

Old Town Academy Board of Directors Application

Spring 2018 Election

Matt Johnson

1) Why do I want to serve on the OTA Board of Directors? Please Provide a brief statement of interest.

By 2019-20 school year, I will have 2 boys at OTA. I was extremely fortunate to be raised by parents who were committed to instilling the importance of taking formal education seriously at all levels of learning. It is important to me to continue this legacy with my boys. My father committed 15 years to being on the Edina School Board, while my sister and I were in the Edina public schools, and I never questioned his commitment or passion to education as I grew up. He talked the talk, and backed it by giving of himself to help make decisions for not just the good of us, but for all of the public-school students in our city. I want to follow this lead, set an example for my boys in a way that benefits the community at OTA. I think the OTA Board of Directors is the best way I can do this.

2) Please identify skills and experiences that I could bring to the OTA Board of Directors.

Education: Edina (MN) public schools DePauw University BA. English/Sociology Double Major
Marketing/PR/Fundraising: 25 years in Sales, Marketing and Management.
Strategic Planning

I guess what I like is that I know a bit about Accounting, Legal (father lawyer), Facilities, Health and Safety (married to nurse), Leadership, IT, Science and Music to be helpful in all areas. My brother in law is a college professor, has his doctorate, is published and has been very involved in many educational reform theories and businesses. My sister has her masters in teaching. My mother-in-law was a teacher. I have considered myself kind of a jack of all trades, master of none.

3) What is my educational vision for OTA?

My reply to this would probably be considering a non-answer. I don't feel I need to be the educational visionary. We have had many legacy parents who were the visionaries, and have put an exceptional charter, as well as facility, faculty, staff and resources in place to create OTA. I feel as a Board member, it is my responsibility to promote and uphold their vision, which clearly to me is to offer an exceptional and well-rounded educational experience for San Diego K-8 students, similar to that of the best private schools, in a public-school setting. The charter is the vision and my vision would be to support and honor it that by staying true to the legacy and fundamentals as outlined within, while undoubtedly facing cultural and technological changes that potentially could not have been imagined when it was drafted.

4) What are my priorities for OTA over the next 1-3 years?

Communication. This is a problem on all levels at Old Town Academy. This is directly related to our technology, external website, and lack of an app for parents to easily use. An initiative was started through the Foundation for an overhaul but may or may not have “stalled” due to a change in parent status. This is not something that should be in the hands of The Foundation to do anything more than potentially raise money to help pay for. A strategically informed parent population is key to the success of a school of our size, and unfortunately “younger” parents have expectations with regards to this happening via technology that has not existed to this point at OTA. The more “non-founding” or “legacy” parents we have move on, the more disjointed we become by missing the fact that as older parents, how we feel a part of something, is different than the next generation. I can extremely easily point to the example when I brought to the website committee, and Mark, that we could really use an app, they said totally unnecessary for a school of our size and too much of a hassle. This is just simply incorrect. Like clients in my business, parents get 100-200 emails a day, and we are lucky if they even read the subject line. Backpack and sandwich boards are great, but as soon as the driver of the car gets home, if they can’t quickly figure out what to do, they move on to facebook, or are distracted and don’t come back to it. Hearst, in La Mesa, has an app and the most involved parent group I have seen in some time. A quick reference, and calendar merge feature have all parents, not just savvy parents, in unison on the needs of the day for their school. I would go as far to say this is not an optional thing. To appeal to millennial parents and their need for inclusion through non-conformity, we need to use the preferred method on their end, not expect them to accept how we do things because they are lucky to have won the lottery. This sense of inclusion, on their terms, will grow Osprey pride, which they don’t have instilled from simply being with OTA through the rough years. Turnover and drop out will be less, longevity and pride will be greater. Having a high percentage of active parents needs to be a goal. It’s much bigger than movie night, dances and class lunches. We need to support those endeavors and create the culture we want, and the initiatives we need, through an intense commitment to improving communication. Everything below is reliant upon this necessity. Frankly we should spend nothing to on our physical structure until we spend what we need to bring current our digital structure.

Retaining OTA-educated students past grade 6 has to be a heavy priority. For testing, culture, economics, reputation and legacy. The commitment of parents to K-8 as the OTA Educational Plan, needs to be considered, as well as a vision of more options, specifically charter-type options, post-8th grade communicated even through the younger grades. As opposed to this concept of “I need to get my child on another school’s track”, the mentality needs to be “I would do anything to keep my child at OTA as long as I can”. To do this we need to expand the post-8th grade options and resources available and may need to get in greater partnership and/or influence with like-minded high schools. If we can’t build it ourselves, well, we can infiltrate and influence. Second is funding. The truth is we have been raising \$200-300k the last few years through foundation activities, and the quiet thought is that this is not sustainable, when over 75% of this comes directly from OTA families. In 2 years when the rent goes up, this cannot be our expectation. The start of looking at options for loans to buy the building, and/or, some other building needs to be a priority, and we need to look at ways to improve revenue instead of depending on the same families over and over to come through with donations. Grants should easily account for 50% of what we are taking in, yet, it falls to the Foundation to be in charge of this, which unfortunately does not get prioritized with the myriad of enhancements, and class parties, also being run by the same group. If we are going to work in a world of businessmen, building owners,

loans etc., we are going to have to up our game with educational grants, both public (we can figure out the free lunch situation) and from private parties.

Attendance expectations. I can tell you as a relatively new parent, no one has sat me down at any point and explained the cost to my school of taking my kids out of school for a long weekend in Mammoth. I believe that if we educated our parents about things they can do that cost nothing, we would be able to chart an increase in revenue. A priority would be to educate parents on attendance. Finally, and it sort of goes without saying, to continue the work from the Real Estate committee and help find a way to either buy our current location or find a new space for OTA.

5) Please provide a brief biography, which includes additional information I believe is pertinent to my candidature (such as: Children at OTA or other schools, extracurricular interests, leadership experiences, etc.)

I have entrenched myself into learning everything I can about all facets of OTA for the past 14 months. I have a unique understanding of preserving Legacy and charter principles, while knowing what we need to do to increase volunteerism and parental “osprey pride” through communication and technology. My family means everything to me, education is a passion and has been a passion of mine my whole life. Giving, financially and through volunteerism, is part of my character. I could (and have a few drafts of this answer to prove it) talk or write about OTA and opportunity indefinitely. I have the pedigree, passion and commitment to confidently know in a variety of capacities I will always be a force for good at OTA. If the Board vacancy is where I can or should help, then I will be there. If legacy thinks I can do more and help more through sticking with the Foundation, I will do that. Right now, I feel legacy parents and founding families need to know the Board of Directors will fall into caring, competent hands, and know undoubtedly my seat at the table would give them that piece of mind.