



# RIVERTREE ACADEMY

LEARN WELL • LOVE WELL • WORK WELL • LEAD WELL

## A Year to Change History

*By Randy Brown, M.D.  
Chairman of the Board*

Some years go by without much notice, while others are marked as moments when history shifted. The birth of Christ shifted our calendar forever. The voyage of Columbus in 1492 is probably the only date in that entire century that most of us are familiar with. I doubt this year will be known across the world, but I can tell you that for 46 children in Como this year changed history. It changed the history of their families, too.

I wish you all could have been at our kindergarten graduation. Our children stole the show as they shared highlights of what they learned this year with a packed crowd of friends and family in a historic Como church. They shared what they had learned academically, and they shared what they had learned about leadership and character. Everyone in the room felt the significance of what was happening. A generation of leaders was beginning to stretch their wings, preparing to fly.



My daughter Piper was in that kindergarten class (pictured above). She was the first person ever to graduate from Rivertree Academy. I anticipate the day when she will sit with her classmates again wearing a cap and gown, celebrating the completion of a high school education and preparing to launch into the world.

I have already watched my oldest daughter cross that graduation stage, so I know how quickly the years will go by. It won't be long before our Rivertree students are leading their communities, and I believe because of what God started this year, they will lead well.

Thank you for believing in our children. Thank you for praying, for giving, for serving, and for sharing the story of what God is doing in this place. We really are changing history.

## Rivertree Review

JUNE 2016

### ABOUT RIVERTREE



Rivertree Academy is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit ministry incorporated to serve the Como community by providing children with a comprehensive, Christ-centered, excellent PreK-12th grade education that will equip them to live a life of leadership and service.

### MISSION STATEMENT

Educating students in Como to live life well: following Jesus, thriving academically, and transforming their communities.

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OUR FIRST YEAR AT

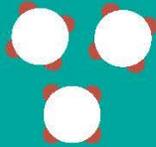
# RIVERTREE ACADEMY

# 46

STUDENTS



## PK4 ▶ 2<sup>ND</sup>/3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE



## AVERAGE CLASS SIZE: 12 STUDENTS

WE WILL BE GROWING TO SERVE **72** STUDENTS NEXT YEAR!

### ★ ACADEMIC GAINS



GAINED AVERAGE 1.6 GRADE LEVELS IN READING



BIGGEST IMPROVEMENT IN READING: 2.8 GRADE LEVELS!



GAINED AVERAGE 0.6 GRADE LEVELS IN MATH IN 1 SEMESTER



BIGGEST IMPROVEMENT IN MATH: 2 GRADE LEVELS IN 1 SEMESTER!

# 40

OF OUR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS RE-ENROLLED FOR NEXT YEAR!

### OUR FAMILIES LOVE RIVERTREE!

PARENT FEEDBACK FROM THIS YEAR...



*The Bible lessons are having such an impact.*



*My son comes home praising, talking about the Bible...*



*I know your hearts in dealing with the kids.*



*Here, it's not just about seeing it and hearing it, it's about touching, interacting, opening doors to experiences.*



*My boys have never had a father figure before, and they have that here.*

### WE LOVE OUR VOLUNTEERS!

OF COURSE WE COULD NOT DO ANY OF THIS WITHOUT OUR AWESOME VOLUNTEERS! WE KNOW OUR STUDENTS ARE INCREDIBLY BRIGHT AND TALENTED. BUT DON'T JUST TAKE OUR WORD...

# 75%

OF VOLUNTEERS ON A RECENT SURVEY SAID THEIR FAVORITE PART OF RIVERTREE WAS...

## THE STUDENTS!

### ★ OTHER HONORABLE MENTIONS



THE MISSION



THE COMMUNITY OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS



THE ATMOSPHERE



*The way the children learned how to express kindness, gain self-confidence in learning new things and learning self-control.*



*Every time I leave the campus, I have such a feeling of joy, and look forward to the next time."*



*They taught me a lot this year!*

NONE OF THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF EACH OF YOU.

*Thank you!!!*

# Blessings Beyond Measure

By Terrence Butler, Executive Director

Greetings! I can't believe I'm writing our supporters and friends, reporting that we have finished our inaugural school year! Highlights are too numerous to name, but I will attempt to name a few. For starters, 46 of the most beautiful, intelligent, curious, full of life, and energetic children you could ever have the pleasure of serving. We have wonderful, dedicated parents who are willing to learn and grow, and, of course, our amazing volunteers! Did I mention our amazing volunteers? If it had not been for them, we wouldn't have had such a successful year. And last, but not least, our faithful donors, partners, and a staff, that only the Lord could have put together, truly a "dream team!"

We are growing our student body by 36% next year, adding 24 new students for a total of 72 students at Rivertree as we add 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We currently have waiting lists in most grades and two spots available in Kindergarten. We have outgrown our current space, and while our original plan was to build a modular building directly behind the school, we learned after several weeks of meeting with our Building Planning Committee that the property there didn't have enough room. But the Lord had a solution, and we will be entering a partnership with Lake Como Church of Christ, led by the under-shepherd Pastor Bryan Moss. Brother Moss and his congregation are gracious to share space with us. We will be doing some renovation to serve both the needs of LCCC and Rivertree. This is a great partnership for the Lake Como community. I am also excited about the amount of people from the Como community who want to volunteer at Rivertree this year.

The Lord has shown Himself faithful this year at Rivertree, and all I have mentioned would not be possible without Him. Please join us in prayer as we continually lay Rivertree at the feet of the Lord. Pray for our incredible God-fearing board, administration, faculty, staff, volunteers, supporters, Como community, families, and children. Pray for what He is doing and going to do in our lives, as we are all part of the mission of Rivertree Academy!



Lastly, I had the pleasure this summer to witness God at work in one of our student's hearts, Jaydon. We were leaving a restaurant, when Jaydon rushed to open the door, because he saw a group of elderly ladies in front of him. They told him thank you, and gave him a warm smile, and he said, "You're welcome; I love you!" They were really surprised and laughed and said, "We love you too!" That sums up what Jesus is doing at Rivertree: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) May the Lord richly bless you is our prayer.



VOLUNTEERS



COMMUNITY



DONORS

None of this would be possible without your support! We are so grateful for the generous love, support, resources and prayer showered upon Rivertree.

## Our K-W-L Chart

By Marilyn Dardenne, Ed. D., Head of School



Planting seeds during Farm Camp

One of the tools in a teacher's belt is a K-W-L chart. To actively engage students in a lesson, we have them make a simple chart and write down what they Know about a topic, what they Want to know, and then to summarize, they write what they Learned. K-W-L makes a fun framework for reflecting on Rivertree's first year as a school and for considering what to carry with us into the future.

What we knew going in is that kids in Como deserved a chance to receive a high quality education, and we knew that no one can truly be educated in the absence of knowing God's redemptive purpose for their lives. We knew we needed tireless, dedicated teachers who would never give up on a kid – or that kid's parents. We knew it would require lots of resources: the time, talents and treasures of many people. We knew there would be opposition, but we also believed that God had planted the vision of Rivertree into the hearts and minds of the people who felt His call to create a safe, nurturing environment in the heart of a tough neighborhood. We knew it wouldn't be easy.

We had lots of questions going in, much that we wanted to know. Would parents take a risk and trust their children's education to us? How would God provide the resources we need to get the job done? Could we trust Him to provide for our every need? Would our plan to utilize volunteers to help teachers meet the individual needs of our students be successful?

For this K-W-L chart, the What we Learned column needs to be big – really big. What we learned is that we *could* create a safe, nurturing environment in which children could thrive academically, emotionally, spiritually, socially, morally, and physically. We learned that with faithful, consistent instruction, our children could make great academic gains, they could learn to resolve conflict peacefully, and they could begin to form a vision for their lives that is full of possibilities, that has the light of God's word illuminating the pathway ahead. We learned that by building relationships with parents, we could gain their trust, and that our parents delight in seeing their children grow and thrive in school. We saw God prove His word over and over. We experienced his grace and his presence daily, and we were overwhelmed by the generosity of you, His people. We learned that when all else fails, love never does.



Mr. Jamaal teaching during Chapel

Early in the year, one of our parents (actually the custodian of a child whose parents were in prison), came up to me and said, "Baby, Rome wasn't built in a day." I am so grateful for those words and for her loving, grateful spirit, which was reflective of the culture at Rivertree during year one. As we wrapped up the year with surveys and feedback meetings, our mission and vision were affirmed, and we received great input that will help keep us focused on our mission: educating children from Como to learn well, love well, work well, and lead well. Thank you for your generous, loving, and faithful support.



# A Week Without Walls

Learning took on a new look the last week of school!



1. 1<sup>st</sup> grade learned about Science cooking in the kitchen
2. Students spent an afternoon in Paris for French class
3. We even took time to stop and smell the flowers!
4. Science was unforgettable for 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> grade when they got to build and ride in a go cart!
5. Rivertree students loved playing with the worms from our compost pile!
6. Fort Worth PD came to Rivertree and taught us about bike safety before holding a Bike Rodeo!

## RIVERTREE STUDENTS: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Beyond making gains in reading, math, science and other core subjects, Rivertree students made incredible gains socially and spiritually this year. Here is what they had to say about their first year.

**Q: What did you learn about how to treat others?**

"If they fall, help them up and have joy and love."

"Be nice and prefer one another."

**Q: What was your favorite part of Rivertree?**

"Everything!"

"To learn and learn about God."

"Dr. Brown, for starting the school."

"When Ms. Emily let us walk on eggs!"

**Q: What did you learn about God?**

"Jesus died on the cross for us...all of us that sin."

"God is the most amazing person. He made this world and He can make all of us joyful and happy. He can give us eternal life."



**As we close out 2015-2016** and head into the 2016-2017 school year, we want to thank the faculty who will forever be a part of the legacy of Rivertree. Every one of our faculty and staff made a big step of faith to come here and lay the groundwork for a brand, new Christian school in Como.



We are adding new faculty and staff members, saying goodbye to a few, and shifting the focus of others. We'd like to share the lineup with you here.

Mrs. Leah Nitcher will be our new fourth and fifth grade teacher. Ms. Leah is a certified reading interventionist and her experience includes teaching in a school similar to Rivertree. She grew up in a private Christian school herself, her father is a teacher, and she is very excited to be joining our faculty. Our new third grade teacher is Ms. Susie Sanders, formerly the academic coordinator at HOPE Farm. Ms. Susie has a newly adopted daughter, Gracie West, who has us all smitten. Ms. Susie brings to our school a wealth of experience and creativity to Rivertree.

We are delighted to tell you that Ms. Michelle Walker, who joined us as a long term sub last April, will return as our second grade teacher. Ms. Walker has over 14 years of experience, and her calm, godly presence brought great peace to our second and third graders in the spring of last year. We also are delighted to tell you that Ms. Emily Ryan will return as our first grade teacher. Ms. Emily will also serve as our Dean of Instruction, helping to onboard our teachers into our educational philosophy and helping them develop curriculum that will meet the unique needs of each student.

To support Ms. Emily, Ms. Leah, and the diverse needs of our students, Ms. Criss Brown, a retired math teacher who has brought extraordinary knowledge, skill, energy and love to our summer math tutoring, also will join our faculty part time to teach first grade math and fifth grade math.

For Kindergarten and PreK-4, we will add four new staff members. Mrs. Leora Cowart has decided not to return to the classroom this year. We thank Mrs. Cowart for her service; as a result of her time at Rivertree, Mrs. Cowart said that her life was forever changed. She said that she has a greater understanding of God's goodness and grace for all of His children. She said that teaching Kindergarten was difficult at times, but "incredibly rewarding without measure," and taught her that "God will and can guide, teach, and provide for our needs in any and all situations." For the upcoming year, the Lord has brought us Mrs. Chiméne Mergens, who has deep knowledge and experience with early learning and Kindergarten. Mrs. Mergens has a master's of education in Curriculum and Instruction, is a reading interventionist, has served as a teacher of teachers for developing support plans for students and designed early learning curriculum for school districts.

Ms. Rachel Hawthorne also has decided not to return to Rivertree, and we want to thank her for the creativity and enthusiasm she brought to our school. We will all miss Ms. Rach! New in PreK-4 is Ms. Sarah Aitken. Ms. Sarah has most recently taught at Morningside, and prior to that she has taught in international schools and has ministered and worked all over the world.

Ms. Sarah brings Reggio Emilia experience and training to our school, so we can look for a continued focus on creative thinking coupled with mastery of written and creative expression. To help her in that area, Ms. Andrea Sanders will join us as an Early Learning Instructional Assistant. Ms. Sanders is CDA certified and has been teaching in PreK programs for over 20 years. She brings deep early learning experience and cultural understandings with her. In addition, Ms. Gail Newsome, who has been volunteering with us, will join us in early learning as a liaison to parents and volunteers.

Mrs. Sharon Hawthorne, who taught art and Spanish for us last year, will now be full time on the farm to assist her husband, Homer. Ms. Starla Brown will join us as Spanish teacher and will use her experience as a case manager and parent educator to come alongside us with strategies for equipping and empowering our Rivertree parents as they become increasingly involved in their children's education. For the arts, Mrs. Sarah Olson and Ms. Jaime Gilbert will coordinate our Extended Day program, now called REAP, as it emphasizes Theater, Visual Arts, Dance, and Academic Supports. Mr. Darren will return to teach Music enrichment, and at this time we are looking for a part-time Choir director who is skilled in Black Gospel style music.

We are very grateful to have Mrs. Teri Winton and Mrs. Andrea Brock returning for administrative support. Mr. Jamaal Johnson's title shifts to Counselor. In his place teaching PE will be Ms. Alaine Capper. Ms. Alaine will also help us with meal service coordination, small group volunteer coordination, and as an aide in the classroom. Mrs. Raney Chambers will continue as our volunteer Volunteer Coordinator. We are all busy planning for what promises to be an exciting and joyful second year of operation as a school.

*-Marilyn Dardenne, Ed.D.,  
Head of School*

# SUMMER AT



## RIVERTREE ACADEMY

— MALACHI'S FARM —



A lesson on blackberries from Mr. Jarob

The first week of summer started with a week of Farm Camp at Malachi's Farm. This week was an exciting week with our farm staff sharing some fun times with Rivertree students. Our Farm staff showed off our 244 free range laying flock, gave hands on lessons on poultry production, gave hayride tours of the farm and taught us how to pick some of our first blackberries from our orchard.



Learn'n'Ride around the Farm!



Picking blackberries!



A lesson in poultry from Mr. Homer



Watching the hens in their eggmobile



The Farm is proud to introduce two new part time employees, Gary and Desmond Dickson. They will be working with us at the Farm for 4 weeks this summer.

## EGG-CITING NEWS!

Rivertree will begin selling free range, hormone free eggs in August!



After 5 months of raising our 244 Rhode Island hens from baby chicks, it is now time for them to begin laying.



We gather our eggs each day from our free range flock that grazes on fresh grass, plus a protein grain ration that has no meds and no hormones.

Contact [homer@rivertreeacademy.org](mailto:homer@rivertreeacademy.org) if you are interested in reserving your eggs today! Look for more details soon.

# Parent University

By Jamaal Johnson, Counselor

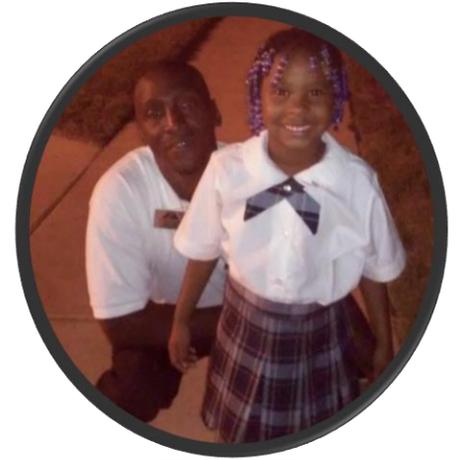
To know a person's story can remarkably impact how you view that person. A person's story can also significantly impact you on a personal level. As believers in Christ, we should know this better than anyone. Jesus's story and life should vastly change our view of ourselves, others, and the world. Parent University has done just that for me.

On May 19th, we began an 8-week course for our parents that meets for 90 minutes each Thursday evening to teach and discuss 40 developmental assets that parents can intentionally develop in their children.

The curriculum, Raising Highly Capable Kids, is sponsored by Focus on the Family and is based on over 50 years of research pointing to character traits and habits that can lead students to make healthier choices and result in academic success. The class format emphasizes open discussion and

answering questions such as, "What kind of parent are you?" and "What kind of parent do you want to be?" As we develop programs that reach and minister to the whole child, we know that it is vitally important to equip and empower the family as a whole. Parent University is proving to be a program that engages our students' caregivers in ways that are relevant to their lives.

The class has been a time of exploring new ways of thinking, confession, healing, tears, laughter, and prayer. We have been exploring and looking deep into how we parent, and why we parent the way we do. We hoped that Parent University would be a community builder and it has been; the classes have become a touch point for staff and families to gain a greater connection and for parents to encourage one another and develop a healthy support system. The course has provided us with the



opportunity to grow in relationship with our parents on a much deeper level, allowing our ministry to reach the hearts of our parents, all of whom have their own unique stories.

The current cycle of Parent University ends with graduation on July 15. The course will be offered in the fall and spring of each year, and we will continue to make it available to parents as they are able to commit, to adjust their schedules, and as we enroll new families. Please keep us in prayer as we continue to facilitate and engage in conversations that are important and often heavy. Pray that the Lord will continue to stir up our affections for Him.

**SAVE THE DATE**

*Dinner under the stars* **10.04.16**  
at THE HEART OF THE RANCH AT CLEARFORK

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES at [RIVERTREEACADEMY.ORG/EVENTS](http://RIVERTREEACADEMY.ORG/EVENTS)

*Olivia & Jeff Kearney and Paige & Graham Pate, Event Chairs*



## RIVERTREE ACADEMY

### Student Creed

I am a student at Rivertree Academy  
 God's grace is at work in me  
 I am a child of the living God,  
 Deeply loved, totally accepted, and completely forgiven.  
 I am called to care for all of God's creation  
 Therefore, I will learn well, love well, work well and lead well.

**Rivertree Review**

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