

Essay Winner #1
Jerre Parsons
Gateway Science Academy

The “hills may have been alive with the Sound of Music,” but Gateway Science Academy (GSA) is alive with sounds of music, laughter, and learning. From our first step through Gateway’s flyer-strewn door last spring, we felt a palpable enthusiasm, energy, and commitment emanating from every corner. This first experience did not occur during an advertised “Open House” where one expects gleaming fixtures, colorful displays, and smiling teachers, but simply on a typical school day where students expected quality learning and teachers delivered it. Genuine smiles filled the hallways as teachers greeted us, and diverse students raced to their next class or activity. Showcasing student work, art-filled walls were sprinkled with reminders that GSA would “Rock the MAP,” the Missouri Assessment Program. (Indeed they did, as they scored near the top in math and reading among St. Louis charter schools.) “Oh, you have to see this!” crowed a dedicated first grade teacher, as she pointed to the “K-2 MAP test,” a teacher-created facsimile, resulting from their students’ desire to “show Missouri” what they had learned.

As we continued our tour, various university pennants emblazoned doors and walls, symbolic of Gateway’s belief in a rigorous curriculum as the precursor to opportunities awaiting their students in higher education institutions. Peeking into doorways, we witnessed children working collaboratively, sharing ideas, facilitating discussions. Yes, it was noisy...but not with sounds of misbehavior or disrespect, but with sounds of involvement, interest, engagement. Thus, you can imagine our delight upon receiving Sammy’s acceptance letter. Now, in two short months, we are amazed by the skills, (academic, social, and emotional), that he has absorbed.

Although his teacher is a novice, one would never assume this from her classroom control. She not only inspires, disciplines, and imparts knowledge, she reinforces our teaching that through hard work, Sammy can achieve anything he desires. Like the remainder of the faculty, she communicates high expectations to children and parents alike, fostering a true community dedicated to one thing: an excellent education. Grateful for this quality option in the city of St. Louis, parents adamantly support GSA’s mission.

Whether we are coaching teams, tutoring students, attending field trips, or organizing events, parents are an integral part.

One can easily see that racial, social, and economic barriers fall away as Harley riders, firefighters, union craftsmen, and white-collar professionals band together during Men's Club functions and projects. Whether they are renovating classrooms or hosting fundraisers, they selflessly devote themselves to enriching the educational experience of community children. So, now not only is GSA vibrant in its second year of operation, so too is our home vibrant with sounds of our kindergartner eagerly reading, seeking out patterns, and discussing his recent science experiment. Thus, dear neighbors, if you're seeking the very best education for your children...simply walk down the street to GSA, and apply today.

Essay Winner #2
Kea Jenkins
Indiana Math and Science Academy- North

Why should you send your child to Indiana Math & Science Academy North? Smaller classroom sizes, college preparatory curriculum, and encouraged parental involvement are all astonishing advantages that you can look forward to by sending your child to Indiana Math & Science Academy North. In addition to these benefits, I love the fact that the staff demonstrates a genuine interest in the overall success and well-being of the students as well as the parents. My daughter whom is now a 1st grade student at IMSA began attending as a kindergartner; and thus far it has truly been a great learning experience.

Due to the smaller classroom sizes, the teachers are able to give students more personalized attention individually as well as additional help when needed. Smaller class room sizes also give each student a chance to participate in classroom discussions and activities. My daughter has a very shy personality, but I have noticed that she has really began to speak up more and is eager to raise her hand and answer questions in class; I believe that this has a lot to do with the smaller classroom setting. Furthermore, distractions are kept to a minimum with the reduced amount of students in each classroom.

As a parent you want your child to receive the best education available, regardless of where you live and how much money you make. Being a single parent with low-income, I was troubled that I would not be able to provide my child with the educational opportunities I desired her to have. IMSA North has turned my dream for my child to receive a good education into a reality. The curriculum is a college preparatory curriculum, and I love the fact that a foreign language is incorporated into that curriculum and they begin as early as Kindergarten. My child is sent home with homework daily, which helps me to see how she has progressed daily as well as new challenges she is introduced to.

It is so easy to get caught up in work and your own personal life that sometimes you get side tracked from being involved with school related activities. IMSA does a great job on getting parents involved with their child education, and the staff strongly encourages parental involvement. Parents are always welcomed to volunteer in the classroom, as well as chaperone Field Trips. Also, the school has Family Night where parents are able to interact with and get to know the staff as well as the families of other students.

As you can see IMSA North is a great school, which provides great opportunities to families who otherwise would have no other resources. This is the 2nd year that my child has attended IMSA North and has previously stated it has overall been a great experience for not only my child but also for me the parent. Indiana Math and Science Academy North offers smaller classroom sizes, college preparatory curriculum and encourages parental involvement which is why I feel you should send your child to IMSA North.

Essay Winner #3
Bobbie J. Daugherty
Noble Academy Columbus

Dear Sara:

Michael Masser and Linda Creed said it best when they wrote the lyrics “I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.” This simple yet poignant phrase encompasses all that Nobel Academy stands for and strives to accomplish through the education of our future – our children. With more than 360 charter school options in Ohio, for us, the clear choice was Nobel Academy. Having small class sizes, the student to teacher ratio made us feel our children would be recognized as individuals with their unique academic needs fulfilled and their boundaries expanded.

When we first moved, we worried over what school our children would attend. We researched the neighborhood school only to find it was failing in reading and math on standardized tests. We asked our neighbors were they happy with the public school their children attended, overwhelmingly they said no. Not happy about the neighborhood school, we investigated the charter schools in our area and Noble Academy was mentioned time and again. With our moving to a new district it meant new schools, new faces, and new fears of the unknown. Our children are close to each other and had always been in school together. With Noble Academy, our children could remain in the same school together until the 8th grade. This is another win for us. They were able to see each other and have the security of a familiar face in a new environment. We know you have children from kindergarten to the fourth grade. Noble would be perfect for them since they can stay together.

I realize how careful you are about your children’s education since you have homeschooled them for many years. I sincerely believe they will easily make the transition from the home to Noble Academy. I also realize your concerns over the safety of your children while they are away. There is such a family atmosphere here. The teachers and administrators are like extended family. They know my children’s names and they are always available to answer my concerns. Your participation is greatly accepted and even encouraged. You can be as involved as you can possibly be. The mix of students in attendance is so vast; we have enjoyed quite a heterogeneous mix of culture and community. Children have the opportunity to learn foreign languages as well. My children are learning Spanish and they look forward to learning Turkish in the future.

There is a tradition of excellence in the history of Nobel Academy. Once our children graduate from here they will transition to Horizon Science Academy where more than 95% of the students graduate from high school and 100% are accepted to college. I am so happy I made the choice to enroll my children in this school. With Excellent and Excellent with Distinction ratings, I couldn’t feel more secure about their education at Nobel Academy and I am confident you will too. There is no better choice.

Sincerely, Bobbie

Essay Winner #4
Jennifer Smith
Horizon Science Academy Lorain

October 29, 2011

Dear Neighbor,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you and your family to our neighborhood. As a mother I realize the importance of a good education and know how difficult choosing a school can be. I feel that Horizon Science Academy is the finest school in our area. My son, Brian Smith, is currently enrolled there and I have nothing but praises for the school. Horizon Science Academy's mission is to create a learning community in which teachers, parents, and students work together to develop young people who are confident and achieve academic excellence in a powerful college prep curriculum. Horizon creates a school culture that is built on success, respect, and accountability.

One of the benefits of attending Horizon Science Academy is the numerous activities they offer to keep students engaged in their learning. There is a diverse assortment of after school activities that are meant for everyone. They offer a robotics team, science project club, art club, math Olympics team, fitness club, soccer club, and board game club. There are also other opportunities for local, national, and international trips, as well as cultural exchange programs, summer camp, and winter camp. These interactive activities provide a fun yet educational atmosphere for students, and make them want to come to school every day.

An added benefit that Horizon Science Academy has to offer is the small and safe school environment. It was designed to be a small school so that all their students receive personalized education and are able to build sustainable relationships with their teachers. This allows the teachers and staff to focus more on each student's individual education needs. Additionally high behavioral and academic expectations are put into action from the first day of school. Students are exposed to rigorous curriculum that will help prepare them for college.

The disciplinary structure is set up to ensure that each student is successful and doesn't question whether they will go to college, but instead ask when and where. Overall Horizon Science Academy has a great deal of exceptional qualities that puts them above all of the other schools in the area. I can personally attest to the positive impact this school has had on my son. The curriculum, the after school programs, the great teachers, the high standards all contribute to the success of Horizon Science Academy and their students. By sending your children to Horizon Science Academy, you are not only ensuring that they are receiving a great education now, but you are also preparing them for their future.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Smith

Essay Winner #5
David Zietlow
Quest Charter Academy

ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY – ENERGY (ARPA-E) U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF ENERGY CONFERENCES, OUTREACH, AND NETWORKING FOR NEW ENERGY
COMMUNITIES AND TECHNOLOGIES (CONNECT)

Funding Opportunity Number DE-FOA-0000475

CFDA Number 81.135 <https://arpa-e-foa.energy.gov/>

November 1, 2011

Dear U.S. Department of Energy,

Quest Charter Academy will ensure that our nation maintains a technological lead in developing and deploying advanced energy technologies. To do this, Quest offers twice the math and science content of the typical public school. Quest attracts students from across Peoria, IL (population 112,936) who have a strong interest in math and science. These students are the scientists and engineers of the future who will face significant challenges because of limited energy resources. Your grant of \$25,000 will make it possible to equip them with the tools needed to be successful in the wise use of energy.

The extra math and science content is evident when Quest students participate in local and regional competitions. Quest hosted a science fair where 24 students submitted projects. These projects were judged by scientists and engineers from the National Agricultural Utilization Research Lab and professors and students from Bradley University. From these projects, 14 were selected to compete in a regional science fair. Twelve of the projects won first place awards along with two second place awards. One of the first place projects also won best-in-category. This allowed Quest to finish third overall.

In a district wide contest called Math Counts, Quest, in their first year of operation, placed fourth out of twelve schools even though they did not have any eighth graders in the competition. This year they should do much better since they have an eighth grade and a year of experience with the contest. One of the ways they equip the best math students is allowing them to use on-line self-study tools to progress at an accelerated rate.

Many of our energy problems are global in nature. Quest is at the forefront of providing their students with the cross-cultural awareness they need to address energy problems from a global perspective. One way this is done is through international tours. Last spring, Quest provided an excellent tour of Turkey. To prepare the participants, they met in small groups several times before the trip. These meetings were instrumental in familiarizing the participants with the customs and language of the Turkish people. The price was set at an economical level so that twelve Quest students, fourteen siblings and parents and nine staff members were able to participate in this rich cross-cultural experience.

You will make wise use of your grant resources by supporting Quest Charter Academy. They will use the grant to equip tomorrow's scientists and engineers with the tools to successfully resolve the significant global problems facing our world. The resources your grant provides will unleash their potential to define and solve the world's energy problems. I strongly encourage you to award this grant of \$25,000 to Quest Charter Academy.

Best regards,

David Zietlow

Proud Parent and Professor Mechanical Engineering Bradley University Peoria, IL 61625