



THE  
**KING'S ACADEMY**  
SOLI DEO GLORIA

Training Leaders in Knowledge, Wisdom, and Godly Character

We're all in this together. This was a beautiful sentiment shared with me last year by the superintendent of one of the school districts we partner with in educating students across Berks and Schuylkill counties. This leader recognized that public schools do not meet the needs of every student, just as nonpublic schools are not equipped to service everyone, either.

My name is Michelle Goodman and I have served as the Head of School at The King's Academy in Mohrsville for 10 years. Prior to that, I worked as a public-school teacher and administrator for over 13 years.

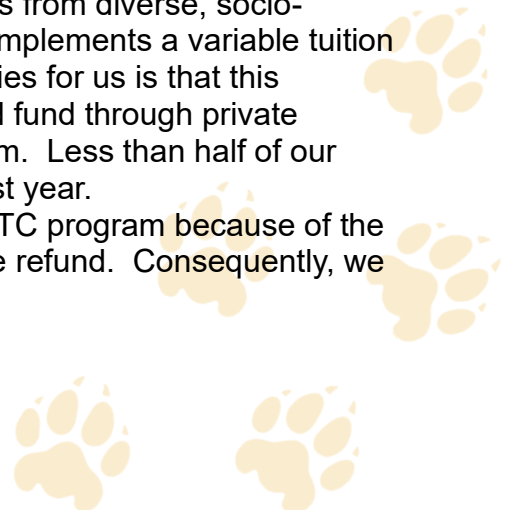
Nonpublic schools offer opportunities that meet certain students' needs better than the public district in which they live. The most significant difference would be smaller class sizes, which give them the ability to meet the emotional and academic needs of each student. We consistently train our teachers to discover the differing needs within the classroom and meet students where they are. Despite the growing academic and social-emotional needs of students, nonpublic schools are meeting more and more student needs, including those with an IEP, while still having to overcome financial limitations.

The King's Academy is a nonpublic, Jr. K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade institution that serves students from over 15 school districts. 5-10% of our population learns through the provisions of an IEP. Close to 20% of our population is nonwhite, including 3 international students. We also welcomed a Ukrainian refugee last year. Out of the 186 students enrolled for the 22-23 school year, 43% received financial assistance, totaling over \$300,000.

Many private schools in the Reading area and its suburbs fall somewhere around our tuition, which is \$8,976 per year. Despite our below-average tuition cost, many parents struggle to pay this amount yearly.

We are committed to serve a broad-based sector of students from diverse, socio-economic backgrounds. Accordingly, The King's Academy implements a variable tuition program which bases tuition on the family's need. The realities for us is that this program is simply a financial discount which we then try and fund through private donors and the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program. Less than half of our financial assistance was funded through outside sources last year.

Unfortunately, we have struggled attracting donors to the EITC program because of the complicated return process and long wait time to receive the refund. Consequently, we





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have had to include the majority of financial discounts in our operating budget, at the expense of staff salaries and program enhancements.

The inability to fund these financial discounts have led to having to turn away the most disadvantaged students in our area. These are typically families from the Reading School District whose hope is to receive a full financial scholarship. I remember Amber, a single mom to Mia and Emma. She needed a full scholarship in order for her girls to attend kindergarten and first grade. Elanie was another single mother whose 11<sup>th</sup> grade daughter was displaced from her charter school when it closed a few years ago. She, too, needed a full scholarship. Another heart-breaking story was a mother and father whose income was a meager \$28,000 per year but they needed an alternative setting for their 11<sup>th</sup> grade daughter. Sadly, we were unable to help any of these families because of our and their limited resources. I could only imagine how these students' experiences and futures would have been different if they had a PASS Scholarship in which to enroll in The King's Academy.

PASS Scholarships would be the first opportunity where we could fully partner with families in underperforming schools. The King's Academy would still provide financial discounts to families who qualify, but the PASS scholarships would now pay the remainder after the financial discount, which has been the ongoing challenge for the most disadvantaged in our underperforming schools.

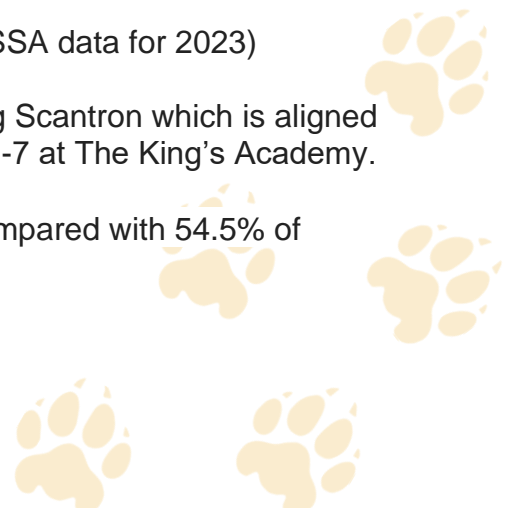
There are those critical of educational scholarships who claim the scholarship program would take away from public schools, which it clearly does not. Others say it is a veiled attempt to send wealthy students to elite private schools which, again, is certainly not the case. As I stated before, this scholarship would allow families in underperforming school districts to attend nonpublic schools, which they would never have been able to afford before.

For years, our school, like many nonpublic schools across the state, has learned to do more with less. Our test scores speak for themselves.

**Testing Data Comparison 2022** (PDE has not released PSSA data for 2023)

TKA administers standardized assessments yearly using Scantron which is aligned to PA state standards. The data below reflects grades 2-7 at The King's Academy.

- 87% of TKA students tested proficient in Reading compared with 54.5% of public-school students.





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- 85% of TKA students tested proficient in Math compared with 34.5% of public-school students.

[Source](#) for PA Data

### AP Exam Data 2022

Approximately 25% of TKA high school students participated in AP classes. This equals 14 students.

- 100% of TKA students earned a 3 or higher compared to 21.6% nationally and 18.7% in PA.

[Source](#) for AP National and PA Data

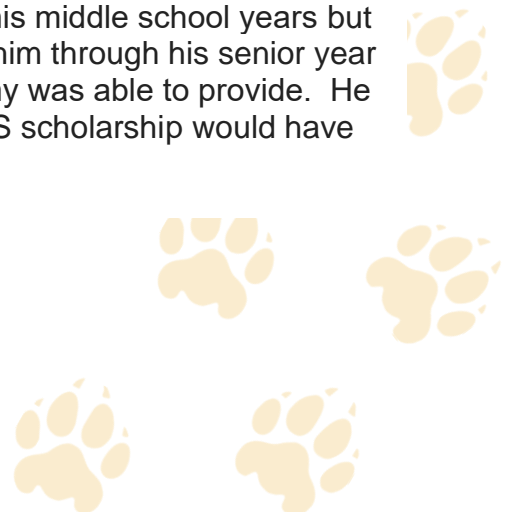
**DIBELS** (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) – a universally recognized assessment from the University of Oregon - <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>) Through the intermediate unit, TKA assess grades K-3

- 68% of TKA students scored at benchmark or above in reading skills beginning of the year
- 78% of TKA students scored at benchmark or above in reading skills end of the year.

Compared to:

- 34% of students nationally in 4<sup>th</sup> grade scored at benchmark in reading in 2022  
Source [NAEP](#) (2022 – No data has been released yet for 2023 but early reports indicate a further decline)

We recently had a young man graduate whose family lives in the city of Reading. Chance's mother recognized his need for a change during his middle school years but by herself, it was impossible. It took a family effort to send him through his senior year despite the significant financial discount The King's Academy was able to provide. He is now set to join our military and serve his country. A PASS scholarship would have helped this family immensely over his academic career.





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In conclusion, I urge you to embrace my initial sentiment that we are all in this together. As a former public-school teacher and administrator, I have seen public education struggle to meet the growing diversity of needs among students since I entered the field in 1994. To persist with an “us vs them” stance while the future leaders of our country pay the price is short-sighted and only continues to perpetuate the problems we face. As we have seen in Florida and other states, robust school-choice options increase success for everyone. Public schools, who are bogged down trying to educate the way we have always educated, are now empowered to implement new and innovative practices they weren’t able to before. Help nonpublic and public schools do what they do best and fund PASS scholarships for those students most at risk.

