



AUTISM MODEL SCHOOL

2020-2021 Annual Report



AUTISM MODEL SCHOOL

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amstoledo.org

PURPOSE

THE MISSION

The school, in **partnership** with parents and the community, will provide a **nurturing environment**, and develop the **full potential** of differently-abled students within the Autistic Spectrum Disorders using a multidisciplinary approach addressing **individual needs**.

CORE VALUES

We Believe...	
The only appropriate education is an effective education .	If the child cannot learn by the way that we teach, then we must teach in a way the child can learn.
Parental involvement and participation is crucial in a child's development.	Behavior in any form, is communication .
A working relationship between school & home is critical to the success of a child's education.	Everyone belongs.
Educational programs should be held accountable to produce outcomes that are socially valuable, functional, and acceptable.	

(BRIEF) HISTORY

The Autism Model School was established in 1998 as one of the first charter schools in Ohio through the state's **Community School Pilot Program**. The school's founders—all parents of children with autism—struggled to find appropriate educational placements in traditional public school settings.

By forming their own program they sought to provide effective, evidence-based instruction in a supportive learning environment. The school opened with 26 students—today, over 100 students are enrolled at AMS and there is a waiting list of over 50.

FUN FACT

The school's graph logo contains a hidden nod to the **initials** of a very important person in our organization's history. **Can you see it?**



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

LOOKING BACK: YEAR IN REVIEW

A snow shower in the middle of April tugged down newly blossomed branches across Toledo. Something unexpected that seemed to fit an unusual year.



The Autism Model School’s “new year” kicked off just before Independence Day, while most districts in Ohio were still on break and sifting through ever-changing health guidelines to decide if students would return to buildings in the fall.

AMS began the summer offering virtual only learning, with each student having a remote learning plan that addressed their unique goals.

After two weeks of preparations—which included training staff on new health and safety protocols—students returned for in-person learning on Tuesday, October, 6th, 2020. The hybrid schedule provided two days of in-person learning per week combined with two days of remote instruction.

However, high community spread of COVID-19 resulted in a move to virtual only learning on Friday, October 15th, 2020. This change would stay in place for over five months, as Lucas County’s health status

remained in the “red,” indicating a high number of cases.

March of 2021 saw improvements to the health situation and another return to in-person learning on a hybrid schedule—a format held in place through the rest of the year.

The entire AMS family showed tremendous flexibility and resiliency through these ups and downs and rapidly changing circumstances. One example is the Aut-To-Be Enriched Facebook group.



Hosted by friend of the school and animal expert, Lara Joseph, this weekly livestream provided engaging content for students and families during the height of virtual only learning, as they got to go behind-the-scenes with giraffes, owls, bears, eagles, wolves and more!

This year proved that no matter the external circumstances, the Autism Model School team is ready and willing to adapt and change to meet the needs of the individuals in our care. ■

A NEW ADVENTURE BEGINS

The next bold adventure has begun for Mary Walters, who completed her last day of work at the Autism Model School on Wednesday, June 30th, 2021. In addition to serving as director for more than two decades, Mary is also one of nine founding members of the school.



Launched in the late 90s, Multiple Options for Development and Educational Learning (MODEL, as it was known at the time) grew from a handful of students meeting in an old office building to more than 100 students, 18 classrooms & over 50 instructional staff.

The focus of Mary and the other founders was to create a caring place for students to receive a personalized, evidence-based education. The fruits of Mary's tireless efforts are evident in the school's waiting list, which has topped 50 individuals for most of the program's history.

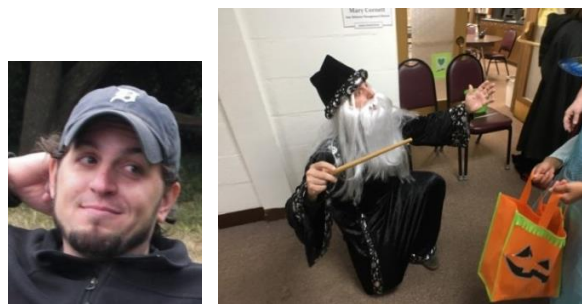


Mary captured some of her feelings upon retirement in a letter sent home to families. "Because the school is in such terrific hands, I am particularly comfortable and happy with the transition taking place."

She thanked and acknowledged the entire school community. "It has been my pleasure to work with all the students and families over the years to build and develop such a wonderful resource serving all our children."

Joel Vidovic is the school's new director. His background in behavior science and passion for providing life-changing programming for all students will build upon Mary's successful leadership.

Mary had this to say about Joel in her letter. "Joel has done an incredible job of overseeing the curriculum and programming, as well as being highly involved in administrative issues...he is more than ready to take over the operations at this time." ■



Content originally shared as a blog post on amstoledo.org

INNOVATION TAKING SHAPE

Clipboards, pens, binders, visual aids and reams of ruffled data sheets—these are the tools of instructors when teaching new skills to students with autism and other developmental disabilities.

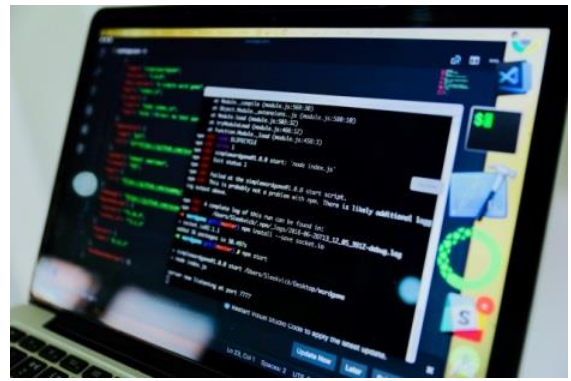
But does it have to be this way?

The Autism Model School’s simple response to this question is, “No, it does not because there is a *better* way to do this!”



Designing a software solution that could eliminate paperwork, speed up the learning process and offer powerful data reporting features has been a top priority of school leadership.

In 2019 this objective became a living project after the school received a \$450,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Education. These funds enabled the school to partner with WTA Consulting—a Toledo-based IT firm—and begin developing a customized training software platform with wide-ranging capabilities.



Hitting the fast forward button—which skips us over countless meetings, brainstorm sessions, steps forward, steps back, tweaks and so much more—brings us to the present moment...a working proto-type.

This “e-learning” program has several powerful features that will accelerate student learning and provide teachers with data at every step of the way.

Students and staff at AMS are getting a first glimpse at the proto-type which is being used on a limited basis.

While the school is thrilled with progress made, there is a clear understanding of next steps—such as continuing to work out bugs in the software, rolling out the proto-type to more students, connecting with local and regional partners to serve as pilot sites, and securing additional development funding.



As the familiar song goes, “The best is yet to come!” ■

WHAT AN ENDING

The school year had drawn to a close and the 2021-2022 campaign was just getting started. Then *it* happened.

It referring to something that had been in the works for a significant amount of time. *It* wasn't just one thing, but many things. Many people, actually, whose courage to try a new approach made *it* a reality.

On July 14th, 2021, the *Behaviors Analysis in Practice* research journal published the "story of how a public charter school serving students with autism adopted Direct Instruction as their primary form of instruction."

This is the Autism Model School's story of "students demonstrating greatly accelerated rates of learning for their age"!

 SpringerLink

Research Article | Published: 14 July 2021

Adventures in Direct Instruction Implementation: The Devil Is in the Details

[Joel L. Vidovic](#)  [Mary C. Cornell](#), [Sarah E. Frampton](#) & [M. Alice Shillingsburg](#)

Behavior Analysis in Practice (2021) | [Cite this article](#)

75 Accesses | 9 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

The authors of the article include familiar names to the AMS family—Joel Vidovic (Director) and Mary Cornell (Director of Education)—along with researchers from the May Institute—Sarah E. Frampton and M. Alice Shillingsburg.

In a recent staff meeting, Joel Vidovic praised the entire team of paraprofessionals and teachers and clinical team members for their foundational role in making the school's Direct Instruction program a success.



Putting in place a radically different approach to student learning—teachers reading from scripts, students answering out loud and all at the same time!—was not without speed bumps. Valid concerns were brought to light by key stakeholders—teachers, board members, parents and students.

One of the school's guiding values kept everyone rowing in the same direction:

"We believe educational programs should be held accountable to produce outcomes that are socially valuable, functional, and acceptable."

Ultimately, the powerful results for students made the school's change to Direct Instruction a road worth traveling. ■

See the "Student Outcomes" section of this report for data presented in the article.

PEOPLE

STUDENTS

All students who attended the school were age 5 to 22 and residents of Ohio. Average enrollment for the year was **102 students**. All students were on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and nearly all were residents of Lucas County.

Here are some additional student details: **79%** were males (note: males are 4-5x more likely to receive an autism diagnosis than females); **41%** were of a minority ethnic background; **68%** were economically disadvantaged as measured by free/reduced priced lunch qualification.

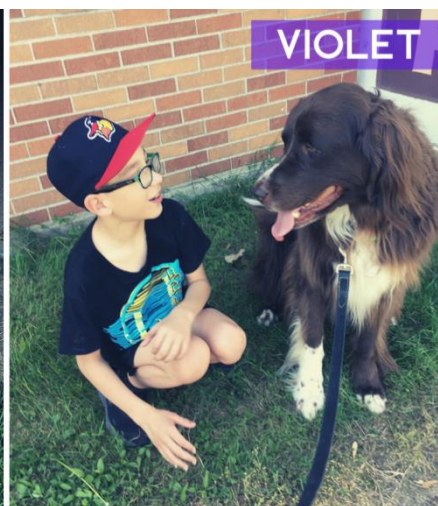
STAFF

The school employed a **dedicated team** of professionals to meet the individual needs of students in our care. For 2020-2021 this included **18** intervention specialists (“special education teachers”), **40+** paraprofessional aides, **10+** administrators—including a transportation director, licensed speech and occupational therapists and board certified behavior analysts.

Joel Vidovic is the school’s director. For additional staff details, including contact information, please visit amstoledo.org/about-us/directory

VOLUNTEERS

Due to the pandemic and school policy changes, volunteers were unable to help further our mission for most of the year. As the situation improved in the spring of 2021, however, we were able to welcome back our favorite 4-legged friends, **Ella**, **Diamond** and **Violet** (and their human counterparts, Terry and Linell)!



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Autism Model School's **Board of Directors** consisted of 8 members who met at monthly meetings to discuss organizational issues and vote on policies as needed.

Bruce Weinberg (*President*)

Lisa Marsalek, MA, MLHR (*Vice President*)

Isaac Demarest, MBA, AAMS, CFP (*Treasurer*)

Toni Gerber, MEd

Mark Greenblatt, CLU, ChFC, CASL

Nirav Raj Parikh, JD, BS

Jim Rothschild, JD (*Secretary*)

Linell Weinberg, MSW

Dr. Ed Cancio [*Resigned 4/20/2021*]

PROGRAMS

OUR APPROACH

The school continued its emphasis on providing evidence-based programming—rooted in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)—in a highly supportive environment. Oversight from a supervisory team, a **1-to-2 staff-to-student ratio**, small classrooms (between 5 to 7 students)—these are a few examples of this approach in action.

For more specifics, visit amstoledo.org/about-us/school-philosophy



PROGRAMMING PATHWAYS

The Autism Model School provided a wide range of programs to meet the **diverse needs** of the earliest learners on up to job training and college readiness.

ACADEMICS

For core academic programming—in subjects such as math, reading and writing—the school used **Direct Instruction** (DI) curricula published by McGraw Hill.

DI is a structured approach to teaching that emphasizes carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments. The effectiveness of DI is backed by over **40 years of research**. For outcome data related to the school’s initial implementation of DI, see the “Positive Impact” section of this report.

Additional reading and math curricula included computer-based programs, such as HeadSprout and TeachTown.

ADAPTIVE SKILLS

Adaptive skills continued to be a priority for many students attending the Autism Model School. Examples of **adaptive skill areas** include self-care, social skills, leisure skills and safety.

VOCATIONAL

The school implemented individually-based **vocational programming** for students aged 14 or older. Due to the health crisis, many typical experiences—such as off-site job placements and volunteer opportunities—were postponed.

The school continued to provide job training through the **e-commerce program**, which enabled students to run the behind-the-scenes aspects of an online storefront. Learn more about this exciting program at amstoledo.org/partners

ENRICHMENT

Students expressed their creativity and learned new skills through the school’s **enrichment activities**. These included...

- Art Club (Virtual and In-Person)
- Garden Club
- Aut-To-Be Enriched: Animal Education (Virtual LiveStream)

Unfortunately, the in-person component of the highly popular Dance Till U Shine program had to be put on pause due to the ongoing health crisis and associated school policy changes.

AFTERSCHOOL ASTROS

The **Afterschool Astros** program, which is led by Mary Jo Besase and staffed exclusively with Autism Model School employees, continued to provide quality enrichment opportunities for over 10 students throughout the school year.

The Astros stayed flexible due to the ever-changing health crisis—starting the year virtual, shifting to in-person, returning to virtual, then moving to a 2-day/week format.

Learn more about this exciting program by visiting amstoledo.org/astros



POSITIVE IMPACT

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students from a diverse range of backgrounds made progress towards their individual goals during the 2020-2021 school year. The personalized nature of these results makes them difficult to report on. However, the benefits of the school’s core curriculum—**Direct Instruction** (DI)—were highlighted in a recently published research article.*

The following excerpts from the article show a remarkable growth in reading skills students at AMS made after two years of DI...

“Outcome data suggest that DI reading programs led to improved scores on standardized measures of academic achievement in the area of reading at a **statistically significant level.**”

“Multiple students made progress at rates **beyond what would be expected** for their age, indicated by scores nearing or exceeding the mean for the KTEA-II Brief Form [*standardized reading test*] after DI intervention.”

“[*The following table*] further explores **the changes** observed in reading Growth Scale Value (GSV) scores between initial assessment and post-intervention [*i.e. after two years of DI*]...”

Table 1 KTEA-II Brief Form GSV Scores—Participant Makeup

	Initial Assessment	Post-intervention	Change
Scores at or above Mean	6	9	+3
Scores within 1 SD of Mean	12	20	+8
Scores below 1 SD of Mean	49	38	-11
Total	67	67	

“These data [from Table 1] indicate that at least 11 of the participants experienced changes in reading GSV scores between initial assessments and post-intervention, which may indicate **higher than expected rates of learning**.”

* Vidovic, J.L., Cornell, M.C., Frampton, S.E. et al. *Adventures in Direct Instruction Implementation: The Devil Is in the Details*. *Behav Analysis Practice* (2021).

COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

The students at Autism Model School aren’t the only ones who grew and learned this past year. Autism Model School invested in several specific opportunities for our faculty to advance their instructional skills. Multiple teachers and school administrators attended trainings from the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) to improve their ability to deliver DI lessons remotely. Indeed, **remote instruction** was a necessity for much of our year.

Other teachers attended a series of workshops and trainings provided by Teach Town, an online curriculum that the school utilizes. This year, Autism Model School brought **Teach Town’s Transition Program** on board as a new tool for students to access. The training allowed teachers to become familiar with the scope and sequence of the curriculum, methods for assigning new activities to students, and the variety of reporting features within the program. This new tool looks to be an exceptional addition to AMS’ robust programming for students.

Meanwhile, those faculty members who serve students who have difficulty accessing academically oriented instruction due to behavioral barriers attended a 10-hour workshop to learn how to implement the **Practical Functional Assessment and Skill-based Treatment model** that has been developed and empirically validated by Dr. Greg Hanley, his graduate students at Western New England College, and members of his consulting team at FTF Behavioral Consulting.



Since attending Dr. Hanley’s workshop, faculty at Autism Model School have an increased focus on identifying and building relationships and individually tailored learning environments that result in each student feeling “**happy, relaxed, and engaged**” (HRE) while attending school. Once HRE for each student has been identified, a focus shifts to building important life skills including communication, delay and denial toleration, and subsequent participation in academic, vocational, and leisure activities.

From the website of FTF Behavioral Consulting:

“Peer-reviewed research has shown IISCAs to be a quick, safe, and reliable means to understand enough about why problem behavior is occurring to design individualized treatments capable of eliminating problem behavior while **promoting essential skills** such as functional communication, delay and denial toleration, and contextually appropriate behaviors (e.g., accuracy with academics, vocational skills, independent leisure activity).”

STATE REPORT CARD (STATEWIDE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS)

The Report Card for the Autism Model School was released on October 14th, 2021. The received an **overall grade of NR** (“Not Reported”). Component grades were as follows:

- Achievement – **NR**
- Progress – **NR**
- Gap Closing – **NR**
- Graduation Rate - **NR**
- Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers – **NR**
- Prepared for Success – **NR**

To view the State of Ohio’s most recent report card for the Autism Model School, please visit reportcard.education.ohio.gov and type “Autism Model School” in the search bar.

PARENT SURVEY

The school asks parents a series of questions near the end of each year. The responses for 2020-2021 are presented below. Around **35% of parents** completed the survey.

1- The school tries to bring out the best in each child.

Strongly Agree: 47%
Agree: 47%
Unsure: 6%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

2- Progressive and effective teaching methods are used.

Strongly Agree: 33%
Agree: 61%
Unsure: 6%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

3- Students have easy access to technology.

Strongly Agree: 39%
Agree: 53%
Unsure: 8%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

4- Incidents of bullying are noticed and dealt with.

Strongly Agree: 14%
Agree: 36%
Unsure: 50%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

5- School reports give clear feedback about progress.

Strongly Agree: 47%
Agree: 47%
Unsure: 6%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

6- Does your child like going to school each day?

Strongly Agree: 55%
Agree: 28%

Unsure: 0%
Disagree: 11%
Strongly Disagree: 6%

7- The school helps my child deal with anxious emotions.

Strongly Agree: 28%
Agree: 55%
Unsure: 17%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

8- I would recommend Autism Model School to others.

Strongly Agree: 64%
Agree: 25%
Unsure: 8%
Disagree: 3%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

9- School staff members know and appreciate my child's qualities.

Strongly Agree: 53%
Agree: 44%
Unsure: 3%
Disagree: 0%
Strongly Disagree: 0%

10- What words/phrases would you use to describe the school to others?

There were a total of **34 comments** left in this section—**97%** of comments were positive or mostly positive. Here is a sampling of comments...

"Very professional and really tries to work with kids based on their individual needs."

"My child has succeeded and came a long way since starting at AMS."

"Helpful and Caring and Nurturing."

"Great school with awesome teaching staff! Easy to communicate with teachers about any concerns. Trustworthy."

"Passionate, dedicated, friendly, helpful."

MORE ABOUT AMS

SPECIAL EVENTS

The **Class of 2021** was celebrated at a drive-thru graduation ceremony on the evening of Thursday, June 3rd, 2021. There were a total **5 students** in the class.



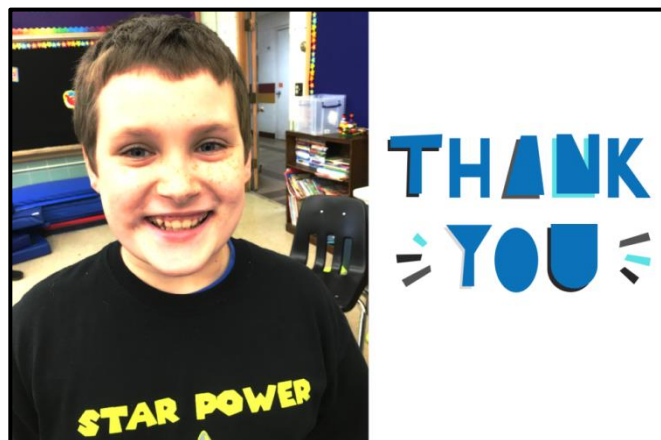
STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

The lives of students and staff members were **made brighter** thanks to financial gifts from individual donors, local businesses and grant-making foundations.

Individual donors gave more than **\$4,000** throughout the year—many supporters asked for donations on their birthdays through Facebook. Others gave through workplace giving programs or to honor a loved one.

The school received grants from a broad range of organizations and foundations. Grants totaled over **\$25,000** and came from many sources, including Walmart Giving, Ohio Department of Education and the Greater Toledo Community Foundation.

The Autism Model School's mission is enhanced and furthered thanks to **the generosity** of our stakeholders.



OUR SPONSOR

The **Educational Service Center of Lake Erie West** (ESCLEW) served as sponsor for Autism Model School during the 2020-2021 school year.

ESCLEW monitored the school's academic and fiscal performance, as well as organization and operation of the school, and determined that the school was **overall compliant**.



The Autism Model School worked towards meeting **Performance Accountability Framework goals** (Contract Attachment 11.6) during the 2020-2021 school year. Per Ohio law, the 2020-2021 School Report Card did not have overall grades or ratings (see “State Report Card” section). Therefore, we are unable to determine if we have met our contractual goals.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

The school operated on a year-round schedule with four short breaks throughout the year. The calendar included **206 days** with two dates scheduled for parent-teacher conferences. In-person school days were 6-hours in length.

A virtual-only learning format was in place at the onset of the school year (July 1st, 2021). Apart from a brief return to in-person classes in October, **remote learning** continued into mid-March, 2021. At that time, students returned for in-person learning 2 days per week combined with virtual instruction (i.e. “hybrid format”).

FISCAL SPONSOR AND FINANCIALS

The fiscal sponsor of the Autism Model School is **Massa Financials Solutions, LLC**.

On May 6th, 2021, the Ohio Auditor of State released a Financial Audit for the Autism Model School—the report period was 7/01/2019 to 6/30/2020. To view the document, visit **ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Search.aspx** and type “Autism Model School” in the *Entity Name* box.

The following **financial snapshot** is taken from the minutes from the Autism Model School’s 2021 July board meeting.

Autism Model School	
Statement of Net Position	
<i>June 30th, 2021</i>	
Current Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	595,968
Accounts Receivable – Grants	165,799
Other Current Assets	12,556
Capital Assets	
Capital Assets – Net	166,704
TOTAL ASSETS	941,027
Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	75,698
Accrued Expenses	(90,179)
Intergovernmental Payable	6,881
Withholdings Payable	11,084
Loan Payable – Vans	39,339
Loan Payable –Signature	74,415
TOTAL LIABILITIES	117,238
Net Position	
Net Position – Operating	823,789
TOTAL NET POSITION	823,789
TOTAL LIABILITIES and NET POSITION	941,027

GET INVOLVED

If you’d like to learn more about the Autism Model School, please contact us by calling **419.897.4400** or by emailing **autismmodelschool@amstoledo.org**.

The school is a registered 501c3 nonprofit in the state of Ohio (tax ID no. 31-1606800) and holds a GuideStar Silver Transparency rating for 2021 (guidestar.org).

Be a part of providing life-changing education for a student at AMS through a tax-deductible gift by visiting **amstoledo.org/give**