



HEAD OF SCHOOL
July 1, 2012

GRAND RIVER ACADEMY
Austinburg, Ohio

THE SCHOOL

Grand River Academy is a small school with long history. It offers a non-military, non-sectarian, all boys, boarding, college preparatory education. Founded in 1831, the school has undergone a number of reincarnations, one of them moving the school to its present location some 20 miles distant from the river giving it its name. Since 1962, it has upheld its current mission: to develop and foster the emotional and academic maturity necessary for its students to graduate and launch successful college careers. Its curriculum is college preparatory, with an emphasis on helping those students who will benefit from the extra attention and structure of a small boarding program.



GRA is located in the northeast Ohio town of Austinburg, not far from the Pennsylvania border. Cleveland is about an hour to the west, Erie an hour to the east, and Youngstown an hour to the south. The town is close to the shores of Lake Erie, and the region's hardy residents are well-accustomed to windy and snowy winters.

The school has a capacity for 118 boarders. More typically, though, enrollment has been between 100 and 110 boarders, with an occasional day student. The school's small size and national and international draw create a significant cultural diversity and provide a rich and supportive environment to help students develop intellectually, physically, socially, and morally.

THE SCHOOL'S MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

GRA's formal mission statement states:

Grand River Academy offers high school boys a highly structured academic and social boarding environment in preparation for college acceptance and success.

Its philosophy is:

Grand River Academy believes that small classes, mandatory study periods, and special help sessions inspire Academy students to take a personal interest in their education, often for the first time. A traditional all-male boarding environment in a rural setting focuses students in their preparation for college. An integral part of the program is the dedicated faculty and staff, who emphasize individual attention for every student.

Grand River Academy values independence, which allows us to implement a college preparatory curriculum that enables students to experience significant academic growth. As one of the oldest single sex, non-military boarding schools in the country, many traditions are evident in our fully accredited program. Students gain pride and develop self-reliance in our challenging academic atmosphere, structured sports and afternoon activities programs, and the leadership opportunities afforded by our small community.

We believe that responsible, college-prepared students are developed through our structured, yet flexible program. The Student Assistance Program enables many boys to experience not only academic success, but also personal and social growth for a better understanding of the society in which they will function. The Academy believes that with the support of our Learning Center, selected students with learning differences can also meet the requirement of admission to a college or university prior to graduation.

As a secular school, Grand River Academy embraces diversity by welcoming boys not only from many states and countries, but also from many ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. We believe our success is due to our nurturing family atmosphere, our understanding and compassion, and our persistence.

Put into daily practice, the mission statement produces a traditional-looking and traditional-feeling school. The curriculum doesn't culminate in an array of AP courses, but it encompasses rigorous college preparatory content and is repeatedly described by faculty as "top notch." Classes are very small, with five and six students the norm. The largest section this year is a math class with 11 students. There is a seven period academic day, every student takes five major classes and has two formal and supervised study halls. There are supervised study hours in the dormitories, and it is only via a carefully monitored privilege system that highly performing students can earn their way into less structured study settings, for instance at the Bud Field Student Center.

Despite the congenial closeness of the school and the warmth of personal relationships, there are structures that provide for formality and order. Shirts and ties are required during the class day (unless an honors privilege "relaxes" that requirement to polo shirts), there are assigned seats and tables in the dining hall, and the students address adults formally as "Mr." and "Mrs." The adults watch and record, and encourage and correct in ways that effectively promote learning, harmony and general understanding among students with a wide range of learning styles, needs, and backgrounds.

GRA is very good at finding ways for students to succeed when they haven't before; to put them on a better path. One faculty member articulated the challenge as that of "...being hard as nails, but flexible when necessary. We can occasionally be blasted for inconsistency, but maybe it's our strongest point." Faculty also seek a better path. One commented, "We're the best at what we do, yet we're our own worst critics. We're more successful than we know."

SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

Enrollment:	Currently 92; capacity is 118
Teaching Staff:	15 full time; 5 part time
Administrative and Support Staff:	7 full time; 5 part time
Hold Advanced Degrees:	5 full time faculty; 3 administrators
Student to Teacher Ratio:	6:1
Campus:	13 buildings and 10 residences on 150 acres
Op. Expenses FY 11 Projected:	\$3.9 million
Aid FY 11:	\$260,000; average award: \$17,000
Annual Giving FY 11 Projected:	\$75,000
Tuition:	\$35,375 for 7 day; \$33,950 for 5 day
Special Fees:	\$1,800 per semester for Learning Center \$5,000 average International Student Fee
Endowment:	\$1.6 million
Memberships:	NAIS, ISACS, OAIS, IECA, TABS, SBSA
Website:	www.grandriver.org

COMMUNITY & RESOURCES OF THE SCHOOL

When asked to identify the school's enduring strengths, constituents use remarkably consistent language invoking the family and community metaphors. There is ownership of mission and a kind of possessiveness when faculty speak of "our boys," "our relationships," the "education we give them," and the importance of protecting "our" mission. The community clearly believes that it is empowered by being small, all boys, almost all boarding, and able to concentrate on life lessons outside the classroom as well as those within.

Students

Enrollment as recently as five years ago was at a high of 120 (with wait lists), and has generally averaged around 110. Current enrollment stands at 92, and only one student is day. Classes start small and get bigger. There are typically 40 or more new students enrolling each fall. Historically, GRA has planned on an international population of 10% to 15%, but that has been growing. There are now 24 international students from 6 countries: 12 from China, 6 from



Korea, 4 from Rwanda, and 1 from Sierra Leone, Australia, and Canada. The Chinese contingent is expected to grow to 20 next year, putting the international group to over 30, and probably about 30% of the school's student body.

As the school readies itself for its ISACS self-evaluation process next year, a mission committee has been looking at three student groups that are of note not just for their differing needs, but also for the school's remarkable ability to address their needs well and harmoniously. There are the underachievers: perfectly bright students who for one reason or another have not done well in their former schools. There are the underachievers whose difficulties in their former schools



are the result of diagnosed ADD or ADHD. Then there are those students whose difficulties in school are the result of emotional and behavior issues, and/or drug and alcohol dependencies, perhaps in combination with ADD and ADHD. A number of students in this last grouping have found GRA through counselors in IECA (Independent Educational Counselors Association), and many have participated in therapeutic programs prior to arriving at GRA. A number of those programs entail a wilderness and/or "Outward Bound" component. A possible fourth group are the international students, who don't necessarily fall in any of the three prior groupings, but whose parents seek for them a traditional American boarding school program that will prepare them for admission to an American university. They may be average or above achievers in their home country, and may come from countries that don't diagnose for ADD or ADHD and that don't have an array of therapeutic programs for children experiencing difficulty in school.

Some faculty feel that the school's student body is much the same now as it has been for many years. Others feel that there are fewer of the "quirky" underachievers with whom the school has remarkable and relatively easy success, and more students from the second and third groups. Then there are some observers in the middle who say that the kids are essentially the same, but that interventions have become more sophisticated, and parental expectations more pronounced. The school's Care Team reports that 40% to 50% of the students are seen at least occasionally for counseling support, and half of those have had at least some level of drug and alcohol problems prior to arrival at GRA.



There are factors that clearly impact GRA's candidate pool. Other more traditional boarding schools are dipping more deeply into their candidate pools and accepting "risk" candidates. More consultants are appreciating GRA's success and referring more kids with complicated profiles. There are more therapeutic programs needing a school to receive their transitioning kids. (And there are GRA faculty



who feel that some of these “wilderness program” students are among the best, for unlike others, they have bottomed out, are firmly on the road to recovery, and can be extremely positive role models for other students.) And finally, whatever GRA’s students’ challenges, the more successful the school is, the more similar referrals the school is likely to get.

GRA students are quick to describe their school community as a big and happy family both socially and academically. They appreciate teachers who are interested, interesting, kind, and extremely hard-working. Many students have complicated families of their own, often blended families, and they talk specifically of their appreciation of faculty families and the regular presence of faculty children “around and about” in the dining room and dorms. Student friendships are formed across grade levels as well as across cultures. Students are also very accepting of the wide range of unusual backgrounds and circumstances that

have brought them together around the common cause of finding a first significant academic success. And even though they may not like the structures and supervision they endure, they know they need them.

Parents

Most of GRA’s parents are at a distance and their relationships with the school cover the entire range from virtually no involvement at all, to attentive involvement around all issues. There is an active and supportive Parents Association whose leadership comes from parents living near the school. There are three officers of the association, and it meets monthly and hears reports from the Headmaster and from the Student Council leadership. The meeting is a good forum for parents to be informed about all school activities, and minutes are kept and posted on the school’s website. The association is not charged with fund-raising, but instead hopes to support effective communication and parent understanding of the school’s activities and mission.

Faculty

Faculty are consistently described as highly experienced, deeply committed, remarkably flexible, and very stable. They will do whatever they reasonably can to help students succeed, they go above and beyond all the time, and said one, “We save a bunch of kids here.” Deep caring is an institutional hallmark, the risk being, said one teacher, that “Sometimes we’re too enabling and coddling, which can be a downfall. Giving them one more chance can sometimes lead to one more mess that threatens their continuation here. We need to be careful of that.”

There is a core group of veterans who have been at GRA for many years, who have seen the school through earlier good times and lean times, and who epitomize the venerable notion of the “triple threat” teacher-coach-dorm master. Then there is a younger cadre who bring new energy and perspective to



their work, but who clearly share their elders' commitment to the mission. There is a relatively small "mid-career" group and the school knows that this "barbell" effect means that sometime in the next few years, retirements will create some big shoes to fill. GRA might well be the boarding school that could re-define the old notion of "triple threat" faculty, for they all wear additional hats all the time. Whether it's counseling in a formal or informal capacity, de-escalating some emerging issue, chaperoning a weekend trip, driving a van, or whatever, these professionals are on duty all the time and truly making a difference in the lives of their students.

Administration

GRA enjoys expert and deeply experienced leadership, beginning with the Headmaster, Randy Blum. He joined the school's faculty in the 70's, was named Headmaster in 1989, and will have served in that role for 23 years when he steps down in 2012. His entire career will have been devoted to one school.



Mr. Blum is a self-acknowledged hands-on and old-school head. He knows virtually everyone and everything going on in the school. There isn't anything he would ask a faculty or staff member to do that he wouldn't do himself, he's the first to offer assistance or advice in any time of need, and employees and parents alike have his home and cell numbers. He meets and greets visiting families, and he models open door approachability that he expects across the school.

That GRA's administrative culture is decidedly "head-centric" is completely understandable and even necessary. One, GRA is very small and the head should know almost everything that is going on. Two, smallness means that every job requires wearing multiple hats and so the head has to be ready to offer back-up. Three, the head's longevity means that he has appointed, trained, mentored, advised, or otherwise supervised every administrator on campus. Everything at GRA has a way of going back to the head. He is widely appreciated as being totally present; a man of his word who has his thumb on every aspect of the school.

While this is one of the school's great strengths, it will also be a great challenge going forward. A new leadership playbook, in its chapters both explicit and implicit, will take getting used to by all parties. The outgoing head gets huge praise for accomplishments there for all to see; the incoming head must gain the community's trust by defining a vision of the school GRA is still to become. Constituents' willingness to follow new leadership will be a leap of faith for a school entering a new chapter.

The administrative team is strong and experienced. Academics, athletics, residential life, counseling services, business management, facilities planning and maintenance, admissions, development and public relations – all are in the hands of qualified and dedicated professionals. Communication between departments is cited by some as an issue to be addressed, but the school is small enough that a great deal of coordinating information is passed back and forth without the need for formal meeting structures.

Governance

There are currently 12 members of the Board of Trustees, which meets four times a year. The board understands its primary obligations of hiring, supporting, and evaluating the head, setting major policy, and ensuring the financial resources required by the school's mission and policies. It has committees for finance, facilities, and curriculum. The board has relied heavily on the head for its guidance and direction, but in response to the financial pressures of the last few years it has become more involved and sought more information in support of its oversight role. As the board has lost several veterans and brought on new members, as a group it has become more inclined to expect more detailed reporting from the head and key administrators.

Alumni

While the school was founded in 1831, between its various incarnations, shifts in grade range, and changes of both physical location and niche, its first true graduating class of record was in 1964. As a result, despite the official age of the school, alumni of record number under a thousand, and their average age is between 30 and 40. In addition to this numbers challenge, the alumni office deals with the fact that while the school's alumni may be glad they attended and grateful for their opportunities to succeed, they may not be proud of their alma mater in the traditional sense. They were enrolled, sometimes against their will, to achieve a fix of sorts, and so the alumni office challenge is sometimes to smooth over some difficult memories by recalling all the good ones. There are many of those, of course, but it takes work and digging.

Town of Austinburg

Austinburg is just south of Interstate 90, a small village that lies midway between Geneva to the west and Ashtabula to the northeast on the shore of Lake Erie. It is primarily an agricultural region, supported by service and light manufacturing in a region known a few generations ago as the center of America's great and successful heavy industry, especially steel. The region has a very Midwestern feel, and while there is not a great deal of racial or cultural diversity and the impacts of the recession still linger, the community is very open and accepting. The school participates in village and community life as it reasonably can, given its 24/7 focus on its students. Austinburg is hardly a wealthy community and that can sometimes lead to the perception of the "rich kids' school." Faculty and staff – and even students – are sensitive to this and try to counter it when they reasonably can.

Helpful links to learn more about the area:

<http://www.genevachamber.org>

<http://www.genevaohio.com>

<http://ci.ashtabula.oh.us>

Buildings & Grounds

Functional buildings and expansive grounds support all aspects of the school program. The school owns and operates 13 school buildings and 10 faculty residences on its 150 acres. The facilities include everything a good boarding school needs: classrooms, dormitories, library, large dining room, a spacious multi-functional gymnasium, and administrative offices. The



head's residence, an attractive and historic structure, sits in the middle of the campus. There is a pattern of new construction that speaks to the school's progress: a science and art building completed ten years ago, a student center completed four years ago, construction of athletic fields and pavilion, and a very attractive lecture hall scheduled for completion by this year's commencement. The gym is functional and attractive but aging, and there are plans showing a new gym and field house in the future.

Buildings and grounds are well and attractively maintained and create a very favorable first impression. Deferred maintenance is not an issue, though Shepherd Hall, the largest dorm and home, also, to the Admissions Office, will soon need renovations and updating.

There is a full time director of maintenance. He is supported by two part time assistants, four part time housekeepers for the dorms, and occasional college and/or intern help as needs arise.

Finances

Grand River Academy is almost completely dependent on tuition revenues. Annual giving typically raises about \$75,000 each year. A mostly unrestricted endowment of \$1.6 million does not generate significant non-tuition revenue. The head and his administrative staff work hard to be sure that expenses do not exceed the year's anticipated revenue, and the school has enjoyed a long history of balanced budgets until this current fiscal year, when there will be a modest operating deficit. The break-even enrollment number is about 110; coming in below can lead to deficits, and coming in above yields an operating cushion. Some debt was incurred in connection with the construction of the new lecture hall and is almost equally offset by capital pledges payable. There was a lead gift of \$400,000, its cost will be almost a million, and there remains a \$200,000 balance to raise. Unlike larger schools that engage in very formal strategic planning leading to formal capital campaigns, GRA has taken the approach more typical of smaller schools. Over the years, the head has been very successful in matching donor interest with specific significant maintenance or capital needs as they have arisen.

Budgetary control has been exercised almost entirely by the head until the last few years, when the business office has become more involved. Division and department heads have not been formally involved in developing or managing budgets specific to their areas of responsibility.

Technology

Technology at GRA is overseen and implemented by three individuals. A tech-savvy member of the board oversees and advises as needed. The school's website is maintained by the Technologies Teacher, with occasional involvement of his classes.

The Director of Technology is generally in charge of operating and maintaining the hardware and software systems that include servers of 1999 vintage operating on Win2000, and approximately 50 networked PCs spread around campus. He is responsible for equipment, firewalls, security, and troubleshooting, as well as the smartboards located in most classrooms and actively used by most faculty. Two WiFi systems serve the entire campus. The dorm system is content filtered and controlled in terms of hours of availability. The second system serves classrooms and administrative areas. Administrative offices are using school software provided by Rediker. The Director hopes to be able to upgrade servers in the near future, and struggles with the typical school issues of obsolescence that stem from constantly trying to make old and new hardware and software as compatible as possible. He also sees the need for a current and fully understood acceptable use policy for school technology.

PROGRAM

Grand River's curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs are fully described on the school's good web site, www.grandriver.org. Candidates should become completely familiar with this resource as it describes every aspect of the school.

It is noteworthy that GRA is able to do so much, so well, for such a diverse student population. All graduates complete their stay fully prepared for college. Almost all do attend after graduation, though a few opt for a year

off, attend community colleges, or consider military service. Faculty express the wish that the school could offer more electives, especially in fine and performing arts, but they understand the constraining realities of the school's size, its resources, and the impacts of the recession.

Central to everything the school does is its Student Assistance Program and the coordination of what the school calls the Care Team. Consisting of key administrators, the behavioral and emotional counselor, the substance abuse counselor, and two rotating faculty members, the Care Team meets weekly to discuss students who are experiencing any kind of significant difficulty. While they are effective in addressing crisis and post-crisis situations, their most important work is the early stage of crisis prevention.

GRA's athletic programs warrant special comment. First, it is unusual that such a small school can field nine interscholastic sports. An example of its creativeness in doing so is its cooperation with a local Catholic high school in combining numbers so that the schools, together, can field a football team. The department's philosophy is to offer opportunity, to allow students to get better in the sports they choose, and to get lots of healthy exercise. The school is not part of the Ohio Athletic Association, nor does it choose to compete in end of season conference or league championship competitions. Teams play for the purity of athletic competition and for success as they achieve it, and will post a banner in the gym for a winning season. It works well philosophically, and it works practically for coaches who understand that GRA is a hard place to coach when you don't know exactly what your roster will look like from one year to the next.

GRA is accredited by the Independent School Association of the Central States, and in 2011-2012 it will conduct its full self-study in preparation for the visiting committee scheduled for its visit in the fall of 2012. This timing means that the new head will come into a school that has just undergone its own thorough self-examination and completed its own list of plans and recommendations. And just as the new head welcomes the community in the fall, that list will then benefit from the input of the ISACS visiting committee.

GRA is a member of the Ohio Association of Independent Schools, an association that grapples with a state that has been uniquely successful in imposing upon independent schools its statewide testing mandates. As a result, guidance at GRA includes the usual college counseling and SAT/ACT testing and scheduling, plus the additional state-imposed layer.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Most independent schools lay claim to being “unique.” Because of its unusual mission, GRA really is unique. It is that quality that may also make it unusually resilient as it has dealt with occasional adversity. The latest challenge, which unfolded in the summer and fall of 2010, was the interest of the Geneva area Recreational, Educational, Athletic Trust in acquiring the GRA campus so that “GaREAT” could create a 600 student sports academy not far up the road from its recently completed athletic complex. (<http://www.gareat.org>)



While the school was initially intrigued by apparent benefits of such a merger of interests, it became clear as discussions unfolded that the final outcome would be a takeover and put the entire school and its mission at risk. Initial agreements fell apart and the parties went their separate ways. Positions were taken in the process, however, and while healing is well under way, the community is feeling fragile as a result. And the admissions office couldn't really know what it was “selling” in the fall of 2010, so the school did not enroll its usual complement of late fall new students. This explains in large measure the lower than usual enrollment this year and the feeling in the school that there is much ground to recover.

Several common themes unfolded as constituents were asked about the challenges and opportunities facing GRA in the next decade. They include:

Enrollment / Revenue

- Achieve full enrollment with “mission-consistent” students
- Restore budgets to balance or modest surplus

Program

- Complete any final revisions to the mission statement and champion its adoption
- Sustain and inspire an academic program that meets a broad range of needs
- Provide professional development consistent with student needs
- Anticipate the coming wave of senior faculty retirements

Resources

- Continue the practice of prudent financial management
- Achieve predictable tuition revenue through full enrollment and right-pricing
- Explore ways to increase endowment

Articulating the School's Message and Raising Its Profile

- Be more creative in marketing
- Be nationally recognized for excellence in achieving a unique mission
- Take the school from relatively passive PR to highly active PR
- Cultivate the alumni constituency more actively
- Coordinate communications: parents, students, faculty

Documenting Practice and Managing Change

- Document and standardize policies, procedures, expectations

THE CANDIDATE

PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES

Grand River Academy is excited to welcome a visionary head of school who “loves small” but is able to “think big” and lead and inspire the community to remain small but still to be great in its achievement of a one-of-a-kind mission. The community hopes to attract someone who will treat the school as a special place in its own right, worthy of a long stay. The next head should possess excellent professional experience and credentials that include the following:

- Advanced degree in relevant area (e.g., specials needs or business administration)
- Substantive independent school experience at the secondary level, including:
 - Teaching, coaching, and involvement in residential life
 - Familiarity with external affairs, fund-raising, admissions, and PR
 - Significant leadership as a head or head of a division or department
- Sound business instincts, if not experience
- Understanding and appreciation of learning differences and challenges
- Ability to advocate for the GRA mission, philosophy, and niche
- Familiarity with substance abuse issues and reluctant learners
- Familiarity with both instructional and administrative technology
- Familiarity with international students and their and their parents’ needs

PERSONAL QUALITIES

The next head of school should possess the following personal qualities:

- Be a gentleman.
- Be hands on, likeable, approachable, visible, and open to ideas of others.
- Have a genuine desire to know all students and faculty well.
- Listen, reflect, and act thoughtfully and decisively, with firmness and fairness.
- Base decisions consistently on principle, policy, and the mission of the school.
- Be a model of integrity, able to be a moral compass for the school.
- Be as transparent as possible.
- Articulate a clear and enthusiastic vision.
- Communicate easily and comfortably with all constituents.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Have a good sense of process.
- Match self-confidence with confidence in staff.
- Be comfortable wearing many hats.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Candidates should email a cover letter, resume, statement of educational philosophy, and a list of five references to:

Thomas M. Evans
Resource Group 175, LLC
90 Great Western Road
Harwich, MA 02645
774-237-0349
tmevanscca@comcast.net or tevens@rg175.com

For additional information about the school, visit its website:

www.grandriver.org

Grand River Academy does not discriminate in its policies based on race, religion, national origin, sexual preference, or age.