



# VALOR

Avail Academy Newsletter

# Voice

Winter 2023



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

**Mission:** Avail Academy provides quality education that is fully integrated with a biblical knowledge of God and his world, supporting Christian parents and the church in nurturing children as disciples of Christ.

**Vision:** Avail Academy will thrive as a provider of distinctively Christian elementary and secondary education and will lead the larger community to adopt Christian education as a priority.

**Values:** Cultural Connectedness, Thoughtful Discipleship, Nurturing Community, Transforming Education, Opening Opportunities

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Avail Community,

January—the middle of the school year already! So much has been accomplished, yet much is left. We must say “thanks” to great staff, who support a wonderful faculty, all of whom really care about students and go the extra mile to ensure academic success from a Christian worldview.

Two highlights from the first half of the school year really stand out. First, we received affirmation in the strength of our academics as Avail High School students scored an average composite mean score of 27.5 on the ACT during the 2021-2022 school year, which is well above the national average of 19.8. This is Avail Academy High School’s highest composite mean score over the past six school years!

Second, I hope everyone had the opportunity to experience one of the highly acclaimed Christmas concerts. Each was, indeed, an uplifting and wonderful example of worship and community.

As we move into 2023, I want you to know the leadership team is planning for the next academic year. We have begun by identifying capital improvement projects needed to make sure Avail is strong and poised for growth. In addition, we are actively working to strengthen Avail’s student support, instructional coaching, and curriculum development.

God has richly blessed Avail with a rich history from which to build great people – students, families, supporters, staff, faculty, and other partners. Each of you is vitally important in the quest to do **Christian Education on Purpose.**

Jeff Piehl  
Interim President



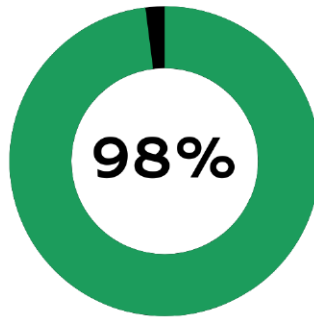
# Avail Academy Completes Steps for Accreditation Renewal

Avail Academy is accredited by Christian Schools International, a nationally recognized accrediting agency. Being accredited verifies and communicates that Avail maintains high educational standards. Avail recently completed the rigorous accreditation process and received a unanimous recommendation to the Christian School International Accreditation Commission for accreditation.

As part of the accreditation process, parents from the three campuses were asked to respond to a survey in the winter of 2022. The survey provided valuable input in how effective the Avail Academy administration, staff, programs, and facilities are in meeting the needs of students. Excerpts from the parent survey are shown to the right.

The data collected through the survey and the accreditation process will be used to guide self-improvement efforts over the next five years. Goals include strengthening board vision and communication and improving stakeholder collaboration. Avail made plans to improve staff development practice and student support services. Avail uses the accreditation process to help fulfill our mission to provide high quality, fully integrated Christian education.

# PARENT SURVEY RESULTS



Avail Academy School provides quality education fully integrated with a biblical knowledge of God and his world, supporting Christian parents and the church in nurturing children as disciples of Christ. 98% of parent responses agree or strongly agree that the mission statement guides the direction of Avail Academy.

## What Parents are Saying...

“We love everything about Avail and couldn’t be happier with the education and biblical teaching our daughter is receiving.”

“The teachers are amazing, even (and especially) in the environment of COVID. They see each of my children individually and encourage them with the way God has gifted them!”

“We have open conversations with our child’s teacher, and other staff is invested in him succeeding”

“The kindness given to our children is amazing. I love to see the staff interacting with the kids. The principal comes out for recess and plays basketball or sports with the kids. Everyone knows everyone. It’s like a large family.”

The teaching and learning at Avail Academy is of high quality.

**98%** of parents agreed or strongly agreed

Avail Academy is teaching my child to see how he/she can purposely live for the cause of Christ.

**94%** of parents agreed or strongly agreed

Avail Academy is helping my child understand how his/her learning connects to God’s story.

**96%** of parents agreed or strongly agreed

My children are engaged with what they are learning at school.

**96%** of parents agreed or strongly agreed

Avail Community,

On behalf of the Avail Board of Directors, I wish you all a Happy New Year. For many the New Year signifies new beginnings, and this certainly resonates at Avail as we continue our search for the next Avail Academy President. We have been encouraged by the progress so far, and we are excited for what God has for us in this next season.

We started the search process this summer by convening a retreat of the Board to carefully consider the state of the school and our vision for the future. In our time together, we affirmed our commitment to the President leadership model and we found strong consensus in the desire to see Avail Academy continue to grow. Yet, even more important than desiring to serve more students and families, we affirmed our commitment to upholding Biblical truth and the mission of covenanting together with Christian parents in the education of our children for the ultimate glory of God in all aspects of life.

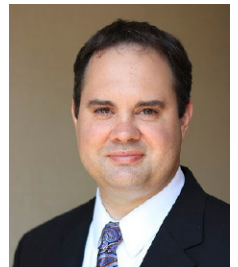
The Board formed a President Search Committee that included Board members, a teacher from each campus, and a parent representative from each campus. We began by conducting listening sessions with the principals, faculty and staff from each of the campuses, as well as sending out an online survey for the entire Avail community. The Search Committee then recommended to the Avail Board to engage with CACE (Center for the Advancement of Christian Education), which is affiliated with Dordt University, to utilize their expertise and connections in the Christian Education community. CACE incorporates a multi-step leadership search process that includes assistance with the Opportunity Profile, marketing to potential candidates, analyzing candidates, and onboarding of the new leader.

In October and November, the Search Committee completed the Opportunity Profile and CACE began

using that as they reached out to potential candidates. We have received a number of applicants and have been conducting interviews in December and January. We are completing the first round of interviews and are preparing to enter the next phase of identifying our final candidates, which will include additional interviews.

In addition to completing the President search, the Board is embarking upon the strategic planning for accomplishing the vision of growth for Avail and God's kingdom. We are excited for the many opportunities and we are intent on relying on the Lord as we face the accompanying challenges. Please continue to pray for the Search Committee and the Board as we take up the work before us and seek to identify the person that the Lord would have to lead Avail as our next President.

Kevin Distad, Chair  
Avail Academy Board of Directors

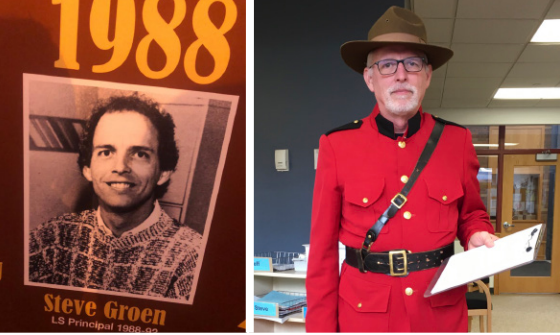


## Avail Academy Board of Directors

Kevin Distad, Chair  
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Linda Marcus, Secretary  
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Lisa DeKam  
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## Principal Steve Groen Announces Retirement after 33 years of Service

Steve Groen, Principal at the Edina campus, announced he will be retiring after 33 years of faithfully serving the Avail community. Steve has modeled a humble servant leader as he wears many different, figurative and literal, hats. Sandi Olson, long-time Edina campus second grade teacher, reflects on Steve's impact on the students and families of Avail Academy and his passion for Christian education.



My name is Sandi Olson. I am retired now, but taught for many years during the time that Steve Groen has been the Edina campus principal. I could share many things with you, but will focus on just three things that stood out to me as I reflect on those years.



First, over the years, Steve's leadership helped guide Avail through building expansion projects, economic hardships, and a COVID pandemic. He was ready to take on the challenges and work toward finding ways to adapt and meet those challenges. Through all of these things, Steve demonstrated a faith and trust in God's faithfulness.



Second, I didn't need to know Steve long before I was aware of his dedication to Christian education. Even more specifically, I came to understand his love for Avail and his desire to see it be a school in which all students could receive a challenging, yet distinctly Christian education and find a home in its supportive learning community.



Finally, I remember how Steve enjoyed interacting with the students. I would see and hear him greeting them in the morning when they arrived. I was amazed that he was able to greet them all by name! I would see him outdoors playing a game with a group of students during recess. Throughout the school day, I would notice him stopping to talk with students. He would talk to them about a sport they were involved in or other things that were going on in their lives outside of school.

Many current and former students and their families hold Avail Academy as a special place that they grew to love. Steve Groen's hard work and dedication have helped to make it that place.



Sandi Olson  
Retired Second Grade Teacher  
Served for 42 years



**Mock Election Day:** Students experienced a mock election on Tuesday, November 8, and had the opportunity to cast their votes for our U.S. House Representative, Governor, & State Senator. Kylie Schumacher, Olivia Distad, Braydon Ritzema, and Grace Bruin acted as election judges, with the help of parent volunteer, Stephanie Ling. One of our deep hopes at Avail is that our students grow to be responsible citizens of God’s kingdom. This simulation encouraged our students to serve as active, well-informed citizens.

**Choir Festival:** Avail’s high school choir attended the Christian High School Choral Festival at Bethel College, joining choirs from other local Christian schools at Bethel’s beautiful Benson Great Hall. During the day participants were coached by college directors and sang with Bethel choir students. All participating schools sang three songs of their own and then joined together for the final song. This was a wonderful celebration of learning.



**Alice in Wonderland:** The cast and crew artfully brought to life the classic story of Alice in Wonderland during four fantastic performances this fall. High school students strengthened their collaboration skills to create multi-person characters such as the Caterpillar and Jabberwocky.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

**Agape Child Development Center:** Students help meet Agape’s mission of, “Mixing love and education, tailoring the social and intellectual development of our scholars.” While serving at the center, Avail students engage in a variety of developmentally appropriate activities with children through the age of five.

**Stevenson Elementary:** Several high school students serve at Stevenson Elementary twice a month. They help students further develop their reading and mathematical skills. We have heard from Stevenson Elementary staff that students eagerly await the arrival of our Avail students.



**Solar Suitcase:** Last year the 10th grade Physics class helped build a solar suitcase to provide electricity in schools without reliable electricity. The suitcase made it to the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Uganda and is being installed.



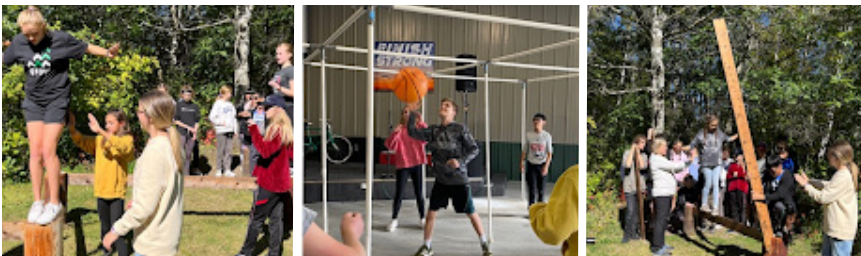


**Valor Live:** This December, the high school welcomed 7th and 8th graders to campus for lunch and competition. Students could choose between two activities. One group joined in an Amazing Race style STEM challenge that had students using robotics, engineering, and physics to solve various puzzles. The other group joined Mrs. VanGeest in an Advanced Art class that created Christmas cards using gelli prints, foam prints, and stencils. Both were competitive activities with prizes awarded.

**Third Grade Walking for Water:** Third grade students participated in a simulation to understand the challenge of finding water for those who live in places where clean drinking water is not readily available. The student walked to nearby Laddie Lake to collect water and then watched the process of purifying and filtering the water to see the effort that goes into collecting and cleaning water from natural sources. Later in the week, students walked around the playground and sports field carrying water in buckets for 30 minutes. They were able to experience, in a small way, what it can feel like for people around the world to walk for their water every day. The students grew in gratitude for the gift of clean water that God gives us while learning where our local water comes from. Students also learned how important it is to conserve and take care of our water sources.



**Inspiration Point Camp:** The middle school students had their retreat at Inspiration Point Camp. While at camp, the students participated in science lessons, leadership development, and team building activities. It was a great time watching the students grow emotionally, spiritually, and as a community.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

**Operation Christmas Child:** This past Christmas season, the 4th grade class committed to serving others through Operation Christmas Child. As they were writing letters to go into the shoeboxes, Mrs. Mulder overheard them saying, “he/she is going to be so HAPPY when they get this box!” and “it sure feels good giving!” The class prayed a blessing over them and know that God will get them into the hands of some very grateful boys and girls.

**Cloverleaf Courts:** 5th grade students continue to develop relationships with residents at Cloverleaf Courts. About 8-9 years ago, Mr. Kroeze started bringing students to this senior living facility right across the bridge from school on Polk Street. It turned out to be a highlight each year. The purpose of this formational learning experience (FLEx) is to connect with members of our community and practice intergenerational skills. Each student is paired with a friend at the apartments that they seek to get to know better during monthly visits. This experience allows many curricular connections as we share and learn with our friends at Cloverleaf.



**Band Students Give and Attend Concert:** Middle school band students took two trips off campus this fall arranged by band teacher, Susan Schevenious. Students played several selections for the residence at the Minnetonka Shores Senior Center. The residence enjoyed the music and kept asking for “just one more” selection. The fifth grade and middle school band students went to the Northrup Auditorium to hear the University of MN Marching Band perform.



**STEM Lab:** The new STEM lab is up and running! The room is outfitted with new flooring, cabinets, a sink, and new furniture designed for STEM activities. Thank you to the donors who provided the funding for this project and to Avail parents, Tim Zwiers and Steve Abbring for mounting the cabinets and countertops, and Katie Abbring who was instrumental in the design of this room. It is a wonderful space for the students to create, investigate, problem-solve, and explore in a collaborative environment.

The fourth grade class took on a STEM challenge before Christmas break. Each table was given paper and tape to see how tall they could make a free standing tree in 15 minutes. The trees took various forms, as students learned how to share ideas, collaborate on a design, and modify their tree structures as needed. The tallest tree stood 48 inches tall.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

**Notes of Encouragement:** Students wrote notes of encouragement for people struggling with addictions that were included with gift boxes to clients at Minnesota Teen Challenge. The gift boxes are prepared and contributed through an organization called Bud and Bumble. Bud and Bumble is a non-profit, family foundation located in Edina whose goal is to bring a gift of hope and encouragement to those who are hurting.

**Thanksgiving Food Drive:** Over 970 lbs of food was collected at the Thanksgiving Food Drive and brought to the VEAP food shelf in Bloomington. VEAP expressed their gratitude for the large donation of items received from Avail Academy.

**Supplies Shipped to Haiti:** At the end of last school year, teachers and staff gathered unneeded but usable school items for Children of the Promise in Haiti (COPT). COPT is a local non-profit whose mission is caring for and empowering the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in Haiti. They provide sponsors for Haitian children to receive free, quality Christian education the community. After several months of travel, the items were delivered to the Haiti campus of COPT.





**Blaine Cross Country:** The Blaine campus hosted the junior cross country NSPSL Conference meet in October. The girls' varsity finished 5th and the boys' JV finished 2nd. Ian Farley (5th grade) finished as the JV Champion.

**Edina Cross Country:** The Avail Edina Campus formed a Cross Country Team this past fall and participated in the Cloudy Water Cross Country Conference, which is made up of nine area private and charter schools. Fifteen students participated on the Avail Cross Country team under the leadership of Coach Brad Stark. Avail Academy had many excellent runners. Sixth grader Gabby Johnson finished first or second in each of her races (Girls' Division). Sixth grader Sam Anderson finished in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place in each of his races (Boys' Division). Others who consistently finished in the top ten for their races were: Evan Koelewyn (Gr. 7), Sophie Ertel (Gr. 8), and Emilyn Bosch (Gr. 8)

**Fridley HS Cross Country:** Justin Kroeze had an outstanding conference season, placing 1st in the Eastern Minnesota Athletic Conference (EMAC) conference finals and qualifying for the MSHSL State Boys Cross Country Meet. Berean Bock (7th grade) and Alethea Rieke (8th grade) each finished in the top-10, earning All-Conference honors in the girls EMAC race. They combined with teammates and sisters Xandra Pull (10th), Theia Pull (9th), and Aliyah Pull (8th) for a second place team conference finish.

**Blaine MS Soccer:** Congratulations to the middle school boys soccer team as they finished their season undefeated with a 10-1 record and won the NSPSL JV Tournament.

**Edina 6th Grade Volleyball:** The Sixth Grade Volleyball Team won all three games in their SSYO League tournament and took home the First Place Championship Trophy.

**Fridley HS Volleyball:** For the third year in a row, the Valor Varsity Volleyball team is the EMAC conference champion. Coach Kevin Anderson and Assistant Coach Marissa Gustafson led the Valor team through a great season of growth, competition, and success.

**Blaine Middle School Basketball Update:** The Middle School Boys Basketball teams are wrapping up their seasons during the next couple of weeks and the girls season started last week. The middle school Varsity team is currently undefeated and in first place in the NSPSL League.

**Basketball at the Target Center:** The Blaine MS Varsity and Fridley HS Teams had the opportunity to face opponents on center court at Target Center in early January. It was a fun night of Valor Basketball, community building and cheering.





## PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**Legacy Giving:** Interested in giving to Avail Academy through an IRA rollover? The IRA charitable rollover allows taxpayers to make tax-free charitable gifts directly from their Individual Retirement Accounts to Avail Academy. Individuals aged 70½ or older can choose Avail Academy as a beneficiary for their required minimum distribution without being taxed.

Contact Heather Wessman with questions at [hwessman@availacademy.org](mailto:hwessman@availacademy.org)

**Avail Accelerators Business Partners:** Avail Academy is grateful for the generous support of our business partners! Our partners understand the critical role their businesses can play in being a catalyst for equipping students in developing Christ-centered worldview to aid them in serving their communities, state, country and world.

Welcome to our new Accelerators!



Christian Brothers  
Automotive



ELEVATION  
WEALTH MANAGEMENT



## Avail Accelerators

### PLATINUM PARTNERS

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4015 Inglewood Ave. S  
Edina, MN 55416

## ALL CAMPUS NEWS

We are grateful for our community celebrating the **2022 Valor Challenge** at Lake Harriet on October 2. The Avail community raised over \$105,000 for the Challenge! It was a beautiful morning together while supporting Christian education at Avail Academy. A special thank you to our Challenge sponsors: Cardigan Donuts, Caribou Coffee, Kowalski's Market, Lunds and Byerlys, Chick-fil-A, My Burger, and all of our faithful Avail Accelerators who support Avail Academy!

Our community came together for our **Annual Fellowship Dinner** on November 12 at International Market Square. It was an amazing evening of laughter, fellowship and sharing stories of how God is working in the lives of our students as they grow as disciples of Christ. The evening brought in \$96,000 for Christian Education at Avail Academy. Thank you to all who partnered with us to make this possible!



**Blaine K-8 Campus**  
8966 Pierce St. NE  
Ph: 763-785-0135

**Edina K-8 Campus**  
4015 Inglewood Ave. S  
Ph: 952-927-5304

**Fridley 9-12 Campus**  
755 73rd Ave. NE  
Ph: 763-531-1732

[www.availacademy.org](http://www.availacademy.org)

[development@availacademy.org](mailto:development@availacademy.org)