabilities Grant
- Preschool Vouchers



*Opportunity Scholarships, ESA+ Disabilities Grant, or Preschool Vouchers



17 RCS Families

CONTRIBUTED

\$10,910 to the VET Program

Since 2016, Rainbow families have had the option to participate in the **Voluntary Equitable Tuition (VET)** program, in which they can elect to pay more than the required tuition in order to help fund scholarships.

Development

Our annual campaign is designed to elevate our programming and amplify our mission. Your donations help to ensure a diversity of families can access our programming, teacher retention and satisfaction is optimized, and campus care is prioritized. Tuition covers most of our outgoing expenses; but, as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we also rely on tax-deductible donations, grants, and other fundraising efforts to maintain a culture of excellence.

The 2024-25 school year's fundraising goal was \$90,000.

Annual Campaign Unrestricted Funds Raised



Donor Demographics



Individual Donors



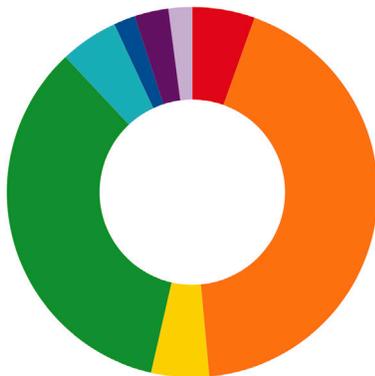
Business Sponsors



Employer Matches



Foundations



- Events
- Families
- Grandfriends
- Rainbow Fans
- Employee Matches
- Board of Directors
- Staff and Faculty
- Business Sponsorships

Fundraising Events

FALL
PLANT SALE
\$2,028



LIMITED
EDITION RCS
SWAG SALES
\$1,035

SPRING
FLING
\$2,200



Do you wish to
DONATE?



Scan QR code or visit our website: www.rainbowcommunityschool.org/annual-campaign-giving

The Rainbow Promise Restricted Funds



The Rainbow Promise Fund was launched in direct response to the humbling outreach, primarily from our extended networks, of financial gifting in support of recovery efforts. The fund supported our efforts to open our doors in a quick, safe, and responsible way. We were able to create systems and structures that helped students, staff, and families feel supported and empowered during this time of uncertainty. The funds were allocated for such things as mold remediation, water and sanitation solutions, potable water containers, and power pumps for classroom use.

Funds Raised = \$21,660

We are full of Gratitude for our Rainbow Promise Donors

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In Deep Appreciation for Our Annual Campaign Donors

Foundations

The Fletcher Foundation
The McMichael Family Foundation

Employer Matching

Baxter International
CDK Global
Duke Energy
HCA Healthcare
Salesforce
SAP Software Solutions

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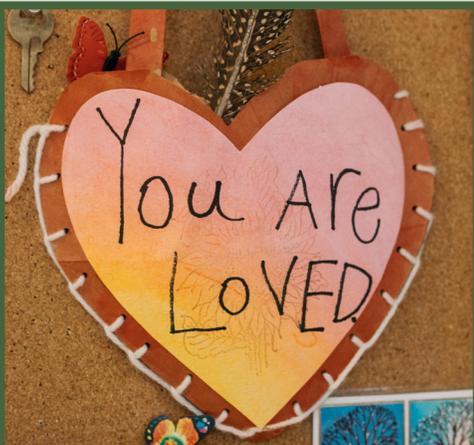
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Fiscal Operations

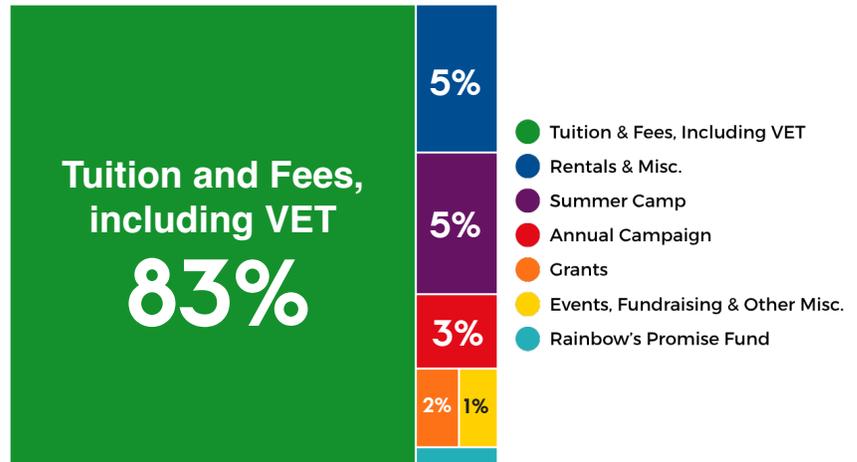
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 Zoe Balaconis & Jon Springfield

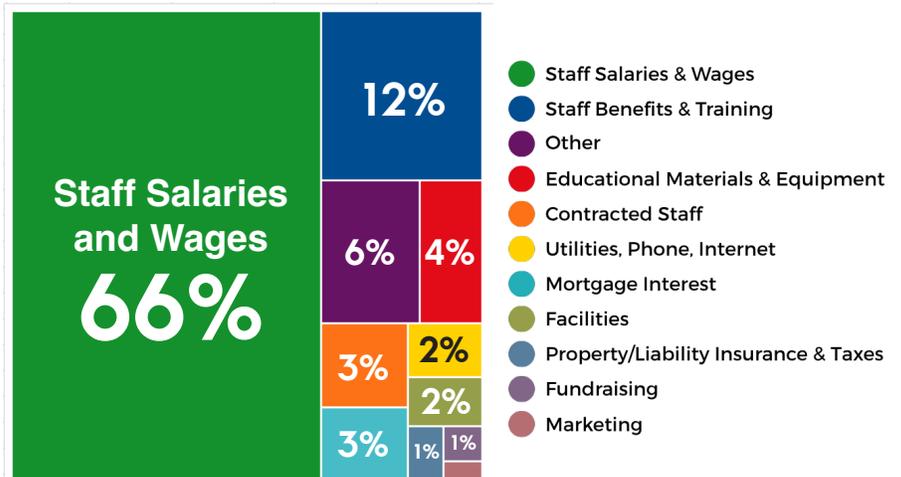
We love our Donors!



Total Revenue: \$3,357,836



Total Expenses: \$3,207,703



**Primary changes in revenue and expenses are attributed to Hurricane Helene.*

Additional Funding & Resources Outside of Our Annual Budget in Support of Our School Programming:

- \$9,414 in Title I Funds paid by Asheville City Schools and Buncombe County Schools provided tutors to support math and literacy skill development.
- \$871 in Title II Funds (supports professional development)
- \$3,443 in Title IV Funds (supports well-rounded education)
- \$2,255 in Preschool Stabilization Grant Funds (supports teacher bonuses and facility upgrades.)
- \$3,768 in Helene Relief funding from the Buncombe Partnership for Children (funded teacher bonuses for seven preschool staff members)

Community School

As a community school, we foster meaningful relationships between and beyond our campus community.

Community Connections



A growing part of our Omega 7/8 program is "Community Connections". This is an opportunity for our students to take on leadership roles, to build relationships with younger children, and to serve our school community through creative collaborations and stewardship of our campus environment. They helped fourth graders create puppets, third graders build Legos, a preschooler celebrate a birthday, first graders learn football, and more.



We returned to holding seasonal community work days in which several families supported efforts to beautify our campus during these opportunities to volunteer.

El Día de los Muertos



Several Latine families helped lead and set up our annual El Día de los Muertos celebration. It was beautiful. This year the celebration included free tamales while the ofrenda was being set up and a donation of pan de muerto for students to enjoy on the day of the celebration.

Water Keepers



Community members restocked our classrooms with potable water every day from October 21st-December 20th. We are so grateful!



Collaborative Dance

Omega Middle School partnered with French Broad River Academy, Hanger Hall School for Girls, Odyssey School, The Learning Community, and Woodson Branch Nature School for the second annual Collaborative Middle School Dance.

Community Event: Movie Night Under the Stars



Cozy blankets, popcorn, a potluck, and our favorite people - nothing beats family movie night outdoors! We had a strong turnout for a much-needed social community event in early November. There is healing in coming together for connection and fun.

Maker Fair



We had a booth at the Asheville Maker Fair, an annual gathering of creative and curious people who like to learn and share what they can do. The gathering is comprised scientists and crafters. We helped over 100 students build kaleidoscopes.

Bang and Sing



Billy Jonas gifted us with a spring music concert for our early childhood grades. Our youngest learners enjoyed Billy's engaging songs and rhythms.

Fun Fact: Did you know that Billy Jonas was once a music teacher at Rainbow?

RCS/OMS

Board of Directors

- Kali DeWine, Chair
- Dusty McKeelan, Vice Chair
- Sevn McAuley, Finance Officer
- Ruth Bhakta, Secretary
- Pamela Goodrum
- Amy Mitchell
- Melissa Scott



**Each Board member volunteers at least 12 hours monthly toward school visioning, governance, and longevity.*

Open Hearts, Open Spaces

On the last Friday of each month our administration and counseling team hosts parents for a gathering called, *Open Hearts, Open Spaces* - an opportunity for connection after morning drop off.



Enjoying hot coffee and tea around the fire and sharing laughter, tears, and stories helps our parent community to stay strong and support each other through the journey of parenthood. We are so thankful for these moments to slow down, share and connect with each other.

A strong community is our foundation. We are grateful to all our community members who have partnered with us to make 2024-25 a meaningful school year!