



The BEACON

News for family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School 2023-2024 No. 2

HEADS UP by Wayne Sit, Head of School

What is Strategic?



The AACS Association was invited to brainstorming meetings that laid out the five strategic areas that the school's leadership is considering.

What does the word “strategic” mean to you? There might be some variations on the definition between different sectors (e.g., corporate world vs education world), but I think everyone would agree that it refers to long-term goals and aspirations that are meant to advance the mission and core values of an organization. They are not small, operational tasks, but higher-level objectives that drive the daily, weekly, and monthly decisions.

As many of you are aware, Ann Arbor Christian School is in the process of writing a new five-year strategic plan. Earlier this month, members of the school’s Association were invited to two brainstorming meetings that laid out the five strategic areas that the school’s leadership is considering: addressing facilities needs, retaining and recruiting high-quality teachers, strengthening fundraising efforts, growing our ability

to increase student support needs, and building more intentional relationships with like-minded and like-value partners in the community.

After a presentation of these five areas, attendees worked in small groups to discuss and record their thoughts and suggestions for each of the five strategic areas. In addition, groups were asked to share if additional strategic areas should be considered. The feedback was very insightful as we are seeking the collective wisdom of the broader school community.

By the end of April, the school board and school leadership team will be taking the feedback shared with us and drafting a new version of our top strategic areas for the Annual Association Meeting on April 30th at 7pm. During that meeting, we will be having another opportunity to talk and get further input. The goal is for a final strategic plan to be completed during the summer. In addition, with the school’s re-accredi-



“Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.”

— Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Continued on page 2

MISSION

In partnership with Christian families, Ann Arbor Christian School offers Christ-centered, academically excellent education that challenges students to live and act in society as committed followers of Jesus Christ.

HEADS UP

Continued from page 1

tation in mid-April and the 9th grade seeking accreditation for the first time, we will see if the accreditation site team from Christian Schools International will have any additional input for our strategic planning.

While we will use our God-given gifts and resources to work faithfully on developing this new strategic plan, in the end, it is the Lord's will that we seek to unfold for Ann Arbor Christian. It is not by our own might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord that Ann Arbor Christian will grow and thrive. We also need to trust in God to define what is good for us rather than our own human metrics and standards.

As we pray, work, and plan, we can trust that the Lord is already working ahead of us and preparing Ann Arbor Christian for the hope and plans He has for us.

GIVING UPDATE

The Fruit of Your Giving

By Wayne Sit, Head of School

This year, we added a number of substantial improvements to the school's main campus facilities. These facility improvements were made possible by supporters using their God-given resources to support the work happening at Ann Arbor Christian.

Additions this year include:

- The maker space, designed for science and art, as well as any class activity that requires extra room, surfaces, and water. It also includes a 3D printer and an electric range and oven for class activities.
- A new industrial kitchen that currently has paperwork being finalized with the health department for future lunch service.
- New score table for the gym
- New wall mats for the gym with school branding
- A new location for the library
- While not a physical improvement, the school also has a wonderful school safety officer on-site now who has fit into the school culture and community very well.

In addition, as shared in December, the school had hoped to raise \$100,000 in general giving as part of our budget. We are pleased to report that we exceeded that amount. Furthermore, the recent vacation raffle reached its goal of \$25,000 (with nearly \$4000 of this donated to Hope Clinic). We are so grateful for the generous giving of so many to make reaching these goals possible.

While 2024 is still young, please keep Ann Arbor Christian in mind as you plan your giving for this calendar year. Your giving may also include participating in the golf outing on May 20 (annarborchristian.org/golfouting) or making a designated gift to support the growth of the AACS high school as it prepares for its second year.

Lastly and most importantly, your prayer is one of the most critical ways to support AACS. Its value is priceless and is never to be underestimated in its impact on us. As James 5:16 says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."



AACS Contacts 2023-2024

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Wayne Sit, Head of School
head@annarborchristian.org

Renée McKeone,
 Main Campus Principal & Curriculum Director
renee.mckeone@annarborchristian.org

Brett Kilgore, High School Principal
brett.kilgore@annarborchristian.org

BOARD MEMBERS

Daniel Bingham
 Amy Brink
 Ann Deckert
 Karen Eekhoff
 John Nadzam
 Erin Perry
 Nik Spasovski
 Michael Yankonis
board@annarborchristian.org

COMMITTEES AND CHAIRS

Buildings and Grounds: Mike Myers
 Curriculum: Renée McKeone
 Finance: AACS Board Treasurer
 Information Technology: Paul DeKraker
 Public Relations/Development: Wayne Sit

THE BEACON

Laurie Campbell-Nuñez, Editor/Consultant
 Patrick Brady, Article Editor
 Heidi Eliason, Article Editor and PR/Development Assistant
prdevelopment@annarborchristian.org

AACS HIGH SCHOOL

What God Can Do in Less Than a Year

By Wayne Sit, Head of School

It gives me great joy to write an update on the new AACS High School. In its inaugural year, what we have been able to accomplish in eight months is a testimony to God's faithfulness and the dedication of the 9th grade families, the high school staff, and many supporters through their prayers and financial giving.

On a practical level, we knew that it was not possible to do everything that a "typical" high school might do. However, as a high school starting from scratch, we actually do not want to just follow the norms of most high schools and do what's "typical". Rather, we want to take this unique opportunity while our high school is a blank canvas to think outside of the box, to do things differently and in a healthier manner, and to honor God along the way while raising disciples for Christ.

As it says in Zechariah, "*Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.*" These words fill us with gratitude for the courage, faith, and pioneering spirit of our first high school teachers and families who saw beyond typical.

What have we done so far:

- Students have taken the PSAT 9/10.
- The school has hosted two college counseling workshops.
- We offered 10 different sports options this year.
- We ran our own driver's education class this winter.
- The school provided excellent technology resources for students and teachers, including interactive, touch-based smart TVs in every classroom.
- With the help of 9th grade families, the high school hosted a fall dance and held a homecoming game and dance.



- We had a sports pep rally.
- There are three world language classes running right now (Spanish 1 and 2, Chinese 1, and online German 2)
- The high school offered three electives: physical education, music, and art.
- Students have the option to start their own clubs, while parents ran a ski club over the winter, which included a weekend at Crystal Mountain Resort. A yearbook club was recently formed.
- The students have an enrichment period to stretch their thinking and to promote teamwork.
- We have taken field trips to the University of Michigan Museum of Natural History, a production of *To Kill A Mockingbird* at the Fisher Theater in Detroit, and a variety of physical education outings, such as Planet Rock.
- We are planning a dual-enrollment program with Concordia University to offer college-level courses that can be used to fulfill high school graduation requirements while earning college credit.
- We have welcomed over 15 pastors from different local churches for visits or as guest speakers.
- The school is planning a luncheon for the heads of local, non-faith private schools to see our high school, such as Greenhills, Emerson, and Rudolf Steiner.
- We are preparing to have our 9th grade accredited with Christian Schools International (CSI) this spring.
- We are making plans for High School Principal Brett Kilgore to do the open devotion at an upcoming meeting of CSI administrators in Michigan to both draw awareness of our new high school and to inspire other CSI school leaders in God's work in Ann Arbor in our collective efforts to expand Christian education throughout the state.
- There is a strong and positive sense of community between the students and teachers.

For a new high school with only a Grade 9, that's a pretty impressive list. Thanks be to God!

BOARD UPDATE

God is Moving at AACS

By Nik Spasovski, President, AACS Board

It has been a really great year at AACS, hasn't it? Between the exciting launch of our new high school, record enrollment, thriving classes of students, and many successful extracurricular activities, there is much to be thankful for about how God is moving in our school community. I recently asked our own children about their favorite things at AACS. Their responses included the community, their friends, the teachers, sports, recess, math, and PE. I love hearing their responses and comparing them to years' past. My wife and I are deeply thankful for the impact that AACS has had on our family. Psalm 107:1 comes to mind, "Oh give thanks to Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!" Let us continually set a positive example of gratitude for the next generation and not take for granted the manifold blessings of our good and great God.

The Board of AACS has been hard at work the past few months working on next year's budget, meeting with potential future board candidates, and meeting with the head of school and administrative team to discuss our next five-year strategic plan. We hope that you will be able to attend the **Annual Association Meeting on April 30th at 7pm** as we share an update on this strategic plan that we plan to finalize over the summer. We would love your engagement and prayers throughout the process!



AACS EAGLES!

Winter Sports Recap

By Bryan Diemer, Athletic Director

As spring sports begin, it is a great time to review our winter season. In addition to our normal 5th-6th grade and 7th-8th basketball teams for girls and boys, the winter also featured the second year for our middle school boys' volleyball teams and the first year of our boys' high school basketball team.

Our first AACS high school boys' basketball team finished up a successful season, with Coach Nolan Wolffis leading the Eagles to an 8-7 record overall. The middle school girls' basketball teams also recently concluded their seasons, competing in their respective league tournaments. Parents Emily Duggins and Keith Harr coached the 5-6th grade girls, while parents Christina Stoller and Nik Spasovski coached the 7th-8th grade team. The boys' volleyball team, now in mid-season, is coached by parents Stan Lee and Skye Schultz.



In another first, AACS offered 3rd-4th grade basketball for both boys and girls this winter, seeing 14 boys and 10 girls participate in the inaugural season. The boys' team was coached by parents Tom Gritter and John Nadzam, while the girls' team was coached by parents John Perry, Brandon Hartleben, and Meredith Hartleben.

We are incredibly grateful for eager parents coming out to coach all these teams. The giving of their time, passion, and skills is one of the key reasons for the success of our athletics program and is an example of strong parent involvement in the life of Ann Arbor Christian.

Spring sports practices have begun at the high school level. AACS high school co-ed track is coached by Pam Stom. Their first meet is on April 6 at Divine Child High School in Dearborn for those who wish to attend and cheer them on. In addition, the high school is offering boys' baseball and girls' softball through a co-op with Father Gabriel Richard High School.

Middle school sports will begin soon as AACS plans to offer 5th-8th grade co-ed track in addition to 6-8th grade boys' baseball. The track team is led by alumni parent Shannon Waroway, and the boy's baseball team will be coached by alumni parent Ty Anderson and parents Todd Redder and Mike Myers. In addition to parents, we are grateful for the support of alumni parents as coaches and their impact on the lives of our students.



Go Eagles!

A COMMUNITY GATHERED

Community Support Makes Science Fair and Chili Supper a Smashing Success!

By Heidi Eliason, PR/Development Assistant



The 8th grade class is grateful for the generosity expressed by the AACS families and friends who came out to support the 2024 Science Fair and Chili Supper. The annual class trip fundraiser was led by

8th grade dads Richard Barnabo and Chris DeRuyver and drew in over \$1,400.00 this year! The 8th grade class would like to give a heart-felt “Thank You!” for the food donations from the 8th grade families and especially from local businesses: Knights, Carsons, Foodies and Aubrees.

While people were enjoying the food, the Ann Arbor Christian School science fair was on display for visitors to view. It is an annual event that is open to all students from Pre-K to 8th

grade and is judged according to education level. The 7th and 3rd graders have a participation requirement and are guided by their teachers as part of the AACS science curriculum. In a world that sometimes pits faith against science, we are proud that we can show that our students can love God and appreciate scientific curiosity and rigor at the same time.



Thank you to Sean Lindblade, Mary Wiland, Stacy Charlton and Renee McKeone who led the team this year. We also appreciate the parent science fair judges who carefully read and evaluated each project.

MLK Day Chapel

By Becky Johnson, Spiritual Life Coordinator

I never learned much about Martin Luther King, Jr growing up, nor do I have any clear memories from elementary school of learning about the Civil Rights Movement. Over the years of celebrating MLK Day as a “day on” at AACS, I have come to deeply value and appreciate the remarkable life of Dr. King. I respect how he modeled the fruit of love in the midst of hatred and prejudice. I am moved by how he challenged those in the civil rights movement to meditate daily on the life and teaching of Jesus.

This year, our MLK Day chapel focused on Jesus’ words, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” The high school students shared a reader’s theater version of John 15:1-17, which was followed by a skit emphasizing that the fruit the Master Gardener is looking for is love. We learned that the only way we can bear the fruit of love is by remaining connected to Jesus, who is the vine.

During the remaining portion of the day, the students learned about different Civil Rights protests and how the participants demonstrated the fruit of love. From Rosa Parks and the ensuing bus boycott, from the Greensboro sit-ins to the Birmingham March, the participants were all asked to sign a pledge before engaging in this work. This 10-point pledge included a commitment to the following:

- meditate daily on the life and teachings of Jesus.
- to walk and talk in a manner of love, for God is love.
- to refrain from violence of fist, heart, and tongue.

In the face of great hostility and anger, these participants modeled peaceful protest, recognizing the power of Dr. King’s words, “Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”



In response to what the students had learned about the Civil Rights Pledge, they were given the opportunity to write a prayer asking God to help them demonstrate the fruit of love in their day-to-day lives.

- Jesus, help me to love others by standing up for people.
- Jesus, help me to love by forgiving others.
- Jesus, help me to love by not prejudging people.
- Jesus, help me to love by being kind to everyone even if they aren’t my favorite.
- Jesus, help me to love by saying, “I’m sorry when I am wrong.”
- Jesus, help me to love by not bragging when I win.

It is our desire at AACS to continue to inspire our students to see each person as an image bearer, worthy of dignity and respect. We pray that our students will be agents of change in a manner that reflects the teachings of Jesus and demonstrates the fruit of love.

BEYOND THE BASICS

Learning 中文

By Renée McKeone, Main Campus Principal & Curriculum Director

The importance of exposure to world languages is critical in developing global perspectives among our students at AACs. However, “global perspective” takes on new meaning when we address world languages from a Christian worldview. Not only do our students grow in their understanding of the world, its people, cultures, and languages, but also in recognizing that others, who may speak a different language or look different are also created in the image and likeness of God and loved by Him.

At Ann Arbor Christian School, world language learning starts in kindergarten where students begin their exposure to Spanish and Chinese. This continues throughout fifth grade where students take half a year of exploratory Spanish and the other half of exploratory Chinese. Exploratory refers to the goals and methods of these classes: to expose students to the language and culture through interactive teaching, games, songs, stories, and activities that build both receptive and expressive language skills. The emphasis is not on memorizing vocabulary, completing homework, or taking tests, but on developing a positive attitude toward language learning while laying the foundation for the target languages. In middle school, language learning becomes more academic, and the goals of the class change to developing proficiency in the language in all areas, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

While many faith-based schools in the area teach Spanish, teaching Chinese is unique to Ann Arbor Christian School. In making the decision to add Chinese to our exploratory languages, we returned to the rationale we had for introducing elementary world languages in the first place. In 2010, the AACs education committee spent time investigating the value of introducing world languages in the elementary classrooms. One of the primary reasons found in our research was the fact that languages are easier to learn at younger ages. This is even more key for tonal languages such as Chinese. Students



who become used to hearing and imitating these sounds will be much more adept at mastering them later in life.

Another key aspect of our

exploratory classes are the cultural studies that go hand in hand with language



learning. These studies expose students to the traditions, holidays and beauty of Chinese art and literature. Hongli Giszczak, our elementary Chinese teacher, has enjoyed sharing traditions such as the autumn moon festival and lunar new year with the students.

While it is true that Chinese can be a challenging language to learn, there are many advantages to learning the language. With over one billion people who speak Chinese worldwide, Chinese is an important world language. Exposure to Chinese culture and language at a young age can open doors for students in terms of business, missionary, and friendship opportunities in the future. Research has shown that learning Chinese can strengthen the brain. Neuro-linguistic studies have shown that learning Chinese fires up more parts of the brain than any other language. While speaking English, speakers use only the left temporal lobe, but Chinese speakers use both the right and left temporal lobes. Speaking and writing Chinese can improve cognitive activities and brainpower. Because Chinese is not a phonetic language, where sounds are combined to make words, but one in which words need to be memorized, Chinese language learning is linked to improved memory.

Currently, AACs students who have been exposed to Chinese in the early grades can study Chinese in more depth in our high school world language classes. We are considering adding an option to choose Chinese or Spanish for our middle school world language classes. Currently, Spanish is the only language available for middle school students.

The high school students started the year with an online Chinese course, but recently a teacher was hired to provide a more personalized experience. Esther Yang, a native Chinese speaker and graduate of Calvin University, is thrilled to have joined the AACs High School and provide personalized instruction to her class. Esther also teaches high school art.

A Chinese proverb states, “To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world.” Our Chinese language classes not only help students have a broader view of the world, but also use that knowledge to love and serve others in their communities as well as across the globe.

LASTING SIGNIFICANCE

Parent Group Helping New High School to SOAR

By Jayme Higgins and Karen Dec, AACS Parents

SOAR began during the 2022-23 school year as a group of AACS parents and staff with a shared vision to help the new Ann Arbor Christian High School. "SOAR" is not an acronym, but a reference to a group of eagles soaring in the sky. SOAR's mission is: to help Ann Arbor Christian High School grow and thrive through prayer, volunteer service, and positive outreach in the AACS and greater Ann Arbor community.

There is a core group of six SOAR leaders who hold various roles such as: staff liaison, social coordinator, secretary, athletics liaison, fundraising, communications, and public relations liaison. These roles help support the school and to further God's mission of creating a Christian high school in the city of Ann Arbor.

SOAR has been involved in many exciting things since its inception. Prior to the opening of the high school this past fall, SOAR created a prayer calendar and prayer guide to get our community involved by praying for specific items. Over the summer, SOAR helped with workdays at the Upper Campus to help get the high school ready for the first day of school. Now that the high school is open, SOAR has provided and coordinated parent support for open houses, shadow days, and other events (such as High School Preview Night) to spread the word about the high school in our greater community.



Some of the larger events that SOAR has sponsored for the freshmen class this school year are the fall Barn Dance, the winter Homecoming Dance, and the Ski and Snowboard Club ski

trip. The social component of high school contributes greatly to the overall experience for students, and SOAR has had a unique opportunity to help facilitate and encourage students in this aspect in the school's inaugural year. SOAR is excited to see what God is going to do as Ann Arbor Christian High School continues to grow!

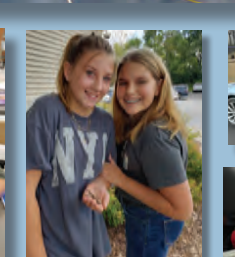
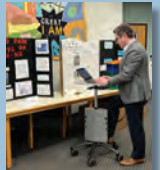
For those interested in supporting SOAR (or just keeping up with SOAR happenings), you can join our email list by emailing soar@annarborchristian.org. We welcome parents from any

grade level, as well as grandparents or alumni parents who want to see the high school thrive. We typically have monthly meetings in-person at the Upper Campus with a Zoom option. Come SOAR with us!



#AACSLIFE

Check out photos like these on Instagram & Facebook



News for
family and friends
of Ann Arbor
Christian School



The BEACON

Ann Arbor Christian School
5500 Whitmore Lake Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
annarborchristian.org
734.741.4948

ALUMNI PROFILE: MADDIE KORTE

Year of graduation from AACCS: 2017 • **Grades you attended AACCS:** 7th-8th grade

What high school did you attend? Father Gabriel Richard High School

Post-secondary educational plans? I am a Junior at Calvin University and planning to be a teacher.

Favorite memories or experiences of your time at AACCS: A highlight for me was mentoring the younger children as a 7th and 8th grader. Not only did I enjoy working with the kids, but it also boosted my confidence in my ability to be a leader. I also loved the 8th grade Chicago trip! It was such a fun opportunity to be with all of my classmates outside of school, as well as my teachers.

Special personal accomplishments since graduating AACCS? I will be going to Zambia this summer for 2-1/2 weeks with Calvin University. There, I will assist in developing and implementing curriculum for one of the local schools.

How did your experiences at AACCS impact you? Although I only attended AACCS for the last two years of middle school, the sense of belonging and community I gained there stuck with me. I proved to myself that however scary moving into a brand-new school in 7th grade was, it was completely doable, and it turned out to be a greater blessing than I would have ever thought it could be.



Maddie attended and prayed at one of the recent strategic planning meetings.



To give: annarborchristian.org/give



facebook.com/annarborchristianschool



instagram.com/annarborchristian