

HOPE ACADEMY OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

Annual Report

OVERVIEW

Our district has one open-enrollment charter school, Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas (Hope Academy). The mission of Hope Academy is to provide students with a safe, positive, trauma-informed academic environment that will nurture their love for learning and confidence in life. At Hope Academy, trauma is defined as “detrimental events that have occurred in a child’s life that significantly impact the child’s ability to cognitively and behaviorally function in a classroom setting.”

Trauma in the life of a young child can manifest itself in a number of ways. At Hope Academy, our definition of trauma will include the following:

- Physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse
- Physical, emotional, or educational neglect
- Abandonment
- Time in foster care
- Witness to domestic violence
- Experience living in a chronically chaotic environment in which housing and/or financial resources are not consistently available
- Experience living with household dysfunction (mental illness, substance abuse, incarcerated relatives, absent parent)

Hope Academy is an affiliate of the Northwest Arkansas Children’s Shelter (NWACS). NWACS is a private, non-profit organization that provides 24-hour residential, emergency triage care for children throughout Arkansas who are victims of abandonment, abuse or neglect. Our mission is to provide these children in crisis with a safe haven, high-quality care and hope for the future.

The NWACS program focuses on meeting the basic needs of the children so they can feel safe and begin to heal from the trauma they have experienced. Meeting these basic needs is one of the first ways that our staff can begin to build trust with the children in our care – many of whom have never been able to trust the adults in their lives. These basic needs include:

- A warm bed
- Consistent, balanced meals
- Healthy snacks
- Clean, well-fitting clothing
- Access to baths/showers and personal hygiene items

And most importantly

- Loving care provided 24-hours per day

Beyond meeting basic needs, we offer or facilitate a wide range of services that help our kids begin the process of healing and trusting adults, including medical, dental and counselling. For more than 21 years, NWACS has operated a school on site for residents of the Shelter. Our goal now is to expand those much-needed services to

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children throughout Northwest Arkansas who will benefit greatly from a trauma-informed educational setting. This expansion of services will allow us to begin to break the cycle of abuse and trauma and provide hope to vulnerable children and families.

On October 10, 2019, the Arkansas Department of Education Board of Directors unanimously ratified the Arkansas Charter Authorizing Panel approval of Hope Academy of Northwest Arkansas! Hope Academy, the first trauma-informed school in Arkansas, will open on the Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter campus in August 2020. The charter school will be an expansion of the mission of the Shelter and fill an educational gap that currently exists in Northwest Arkansas. Children who have experienced trauma, many of whom have the same profile as our current residents, will now be able to find specialized, small classes taught by trauma-trained teachers who strive to create a safe environment for the children to learn, cope, manage and thrive. Our teachers and staff are specially trained to provide an educational space for learners with unique needs. Our team-based approach fosters student success by understanding and meeting physiological, social and emotional needs of students. Our goal is that students will make a successful transition from Hope Academy to a traditional public school classroom.

OUR MODEL

We will open K-3 in our first year. Each class will have no more than 10 children, 1 teacher and 2 para professionals. Instruction will be highly individualized in very small groups. As social and emotional skills develop, the group sizes will become larger. A family advocate will be used along with our counselor and teachers to frequently communicate techniques we use and observations about each child's needs and progress. Our desire is to help families understand what we see working with their children so they can use and reinforce the structure used with their children at school. And we want to know the same from the parent. We want to understand what we can do to reinforce techniques they use and see as successful with their child. Working together, we hope to accelerate the social and emotional development of our children. We see the following as a keys to success:

- Highly individualized instruction with small class sizes
- Strong partnership with families
- Excellent teaching staff and para professionals
- Family advocate that facilitates communication between families and our staff

HOPE'S 4 THINGS

In year one, our plan is to be good at 4 things:

- Use evidence-based approaches and innovative techniques to guide our students' social/emotional development.
- Build Strong Relationships with parents to promote school/family relationships
- Deliver instruction in innovative ways to foster academic success
- Prioritize state cycle reporting compliance in all areas

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Arkansas law recognizes that "students in Arkansas deserve the best education that the citizens can provide." This education must produce academically competent students who can demonstrate their competency in the core curriculum and who can apply their knowledge and skills. We want this for our students and it is our goal. For our students to be successful in their academic careers, we must make them successful in a classroom environment.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Hope Academy has been allocated Title 1 funding from the federal government. Being a Title 1 recipient means we will receive federal funding to supplement our existing programs. These funds can be used for:

- Identifying students experiencing academic difficulties and providing timely assistance to help these students meet the State's challenging content standards
- Purchasing supplemental: staff, programs, materials, and supplies
- Conducting parent and family engagement meetings, trainings, and activities

Given the importance of parental and family partnership in the development of our students, we would desire that most, if not all, of these funds be directed towards the facilitation of a family involvement in the development of their children scholastically, emotionally and socially.

NUTRITION

All students receive a hot breakfast and lunch prepared and served daily by a trained chef and dietary staff at no cost to the families. It will be a balanced protein and plant-based diet. Snacks will be provided throughout the day in accordance with a positive behavioral support philosophy.

TRANSPORTATION

Hope Academy families come from several surrounding communities. We operate 3 bus routes that cover Bella Vista, Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, Fayetteville, Gentry and Siloam Springs.