



ExplorerWest
Middle School



LEAD. **EXPLORE.** DISCOVER.

Annual Report
2015 • 2016

Table of Contents

Mission Statement	2
Ninth Year Reflections	3 • 4
Founder Profile	5 • 6
Outdoor Education	7 • 8
Community Service & Sustainability	9 • 10
Arts	11
English	12
Admissions	13
Update from the Board President	14
Fundraising	15 • 16
Financials	17
Farewell to the 8th Grade	18

Cover Photo: February 2016 8th grade Rome, Italy trip

Explorer West Middle School does not discriminate in any admissions, financial aid or hiring on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.



NWAIS
Northwest Association
of Independent Schools
ACCREDITED MEMBER

Mission Statement

ExplorerWest Middle School embraces the energy and enthusiasm of diverse young people on the journey to adulthood by fostering confidence and discovery. Offering the benefits of a small learning community, Explorer West views the complexity of adolescence as a unique window of opportunity to develop the academic, creative, and social skills required for a sustainable future.





Ninth Year Reflections

Evan Hundley Head of School

I can't believe I've been at Explorer West for nine years. When we hit an all-time high in enrollment last year of 101, I did not think in my wildest dreams that we could surpass that. But, I am happy to announce that our enrollment for 2016-2017 will once again be at an all-time high: 110.

Making connections with each and every student continues to be one of my highest priorities each year. Camping with the new 6th graders each fall allows me to instill the core values of the school at the start of the year, and it allows the kids to get to know me. Modeling respect is so important in middle school and the fall camping trip is the ideal time to set the tone for the school's expectations from each student for the next three years.

New Strategic Plan

The board, in collaboration with faculty and parent representatives, is at work on our next strategic plan. Financially, the school is in great shape and I thank the board for their wonderful stewardship over the years. Even though the school has grown, the one thing that continues to remain the same is our commitment to cultivating respect through our core values of personal and community responsibility, integrity, a willingness to help others, confidence, and creativity.

20th Reunion

Twenty years ago, founder Debbe Hirata convinced a host of others to start Explorer West Middle School. The school cannot thank her, Rick Marting, Manvel Schaffler, and the other pioneers for giving middle school kids a chance to grow and develop in our



wonderful school. More than 60 alumni attended the reunion this spring. Many stories were told and Aurora de la Cruz, our music teacher, led everyone in two songs that she wrote for the occasion.

The Rick Marting Endowment: Year Two

The board, faculty, staff and parent community have truly embraced the concept of a financial aid endowment. After only two years, the endowment now stands at over \$750,000. My goal is to always be able to offer a space at Explorer West for deserving families who cannot afford the price of a private school education. Therefore, we will continue to grow the endowment for many years to come so the dream can come true for many more families. We had our first annual fundraising luncheon for the endowment and were honored to have Trish Bostrom, former Wimbledon tennis star and now an attorney in Seattle, be our speaker.

Students Building Community

Nothing gives me more pride than watching our 8th grade students continue the tradition of the Change the World Project. A year ago our students developed a plan for a new park for children with Autism. Other organizations our students became involved with this year included: Stolen Youth, Youth Care, Friends of the Duwamish River, and more. One team of 8th grade students reached out to Cory Potts, an adult in the community who is an advocate for innovative homeless policies. Cory spoke to the entire student body and engaged them in a provocative discussion.

Sustainability

Once again Explorer West students answered the call to enter the Environmental Issues Slam competition sponsored by the Washington State Foundation for the Environment. For the third time in four years, Explorer West came home with a first place award.

The faculty and staff are supportive of our commitment to sustainability issues and to groups in our community that need help. This is what truly makes me proud each year as Head of School. Hats off to Tim Owens, our social studies/history department chair, for incorporating this project into the 8th grade curriculum.

None of this would be possible without donations from the community. Nine foundations generously gave gifts to the school this year and, from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for believing in us.

Our faculty and staff make quite a team and I am so proud of the core values that our students demonstrate on a daily basis, which is why I love being at Explorer West Middle School. **EW**



I am so proud of the core values that our students demonstrate on a daily basis.



Founder Profile: Debbe Hirata



Debbe Hirata founded Explorer West Middle School in 1996. The seed was planted nine months prior to the school's opening and was nurtured by Debbe and a resourceful team of parents and partners.

Mrs. Hirata's journey began when she and her husband began their search for a middle school for their son. Not finding a local, independent school structured on diversity and inclusivity, she sought advice from Educational Consultant Manvel "Schauff" Schauffler and his colleague Harry Finks. Schauffler and Finks were the top two national experts on Middle School Educations within the National Association of Independent Schools.

Manvel Schauffler had over 40 years experience working with Pacific Northwest independent schools. Schauffler loved children, especially middle school children. He understood what they needed to succeed - strong social, academic and psychological competence but saw far too little educational models that supported these critical needs. "Shauff said 'get a few parents together and we'll talk.' The idea was expressed that an independent middle school was needed in West Seattle. And so the journey began," said Mrs. Hirata.

Debbe's passion and dedication were unstoppable. The school's founding goals embraced those expressed by the community:

- Educating the entire child.
- Incorporating diversity and inclusivity in the student body.
- Making tuition affordable.
- Keeping class sizes small.
- Embracing sustainability while developing a loving community.

A volunteer team of attorneys, financial and real estate consultants, curriculum advisors and non-profit experts was assembled. Their acumen, along with community input and support, paved the way of turning an ambitious goal into a life-changing reality.

The development of the curriculum was a cooperative team effort, spearheaded by Schauffler. Along with basic academics - math, science, history - they included outdoor education, Latin, sustainability and a strong emphasis on writing skills and the arts. This "whole child education" concept instills the academic, creative and social skills necessary to prepare students to excel in high school and beyond.

The school opened in 1996 with 14 students, and only half could pay the full tuition. Debbe knew that a truly diverse and inclusive school was impossible without financial aid. Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the William H. Gates Foundation, the first gift was secured. However, an additional \$35,000 was needed to offer financial assistance to the 7 families who could not afford it on their own. Without those funds, the board decided at an emergency meeting, the school could not responsibly open in the coming fall. They recognized that an additional \$35,000 needed to be raised by 1:00pm the following day or it wouldn't open. With a 15 hour deadline, Debbe

single handedly raised the full \$35,000 ensuring the school would open in September, founded on diversity and inclusivity.

Debbe's mother, Margaret Dewar, and her husband, Ken Hirata, were staunch supporters playing vital roles in the school's inception. Ken was one of the founding board members and negotiated the long term lease with High-line School District that led to the school's current location.

Margaret Dewar was a single parent who raised two children in the mid 1950's in Port Angeles, a small, predominantly white community. "Somehow my Mom found a way for us to truly know and be close friends with many people of color including the Native American, Chinese, Japanese, and Nigerian community members. She introduced us to the beauty and strength of a diverse community and taught us it had to be sought out and nurtured," recalls Debbe.

Naming the school Explorer West wasn't too difficult because of the West Seattle location. And exploration is the psychological mindset of a middle school child. They are curious. They observe, examine and evaluate. Explorer West's goal was to become a safe place for young people to have the opportunity to learn and grow. And most of all, explore.

Lighting up at the mention of the school's Rick Marting Endowment, Debbe recalls the first time she met Rick, a founding head and faculty member of Explorer West. "Hiring Rick Marting was the best decision I ever made," said Debbe, "He had the stamina and strength to walk through fire which was critical to the birth of this school."

Explorer West has become a model of what can really happen in a caring, respectful, supportive, educational environment.

There are so many barriers to entry and inclusion in many schools. "Explorer West has become a model of what can really happen in a well-funded, caring, respectful, supportive, educational environment," says Debbe. The Rick Marting Endowment's mission is to guarantee more financial aid so that no child is ever turned away.

Established in 2015, the first funds from the Marting Endowment have already been awarded for the fall of 2016. **EW**

Manvel Schauffler



My 1st Year - Turning over a New Leaf

Matt Kostle

Outdoor Education

Each year as fall comes, the leaves on trees begin to change color and fall to the ground. Then spring comes and new leaves pop out, bright and vibrant, ready to soak in the sunshine in their new world. That is how I feel having joined the Explorer West family this year! Over the last decade I have been working for various big players in the outdoor education field such as Outward Bound, The Student Conservation Association (SCA), Seattle Parks and Recreation, Longleaf Wilderness Medicine and The Boy Scouts of America. Those experiences have provided strong roots of my own and now I am ready to sprout along with Explorer West. While I am just a spry, young leaf here I look forward to vigorously growing this program and adding new elements to the already solid foundation that is the heart and soul of Explorer West. I thank you for your warm welcome and look forward to growing this wonderful program with you.

In the 2015-2016 school year, there were 10 days of school-wide outdoor education for every student with over 20 distinct trip destinations in and around Washington state. Highlights of this year's programs include:

- Our 6th grade students were beneficiaries of the expertise of marine biologists at Port Townsend Marine Science Center for two courses on invertebrate life and the keystone status of plankton life in Puget Sound.
- The 7th grade returned to Eastern Washington in the spring to camp in the canyons of the Cascade Mountains and explored new areas including the Boulder Cave Recreation Area.
- The 8th grade pioneered a new trip by backpacking along Ross Lake in the majestic North Cascades National Park.

- A snowy winter allowed all grades to return to our winter program and experience several days of cross country skiing, snowshoeing, snow shelter building and other snow travel basics.
- Our student population is growing and so are our gear needs. Grant funds provided for the purchase of a 12-passenger van and updates to our Gear Library's backpacks, tents, trekking poles, and snowshoes.

Growing Relationships Connected to the Natural World

One of the concepts that our students learn in the classroom and see in action as they venture out into nature is that everything is connected. That is always at the forefront of what I try to do with this program. I spent this year building relationships with the students and facilitating connections to nature. It always puts a smile on my face when I see a student

experience nature in a new way, whether that is seeing rock formations that they have studied, watching an animal interact with its habitat, or even why snowshoes are important and necessary to distribute their weight across the snow so they do not end up sinking down to their waists!

This year we made another step towards making our program more sustainable by planting our own willow trees here at school to use in the future for making snowshoe frames. These seedlings came from a partnership with the Department of Ecology at King County who allowed us to harvest willow branches from some of their native willow forests. We have been making other connections in the community to enhance our program such as receiving donations of gaiters and gloves for our winter program from YMCA BOLD/GOLD. I know we will continue to grow and build on these relationships and more in the future to provide students with the access to connect to their natural world. **EW**



Personal & Community Responsibility

Tim Owens

Social Studies and Sustainability

Spring Community Outreach

As an annual project, all students and faculty participate in one day of community service. This year, 6th grade students continued our work on clearing invasive species from Seola Park. 7th grade students worked at the Community Orchard of West Seattle and Camp Long. As part of their Change the World project, all 8th grade students reached out to the community by canvassing to promote their projects and enact change. Altogether, 8th grade students gathered 761 signatures through informal petitions. These petitions accompanied letters to elected officials in the hopes of enacting change regarding their chosen issues.



Change the World Project

This project has become a regular culminating institution at Explorer West. Working in groups of three to four students, 8th graders chose a local sustainability issue, researched it, wrote essays on it, planned action, implemented the action, and finally evaluated their impact. The final assignment was presenting their projects in front of their 6th and 7th grade peers and then again in front of a panel of experts. Action included writing elected officials, canvassing and additional community outreach outside of school.

This year's topics included:

- Youth homelessness
- Sex trafficking
- Homelessness and mental health
- Poverty and access to healthy foods
- Teenage pregnancy
- Pollution in Puget Sound
- Orcas in captivity
- Duwamish River pollution.

It continues to be exciting to watch the students meet with local government officials, trustees of foundations, and business leaders. It is extremely satisfying to know that our students are still involved in these worthwhile causes after they graduate from Explorer West. **EW**



Environmental Issues Slam

For the fourth year in a row, Explorer West represented the school well at the Environmental Issues Slam sponsored by the Washington Foundation for the Environment. Middle and high school students had five minutes to convince an audience that their environmental concern is a pressing issue. Presentations come in many forms, from songs and poetry to formal presentations.

Two Explorer West groups presented this year. A 6th grade group focused on pollution in the Duwamish River and an 8th grade group focused on the need for businesses to stop using styrofoam packaging. Our 8th grade group won the People's Choice Award. They were awarded \$750 and donated their proceeds to the Earth Resource Foundation.



Teacher of the Year and Integrated Arts

David Orace Kelly

Drama

This past year, I was honored as Teacher of the Year for the ACT Theatre Young Playwrights Program (YPP). I was recognized for my continued collaboration with the program, helping it to evolve over the last five years. Together we worked to align the YPP program with National Theatre Arts Standards and Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements in Theatre Arts. Putting my recently earned Master of Arts in Teaching to good use, this work demonstrated what I already knew to be the case; that our students are working above grade level in the arts. It is a testament to the exceptionally high standards that Explorer West cultivates in both its students and teachers.

A New Model for Drama

The Drama program at Explorer West takes students on a three-year journey. 6th grade focuses on basic skills of acting and building a character; 7th grade focuses on crafting a play from script to set design; 8th grade features a global view of theatre genres from Shakespeare to the ancient traditions of Japanese Kabuki to the lights of modern theatre on Broadway.

Five years ago we were invited to join the ACT Young Playwrights Program with a guest artist entering our class for the first ten-weeks of school to co-teach 7th grade. Five students' plays have been produced and published at ACT Theatre. This year, we once again shared the program's top honor. I am proud of our dozens of students who have had their plays produced at smaller theaters across Seattle. We use the plays created in this program to produce a one-act festival.



This Year's One-Act Festival

Every student was involved in the nine plays featured at this year's festival. Written by the 7th grade students, the topics ranged from comedic alien encounters to traumatic stories of loss to modern dramas examining race and discrimination in society. Theatre has the capacity to create dialogue and provoke change in our community.

Integrated Arts

Our halls are lined with fine arts projects which make walking to class like being in a gallery. Fine arts pieces and process are showcased in movies at our two Arts Nights. The evening concerts featured instrumental and choral ensembles, full orchestras, and small student music groups. I am very proud of the lasting arts collaborations and community partnerships that Explorer West has built over the years. I am proud to work with this amazing faculty and our highly talented students. **EW**

Preparing Kids to Write at the College Level

Sherman English, EdD

English and Dean of Students

Over the past four years, the English Department has made a concerted effort to strengthen the writing component of its curriculum and to embrace cross discipline connections.

We began 6th grade with a focus on writing a good paragraph and underscored it throughout the year with summaries of assigned reading, production of a collection of student-written poems, and writing letters from and to characters within a novel. We welcomed back the return of our writer-in-residence, Karen Finneyfrock, who is associated with Seattle-based Hugo House, to teach 6th graders the art of writing a short story.

Students also wrote their first full length essay based on the novella *The Pearl*, by John Steinbeck. The overall quality of their work reflected their commitment to mastering the skills presented in their instruction.

The 7th graders honed their writing skills by producing several essays connected to the literature they read and discussed, as well as exploring their creativity by writing poems and short stories. For one of the stories they wrote, they also produced a "story map" connected to the mystery they had penned.

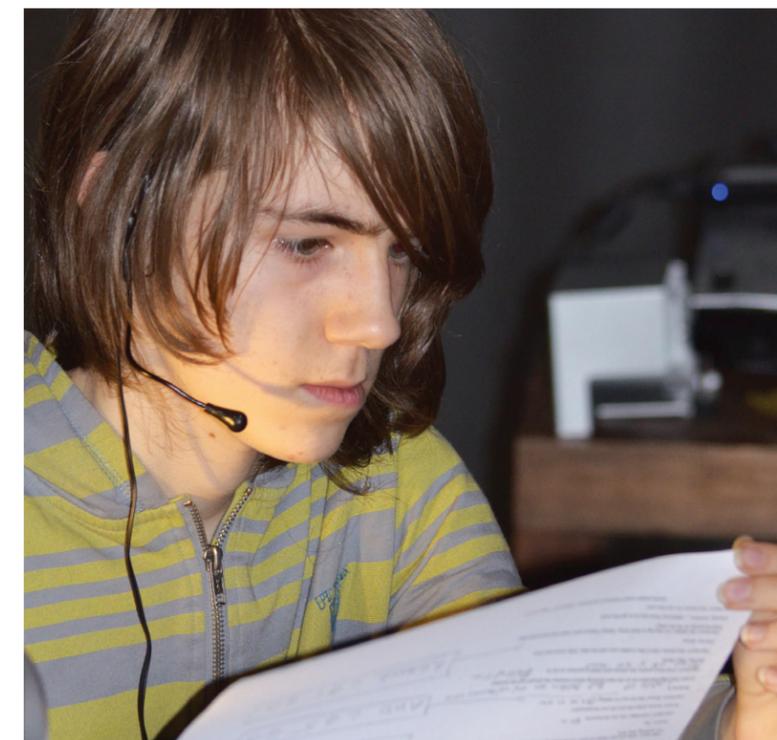
The 7th grade students were delighted to welcome back Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Susan Kelleher. She brought a guest, Trish Romano, recently named Editor in Chief of *The Stranger*, to be interviewed by the 7th graders. The class then wrote articles based on their interviews.

The 8th grade continued its cross discipline projects with the Art and Drama Department. In collaboration with drama, the students read and discussed Shakespeare's tragedy of *Hamlet*. They also wrote Shakespearean sonnets in English, and worked on specific scenes or monologues from the play in Drama.

In groups of threes, the 8th graders produced newspapers connected to their study of the book, *The Secret Life of Bees*. They drew on their 7th grade journalism instruction, examined different newspapers' editorial styles and generated articles stemming from their study of the book.

In one of their more ambitious endeavors, the 8th graders studied poetry, wrote poems, and taught their classmates a poem of their choice. Each student had to prepare a lesson by analyzing his or her poem and then leading a discussion for an entire period about the poem. Students' preparation demonstrated their understanding and insight, as well as their comfort in standing before their peers and presenting their ideas.

All Explorer West students learn the importance of accuracy, of ensuring their writing has power and relevance, and critical step of editing. These efforts have contributed to the strong writing program that is a hallmark of our school. It is also why a vast majority of our graduates excel in high school honors English classes. **EW**



Admissions

Katie Auker

Director of Admissions

Every journey has milestones to mark progress and provide the opportunity to acknowledge, celebrate and reflect. This year, Explorer West held its 20th commencement and sent 28 students forward on the next step in their education. Working with the 8th grade class to prepare for high school highlights the transformation in character, curiosity, commitment and most of all, respect that students gain during their time at Explorer West. Their growth reflects how our small learning community allows students to explore ideas that are meaningful to them in social justice, sustainability and the environment. Whether it is discovering a passion for debate, learning a new sport or networking with non-profit and political leaders, our students move on from Explorer West with an understanding of what it is like to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others.

As middle school remains a milestone for families who walk through our doors, Explorer West continues to move forward on its own growth. In the fall of 2016, we welcome 38 new 6th grade students on their journey to adulthood, bringing our total enrollment to 110 students. This year Explorer West students hail from 42 elementary schools and 24 different zip codes. Now, more than ever, our student body reflects the diversity, energy and ideas of the growing South Seattle and King County region. Our commitment to support families financially continues to grow as we provide 32% of our families with financial aid and will graduate three Rainier Scholars in 2017.

Continuing to Redefine the Middle School Experience

Our 20th year was highlighted by our Alumni Event in June. This event reignited their bond with Explorer West as over 60 alumni gathered to reminisce. Throughout our history, students have walked through our blue doors and have had an experience that helped them to develop academically, socially and as leaders.

As one of our 8th grade speakers said this year at commencement about their middle school experience, "It was not an awkward and unpleasant time; it was the time we learned more about ourselves, developed new interests, and made some of the best friends of our lives." Indeed, these sentiments are not typical of what many of our incoming parents remember from their middle school days, but represent their dreams for their children. We are proud to have been redefining the middle school experience for students and families over the past 20 years and will continue to do so for years to come. **EW**



Update from the Board President

Karen Kalzer

2016 Board President

It is my pleasure to report to our community regarding the activities and successes of the Explorer West Middle School board of Trustees for the past year. The board is charged with ensuring that the mission of the school is enacted and that the school remains sound. As Board Chair, I am aided in this endeavor by our Vice Chair Annie Vasquez; Treasurer Jim Woeppel; and Secretary William Sears.

The board is comprised of a mix of parents of current students, parents of alumni students, and non-parent community members. While we typically meet monthly before and after school hours, our favorite meeting is the one in June, where we attend the graduation ceremony and see the 8th grade class prepare to embrace their future.

Our committees have been busy this year on several fronts. First, one of our major aspirations for Explorer West is that it remain as affordable as possible while offering a breadth of activities and academic rigor for our students. To that end, Eric Eberhard and Diane Cook have worked to build our Rick Marting Endowment in order to provide as much opportunity as possible, while keeping our tuition as reasonable and predictable as possible. Of course, the success of this has been due to YOU, our Explorer West community, as you have risen to the call to raise funds that makes Explorer West eligible for some various generous matching funds. Thank you to Eric and Diane, and to YOU.

Second, our Trustee Affairs Committee has strengthened our parent board membership significantly by presenting two outstanding candidates who have become new board members: Michelle Ward McGee and Paul Shea. I welcome them and look forward to their contributions. We say goodbye and thank you to our colleague Jannat Gargi, who has moved on from our board. Thank you



to Doug Pedegana and Katie DePuma for their excellent work on this committee.

Third, our Strategic Planning Committee has engaged in developing a new rolling strategic plan that will better allow us to gauge our progress and to set new goals on a regular basis. This will be a key advantage as we look to the future and our regular accreditation review by the Northwest Association of Independent Schools. Thank you to Annie Vasquez and Bob Dullea.

I am humbled that the board has chosen to elect me to another year as Chair to lead the board. We have some ambitious plans for the next year and I look forward to partnering with Mr. H. as we continue to implement our vision for our wonderful "little school." **EW**

One of our major aspirations for Explorer West is that it remain as affordable as possible while offering a breadth of activities and academic rigor for our students.

Fundraising

Eric Eberhard

Board Development Committee Chair

The Rick Marting Scholarship Endowment

Thanks to the Explorer West community and many friends of the school, our second year of building this permanent endowment resulted in a total of \$266,000 in new contributions. We were once again blessed with a challenge match of \$125,000 from an anonymous foundation. We began our efforts to meet the challenge with a luncheon at FareStart on Beacon Hill. "Reach for the Stars" featured women's rights legend Trish Bostrom as the keynote speaker and was attended by more than eighty friends of the school who generously donated \$42,000 to the endowment. We were also blessed with a donation from Benita Mooney for \$15,000, the Crean family for \$15,000 and two other foundations for a combined \$20,000. Another \$21,000 was raised this spring at the auction. We met the challenge and achieved the match for the second year in a row. Over the last two years we have raised more than \$750,000 for the endowment and will increase the financial aid pool with the earnings from the endowment investments in 2016 as we continue to work to fulfill Rick's hope that Explorer West will be able to serve students from diverse backgrounds.

Explorer West's Rick Marting Endowment and generous donors allow us to allocate more to financial aid than other schools.

Annual Fund and Auction

The fall Annual Fund campaign was once again successful. We raised \$68,700 with 100% participation from the board, faculty and staff and 92% participation from parents. The net proceeds from the auction were \$99,500, including \$47,000 for Fund-a-Need, part of which will be used to renovate the art room so that there is adequate storage and three sinks, with the balance added to the endowment. The Annual Fund and the auction are an important part of our efforts to meet the needs of our students every year. We are grateful to Jannat Gargi and Dan Pepper for opening their home to host the annual parent appreciation party in February so the board, faculty and staff could express their gratitude to the parents for their generous support of the Annual Fund and auction. We are also grateful to Roberto and Katherine Brambila and their family for providing the food for the party.

Corporate and Foundation Donations

Explorer West is very grateful to Boeing, Microsoft, Nordstrom, Russell Investments and T-Mobile for their employer matching donations. This was the first year we have had this much support from so many employers and we appreciate their involvement in our fundraising efforts and support of the community. We are also very grateful to the Rodman Foundation, the Seattle Foundation and a number of anonymous foundations for their very generous support of Explorer West and our students and families. **EW**



Thank you!

2015 - 2016 Financials

Financial Overview

Year Ending June 30, 2016

Unrestricted Revenue:

Tuition and Fees	83%	\$1,806,000
Fundraising	6%	\$143,000
Release of Restricted Funds	9%	\$209,000
Other	2%	\$46,000
Total Unrestricted Revenue	100%	\$2,204,000

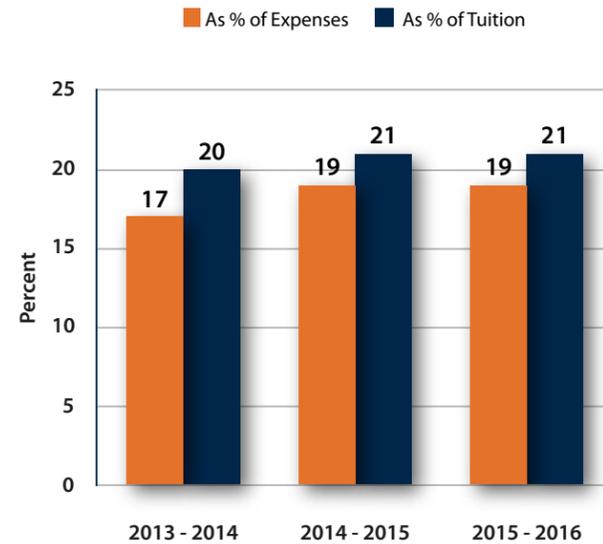
Expenses:

Salaries and Benefits	57%	\$1,113,000
Financial Aid	19%	\$370,000
Occupancy Costs	10%	\$195,000
Program Expenses	8%	\$159,000
Other	6%	\$117,000
Total Expenses	100%	\$1,954,000

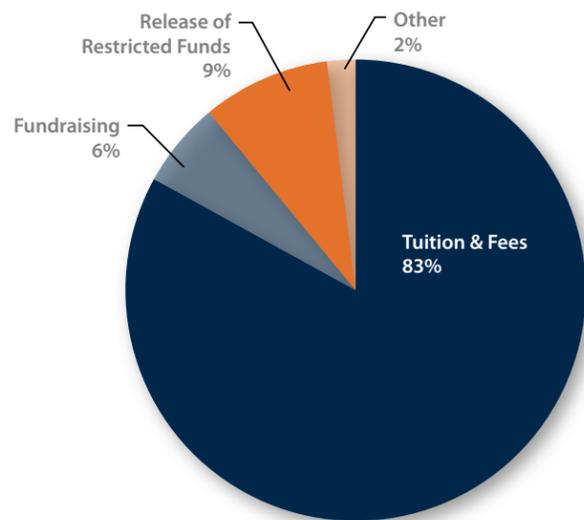
Net Increase in Unrestricted Net Assets		\$250,000
--	--	------------------

Percentage of Tuition Allocated to Financial Aid

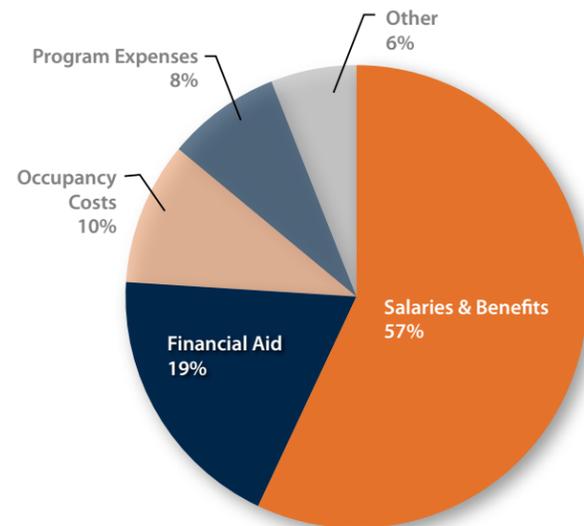
Explorer West's Rick Marting Endowment and generous donors allow us to allocate more tuition revenue to financial aid than other schools in the Seattle area.



Unrestricted Revenue



Expenses



Farewell to the 8th Grade

The 2016 Graduates will be Attending these High Schools Next Fall:

Annie Wright

Ballard High School

Bishop Blanchet High School

Franklin High School

Holy Names Academy

John F. Kennedy Catholic High School

Mount Rainier High School

The Northwest School

Nova High School

Seattle Academy Of Arts and Science

Seattle Lutheran High School

Seattle Preparatory School

Summit Charter School

University Prep

Vashon High School

West Seattle High School



LEAD. EXPLORE. DISCOVER.



ExplorerWest
Middle School

10015 28th Ave SW Seattle, WA 98146

P: 206.935.0495

www.explorer-west.org

