

Yass Prize selects Walsh Academy as 1 of 64 quarterfinalists, the only special ed school in Illinois to qualify for the next round October 9.



Principal Ann Craig proudly poses with the quarterfinalist sign outside Walsh Academy in Niles.

The Charles H. Walsh Sr. Academy & Career Tech High School or Walsh Academy, formerly Maryville Jen School in Des Plaines, IL., wins a coveted spot among 64 quarterfinalists in an announcement made by the prestigious Yass Prize & STOP Award Initiative on September 14.

Walsh Academy was selected from nearly 2,000 applications that represented 27 million students from every sector of education and every grade across all 50 states. It is the only non-public special education school in Illinois that was selected to move on to the next round of the competition when 32 semifinalists will be announced at the Yass Summit and Semifinalist Announcement in Cleveland, Ohio on October 9.

“All of us at Walsh Academy are truly honored and immensely humbled to be counted among the 64 distinguished and impressive cohort of exceptional educators,” said Ann Craig, Walsh Academy principal and director of educational services at Maryville.

“This marks an important milestone in our school’s history and reflects our commitment to providing quality education to our students to help them have a successful future,” said Craig.

The YASS Prize & STOP Award Initiative began in 2021 and aims to identify and support best-in-class education providers such as Walsh Academy that can tackle the challenges of the day and deliver an education that students deserve.

Craig expressed her excitement when she received the news as she, her staff and students are preparing to relocate the school in Des Plaines to its new location in Niles, IL.

“The decision to move to a new site was carefully considered to ensure that the school could meet the growing needs of our students,” she said. “The new campus will feature 12 state-of-the-art academic classrooms and eight dedicated career technical education classrooms.”

The expansion of Maryville Jen School to Walsh Academy in Niles, according to Craig, will enable students to access the latest educational tools and prepare them to be college-ready or to enter high-demand trades. Before the expansion, the school had eight academic and two CTE classrooms.

“I feel incredibly honored and grateful for this opportunity, as it shines a spotlight on the talented students and faculty of Maryville Jen School, now known as Walsh Academy.,” said Craig. “This is an exciting phase for our school as we transition to a new building and embrace the unique educational opportunities ahead.”

Maryville Jen School, a program of Maryville, was founded in 2007. The new school at 6935 W. Touhy Ave. in Niles broke ground in November 2022.

The Walsh Academy will build on Jen School’s 16-year history of providing therapeutic educational services in a project-based, vocational education-focused learning environment that also supports the development of life skills.

Walsh Academy will continue Jen School’s founding vision as an alternative pathway for special education students who are unable to succeed in their home schools. It follows a student-directed pace in a safe and nurturing environment with a classroom setting of no more than 10 students.

Unique to Jen School and now Walsh Academy, the expanded curriculum will provide an Individualized Educational Program and vocational opportunities to young men and women in grades 6-12 who are experiencing academic, emotional, behavioral, or cognitive challenges. It is the only school in Illinois that has a teacher, a social worker, and a paraprofessional in the classroom, and offers an open enrollment policy allowing students to be accepted at any point during the school year.

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