

Charles H. Walsh Sr. Academy and Career Tech High School

Executive Summary

15 Years of Success – beginning as Maryville’s Jen School

Maryville Academy’s Jen School is an alternative, therapeutic day school that has been successfully educating students with intellectual disabilities and special emotional needs since 2007. Located in Des Plaines (Cook County), our students come from 30 different high schools and 18 school districts. They are among the most vulnerable adolescents and are typically diagnosed with one or more intellectual disabilities. 95% of our school families struggle financially and lack the resources to seek therapy and tutoring on their own. Students are also emotionally vulnerable. Many have experienced childhood trauma such as abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a combination of these circumstances. Unfortunately, data suggests that the high school dropout rate for students with special needs is 46% higher than the dropout rate of the general population.

Our staff are specially trained to provide for the complex needs of Jen students. This includes following a **trauma-informed curriculum** to support students’ social emotional needs. 90% of teachers have earned a **master’s degree** and 100% of paraprofessionals have **advanced degrees**. In each classroom, students have a general education teacher, a paraprofessional, and a social worker. This “push in” approach is crucial because students get emotional support immediately in the classroom. It also improves the chances of behavioral outcomes and reduces the loss of instructional time. Jen School strives for an educational environment characterized by student-teacher and student-student relationships grounded in **respectful reciprocity**.

One critical point of differentiation is that Jen School combines high school academics and social/emotional learning with **career technical education (CTE) classes** which provide hands-on training in to make learning accessible. Research from Careertech.org indicates that those with special needs learn better when combining academic lessons with hands-on applications. For 9 consecutive years, Jen School has been awarded the **School of Excellence Award from the National Association of Special Educations Teachers**, an honor given to just 2% of the non-public special education schools in Illinois.

Creating a Path for the Future – The Walsh Academy

With Maryville’s purchase of the Niles South School in Niles, Illinois, Jen School is elevating its vision to meet the future needs of students and the demands in the workforce. The current building is being renovated to become the **first** alternative special education school in Illinois, and possibly the **only** in the nation, to focus its CTE training on a skilled trade curriculum for special education students.

With this move, we are progressing from CTE courses that simply make learning more accessible to providing trade focused CTE courses that create pathways for more than 100 students to pursue apprenticeships and high-paying high-demand jobs in skilled trades. Students taking CTE courses will receive up to 120 hours of instruction per semester. Graduates will receive an Illinois High School diploma with curriculum that is validated by the Illinois’ State Board of Education and be awarded certificates for each CTE program they complete. Research by Stanley Black and Decker released in 2022 indicates individuals with careers in the trades are satisfied with their choice and would recommend their career to others. However, misperceptions about the trades and lack of exposure prevent today’s youth from

pursuing these careers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022, There are currently 8 million vacant jobs in important skilled trade positions in the U.S. This indicates a need to expose students to careers in the trades during their formative years.

To accomplish this, we are renovating the property and expanding from 8 academic classrooms to 12 and are building 8 dedicated trade focused CTE classrooms. We will introduce the school under its new name: **the Charles H. Walsh Sr. Academy & Career Tech High School** and open in August 2023. Walsh Academy is the namesake of a beloved Maryville alumnus who lived on our campus as an orphaned child, then had a successful career and returned to Maryville to make substantial contributions as the Board Chairman.

The plan is to build industrial arts classrooms for the following CTE programs:

- Carpentry & Woodworking
- Culinary Arts / Agriculture
- Electrical
- HVAC
- Welding
- Printshop / Screen printing
- Health Science
- Small Engine & Bike Repair
- Computer Tech
(Pod Cast & Video Production)
- Information Technology/3-D Printing
- Plumbing
- Drafting / Computer Aided Design

Having a high school diploma has become essential for financial independence. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2022 report indicated that high school graduates earn over \$670 more per week than dropouts. Data indicates that high school dropout rate for students with special needs is 46% higher than the dropout rate of the general population. Fortunately, for this at-risk population, data also indicates that CTE courses more fully engage students, curb this dropout rate, and lead to higher median annual earnings. Walsh Academy students will also receive instruction in the classroom and on job sites that emphasizes employability and soft skills to assist the transition to long-term self-sufficiency.

Walsh Academy will continue growing and enhancing our community partnerships with groups like CISCO, Illinois Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Local 134), and Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc. We will look to these industry experts to collaborate on curriculum, classroom equipment, and provide educational and community connections to local internship programs for students in their home communities.

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