



ACTON ACADEMY WEST END

INFO KIT

FIND YOUR CALLING | CHANGE THE WORLD



MEET THE FOUNDERS

OUR STORY

We are Emily and Joe Malizia and Katelyn and Michael Alsop. We're family, best friends, parents and entrepreneurs. We've never done things the "traditional way". From starting multiple small businesses, to growing a seven-figure online education platform for photographers, to raising our kids together, and now starting a non-traditional micro school for our kids and their peers, the excitement of re-imagining what's possible drives us and inspires us!

As parents to six young children between our two families, we have been thinking about education a lot recently. We all attended public school, currently live in a great school district, and have confidence that our children would do just fine in that setting. However, the more we thought about it, the more we wondered, should we settle for "fine"? We've heard about the excessive homework and standardized tests that start in the early elementary years. Will this approach adequately prepare our children for a successful, fulfilling life in the 21st century?

As we began searching for answers to these questions, we came across *Courage to Grow* by Laura Sandefer, Acton Academy Co-Founder. We were intrigued by the innovative school that she and her husband, Jeff, started 10 years ago in Austin, Texas. Instead of an institution, school is viewed as a community of learners who are each on their own “Hero’s Journey” to discover their passion in life. The standards are extremely high and nothing short of excellence is acceptable. Success is not about completing worksheets or memorizing facts to pass a test. Instead, the goals for students are simple and bold: find a calling and change the world.

“Every child has passions, gifts, and purpose to discover as they grow up. Why make them wait until 18 to start pursuing it?”

KEY ELEMENTS TO KNOW

HERO/EAGLE

These terms can be used interchangeably. We prefer to use these terms instead of “children” or “student,” because we are all students on a learning journey.

HERO'S JOURNEY

We believe each of our students will find a passion – something they love and are uniquely gifted to do – finding and pursuing this gift is what we call the Hero's Journey.

STUDENT-LED

Acton Academy is Student-Led, which means that our students are involved in every step of decision making processes from studio rules, scheduling, school systems, and even disciplinary actions. Age appropriate freedoms, within reason, are given to students. They are responsible for setting their own goals, tracking their progress, navigating relationships, and reflecting on their experiences.

GUIDE

Acton employs Guides rather than teachers. A Guide's role is not to be an expert but to help lead the learner to their own conclusions. Guides provide instruction with the goal for learners to eventually become intrinsically motivated and independent. We desire our learners to have no have a “sage on a stage” but rather a “Guide on the side” who is coaching them into each season of growth.

STUDIO

We refer to our classrooms as studios to encourage the idea of an environment of creation and personal expression.

TRIBE

We are very intentional about building trust and deep friendships between all of the Eagles in a given studio. We refer to them as a “tribe” because of this level of intimacy and vulnerability that is required to truly belong to the team.

KEY ELEMENTS TO KNOW

CORE SKILLS

Reading, writing, and math are the foundational academic subjects that all Eagles work on individually and at their own pace.

QUEST

A quest is roughly equivalent to a unit in project based learning. It represents a significant amount of work with a team and a high level of mastery to complete.

JOURNEY TRACKER

The proprietary Learning Management System (LMS) built by and for the Acton network. Think of it like an Eagle's educational plan, calendar, and record of work.

LAUNCH

A Socratic conversation that is geared toward exploring deep and meaningful concepts or challenges. Every school day begins and ends with a "launch."

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION

A formal discussion based on a defined concept or question that requires participants to clearly articulate their positions or arguments. A leader's role in a socratic discussion is to ask open ended questions that will help the participants lean into deeper and deeper understanding.

CORE BELIEFS

AND VISION

01. We believe each child has a gift that can change the world in a profound way

02. We believe in a closely connected family of learners

03. We believe in learning to learn, learning to do, and learning to be

04. We believe in economic, religious, and political freedom

Our vision is to offer an innovative approach to education that celebrates personal responsibility, creative freedom, and the pursuit of one's life's purpose.

OUR PROMISES

TO OUR LEARNERS

To prepare young people to live exceptional lives in the real world.

Encourage them to be curious, independent, lifelong learners

Encourage the discovery of gifts and learn to use them to solve difficult problems

Encourage the development of deep respect for economic, political, and religious freedoms

Empowering them to cherish the arts and the wonders of the world

“Being part of the Acton Community means a devotion to a growth mindset: one that cherishes mistakes as learning opportunities.”

WHAT MAKES ACTON UNIQUE?



LEARNING TO LEARN processes

Learning to LEARN means finding the recipes, processes, and algorithms that help us make better decisions and more deeply embed the right habits of critical thinking.

- Goal Setting
- Time Management
- Reflecting
- Learning Through Play

LEARNING TO DO skills & academics

Learning to DO means making practical decisions in the real world to accomplish great tasks, as a way to change the world.

- Apprenticeships
- Personal & Business Budgeting
- Product / Invention Demonstrations
- Hands-on Discovery of the World

LEARNING TO BE character & growth

We want heroes near the end of a successful, satisfying and fulfilling life to have answers to three important questions:

- Did I contribute something meaningful?
- Was I a good person?
- Who did I love and who loved me?

The final “learning to be” promise means finding ways through difficult challenges and decisions to deeply etch habits of positive character traits into each soul, while rubbing away the negative habits that take away from who we are destined to become, if we want to reach our full potential.

HEAR FROM THE FOUNDER OF ACTON ACADEMY



LAURA SANDEFER, FOUNDER OF ACTON ACADEMY

What happens when you take a school and remove all but three adults? You get Acton Academy.

Laura Sandefer, co-founder of the Acton Academy school network and author of “Courage to Grow,” is an academic entrepreneur who believes that children need to be empowered to make mistakes, fail, grow, and improve on their own.

Sandefer works to enable other parents to establish new Acton Academies to serve the educational needs of their families and local communities. Acton Academy is a radical model of schooling that puts as much power as possible directly into the hands of students, giving them the opportunity to take ownership of their choices and capabilities from an early age.

OUR LEARNING

ENVIRONMENT

Hands-on learning | no homework or frequent standardized testing

Character Education | Opportunities for service and growth

Fine Art and Music workshops | opportunities for learning beyond the studio

Purposefully designed indoor studio and outdoor learning spaces

Fun and enriching family and community involvement

STUDIO DESIGN

Acton Academy is a blend of the old and the new. It resembles a return to the community schoolhouses that built America with multi-aged classrooms. It also utilizes the best of modern technology and 21st century organizational design.

In a tightly knit community bound by shared mission, promises and accountability, young people develop deep friendships and the skills to keep them for the long run.

CURRENT
STUDIO

DISCOVERY STUDIO

(generally ages 5-7)

Guiding Belief:

Play is the important work of the child.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice a sense of right and wrong with a foundation in learning to be a good friend. Learn to be part of a community with a focus on collaboration, conflict resolution, curiosity, and creation.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Exploration of the natural world, Strong Reading Foundation, Develop a real-world math sense through manipulatives and game play.

Most learning in Discovery Studio happens through play.

Guiding Belief:

Exciting challenges foster curiosity and encourage a child to dig deeper.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice stewardship of self, space, and time. Learn to more fully consider others and their ideas & needs. Goal setting and maintaining a growth mindset.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Project-based exploration in reading, writing, math, and art that encourages natural love of learning.

LOWER ELEMENTARY

(generally ages 6-10)

(coming Fall 2023!)

(not yet available)

UPPER ELEMENTARY

(generally ages 9-13)

Guiding Belief:

Love of learning must be protected through a delicate balance of challenge and choice. Too many requirements kill the love of learning, too little challenge or expectation kills love of learning and undermines growth.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice curiosity, working hard & playing hard, setting goals, identifying & celebrating failures quickly, conflict management, and independence with a keen awareness of building community.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Project-based exploration in all subjects, while taking on more structured problem solving in math, and challenges in reading & writing

Guiding Belief:

"Work Hard. Play Hard"

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Mid School is an active learning environment where heroes thrive in love of learning and take on greater responsibility for self and community contribution (Servant Leadership). They learn to foster healthy peer connections through team building, collaboration, meaningful discussion, and actively practice holding one another accountable.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Increased responsibility for higher levels of rigor and time management in writing and problem solving (math). Increased focus on assimilating knowledge from powerful books, history, and science through discussion & self reflection. Increased focus level (for longer periods of time) is gained by alternating work with intermittent breaks for movement and collaboration. Hard work leads to the opportunity for fun group activities.

MID SCHOOL

(generally ages 11-15)

(not yet available)

Guiding Belief:

Preparing to launch

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Self-discovery & personal gifts, servant leadership, high-level morality, habits of personal success.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Critical thinking, conceptual mastery of all high school core subjects, clear written & spoken communication through practice and repetition. Making meaningful connections between the work of learning and real life experiences. Pressing deep into areas of passion or calling. Heroes will secure and complete apprenticeships, work together on large, long term world-changing adventures, prepare a professional portfolio, and complete all other requirements necessary for entrance into the college or career of their choice.

(not yet available)

LAUNCHPAD

(generally ages 14-18)

MEASURING

GROWTH AND MASTERY

For most people with a background in traditional education, the idea of testing is a must in order to ensure that students are actually learning. However, at Acton, we believe that there is another way to prove a young person is mastering a skill. Below are four ways we track progress and growth:

Students celebrate the mastery of tools, skills, and **character by earning badges, assembling portfolios and taking part in public exhibitions.**

Parents can review a **student's academic progress** by reviewing their earned badges in Core Skills like reading, writing, math, and spelling and character development.

Public exhibitions at the end of most Quests allow young heroes to present work to experts, customers or the public for a real-world test.

Electronic and hard copy Portfolios capture rough drafts, photos, video, and other creative work.

A DAY IN

THE LIFE AT ACTON

A day in our studio is marked by creativity within constraints: large blocks of time for work and play with clear but broad guardrails, equipping young people to manage their time, set goals, and track progress. As learners demonstrate their readiness, they earn more freedom and responsibility. Mornings are reserved for Core skills and afternoons are for hands-on projects with integrated time to reflect, think deeply, and connect with peers. Within each work block, students choose from a broad range of work options based on their personal goals, passions and commitments.

OUR LEARNER-DRIVEN COMMUNITY

Our Learner Driven community is run mostly by our learners, where closely connected families of lifelong learners are bound by clear covenants; and “Learning to Do” and “Learning to Be” are even more important than “Learning to Know”.

- **Students create and sign a Contract of Promises describing how each individual will act and the consequences for violating community norms**
- **Mentor teams encourage younger and older students to listen, affirm, set goals and hold each other accountable**
- **“Learn to Be” badges that celebrate character and completing leadership challenges**

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

8:15-8:30 AM

drop-off / free time

8:45-9:15 AM

launch/socratic discussion

9:15-11:30AM

core skills

(Goal setting, math, reading, civilization discussion, gamified learning, "Brain Breaks" throughout)

11:30 - 12:30 PM

lunch / free time /outside

12:30 - 12:45 PM

quest launch

12:45 - 2:45 PM

quest

(Hands-on work, team-based challenges, sciences, coding, entrepreneurship, art & music, history, report on goals)

2:45 - 3:00 PM

studio maintenance

3:00 - 3:15 PM

closing group (socratic discussion)

3:15 PM

pick-up

IS THIS THE

RIGHT FIT

FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Acton Academy West End is a wonderful fit for families who resonate with the following:

- You believe the traditional school system is no longer the best option to prepare children for the modern world
- Entrepreneurs, Creators, and Creatives
- Out-of-the-box Thinkers
- People who want the benefits of child-directed learning without having to make a full-time commitment to homeschooling
- Families with flexible schedules
- Children who want additional time to pursue their passions beyond traditional after school hours
- People who want to maximize their family time
- Trailblazers and trendsetters
- Families who value their freedom and want their children to develop a love of learning

CO-OP VS. PRIVATE

WHY ARE WE A CO-OP INSTEAD OF A PRIVATE ACADEMY?

At Acton Academy, we have done extensive research about the pros and cons of being viewed as a private school or a homeschool co-op by the state of Virginia.

While being viewed as a private school by the state seems more prestigious, we have always come back to the heart of what we love about the Acton model and that is the freedom that it allows for our children in their educational journey.

Private schools can be expected to follow mandates and protocols set by the state. For example, private school models have more restrictions on attendance. Families that would like to take their children out of the studio and work remotely on family trips would have more flexibility under a homeschool co-op model.

This decision does not change the Acton structure or approach to education, it simply allows Acton Academy to thrive and be unhindered.

Parents will need to download, complete and mail a "notice of intent" form by August 15th to send to the Superintendent of public schools in your county.

FAQS

HOW IS ACTON ACADEMY WEST END AFFILIATED WITH ACTON ACADEMY?

Acton Academy West End is part of the network of over 300+ Acton Academies around the world. We follow the same exact Learning Design (curriculum) and learning model that Jeff and Laura Sandefer helped create at the original Acton Academy campus over a decade ago.

WHAT GRADES DO YOU OFFER?

It is our goal to grow to a place that we are able to offer studios for 5-18 year olds. Each year we are adding and expanding the ages we are able to accommodate. Reach out to us at info@actonacademywestend.com to discuss the ages we are currently able to have at Acton Academy West End.

WILL CHILDREN BE GROUPED TOGETHER BY GRADES?

We believe that children learn best when working with children younger and older than themselves rather than split up into groups based solely on age. In addition to individualized curriculum, all ages of students work together in groups.

WHAT IS YOUR TUITION?

Tuition is \$850 per month for 9 months (\$7,650 per year). There is a \$100 (non-refundable application fee). First month's tuition (\$850) is due upon acceptance to hold the spot for your learner. There is an \$850 annual supply fee due by July 1st.

WHAT KIND OF LEARNER THRIVES AT ACTON ACADEMY WEST END?

Students who love to learn, are curious, self-motivated, and respectful. Our environment is an accelerator for the independent learner who can tackle challenging questions, follow instructions, and solve problems.

IS ACTON ACADEMY WEST END A MONTESSORI SCHOOL?

We respect and incorporate Maria Montessori's philosophy but, we are not a Montessori school. We also use the latest interactive technologies, hands on projects and the Socratic Method for discussions.

HOW DO I KNOW IF IT'S THE RIGHT FIT FOR US?

Each family is unique, though there are some similarities we've seen between the families who are happiest and most successful in this model. We encourage families to be intentional about their decision to apply! Please read "Courage to Grow" by Laura Sandefer, and reach out to us to schedule a time to meet.

DO YOU OFFER SCHOLARSHIPS?

There are limited scholarship opportunities at this time. If you are interested in a scholarship, please let us know in your application. If you would like to contribute to the scholarship fund, please let us know. We are eager to share this opportunity with as many highly qualified applicants as possible.

WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU HAVE FOR SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS?

We take our commitment seriously when we promise to deliver a transformative education experience for young people at Acton Academy West End. Since we are a small school, we make sure that we have the resources necessary to keep this promise for each family that joins us. Currently we have resources to assist young people who experience mild ADD/ADHD, dyslexia, and some minor forms of autism. We are not currently equipped to serve young people with other specific learning needs.

IS ACTON ACADEMY WEST END ACCREDITED?

Yes the school is accredited through the International Association of Learner Driven Schools.

HOW DO YOU USE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM WITHOUT STUDENTS HAVING TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME?

At Acton Academy, we believe in the power of balance. Using the incredible, self-paced eLearning tools now available, we are able to provide the rigor needed for learning math, vocabulary, spelling and grammar in under 2 hours each day, while freeing up the rest of the day for engaging, project-based learning. The two are highly complementary.

IS ACTON ACADEMY A RELIGIOUS SCHOOL?

Acton Academy West End revolves around the basic truths of Christianity: the belief that humans are designed to be the hands and feet of God in the world, using their gifts to the best of their abilities. Because Acton encourages exploration and independent learning, however, we leave the teaching of specific doctrine up to individual families. Children and families of all faiths are welcome at Acton Academy West End.

READY FOR MORE?

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

[Courage to Grow, Laura Sandefer](#)

[Nurture Shock, Po Bronson](#)

[The Gift of Imperfection, Brene Brown](#)

[The One World School House, Salman Khan](#)

[Mindset, Carol S. Dweck](#)

[Daring Greatly, Brene Brown](#)

[Unschooling Rules, Clark Aldrich](#)

[Your Three Year Old, Louise Bates Ames, Ph.D. \(Each book for each age\)](#)

[The 3 Big Questions for a Frantic Family, Patrick Lencioni](#)

[A Thomas Jefferson Education, Oliver DeMille](#)

[The Talent Code, Daniel Coyle](#)

[Choice Words, Peter H. Johnston](#)

[The Price of Privilege, Madeline Levine, Ph.D.](#)

[Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius, Angeline Stoll Lillard](#)

[10 Conversations You Need to Have With Your Children, Shmuley Boteach](#)

[An Ethic of Excellence, Ron Berger](#)

[The E-Myth Manager, Michael E. Gerber](#)

[The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got that Way, Amanda Ripley](#)

[Mastery: The Keys to Success And Long-Term Fulfillment, George Leonard](#)

[2002 Ways to Show Your Kids You Love Them, Cyndi Haynes](#)

[Free Range Kids, Lenore Skenazy](#)

[Influencer, Kerry Patterson, et al](#)

[Crucial Conversations, Kerry Patterson, et al](#)

[The Dream Manager, Matthew Kelly](#)



NEXT STEPS

WE'D LOVE TO CONNECT WITH YOU



[EMAIL US](#)



SCHEDULE A VIRTUAL MEETING

[ACTONACADEMYWESTEND.COM](https://www.actonacademywestend.com)