

## **Parent Testimonial 1:**

November 2025

My son is neurodivergent and was diagnosed with Autism in preschool. Since he was little, he has always enjoyed self-study, researching, and in depth learning about subjects that piqued his interest. He is outspoken and curious, creative and compassionate. He has a keen sense of justice and has always been interested in history and politics.

Sadly, all his interests and strength set him apart from his peers and made him a target for bullying at school. His teachers knew he was bright but often exacerbated the bullying by targeting him as the “other” child in class. He was placed in special education classes even though the curriculum was not the issue- it was his social skills and finding peers he could connect with. This took a terrible toll on his self esteem and mental health. Once he reached high school the bullying and frustration he felt over not being heard or respected by staff and students alike took it’s toll and he attempted suicide.

I was at a loss and very scared- he was so bright and so fragile and the public school system was failing him. I had known for many years he needed something better. Something different that could accommodate his outside-the-box way of learning and moving in the world. I seriously considered homeschooling, but then he would be lacking the key social component he so desperately needed.

Then his IEP advocate mentioned a brand new microschool for kids like my son that was trying to get up and running: Pride Learning Academy.

I immediately made contact with Mx. Wilder and just through several exchanges I knew it was exactly what he needed- an open, nonjudgmental and supportive learning environment where my son could learn core subjects in a smaller group but also have the ability to pursue his personal interests as part of his studies, rather than the generic pre-selected electives offered in public school.

Since attending Pride Learning Academy (now Orchid Community School), his outlook on school has changed dramatically for the better. He actually enjoys going to school and has become more confident socially. He feels safe to express himself and knows that he is supported and respected at school. He is learning to play guitar and is researching politics in early 20th century Vietnam. Where just a year ago I was fearful for his future, I now know he will have the support he needs to forge one for himself. I truly cannot say enough to express how much this school has made a difference in not just my child’s life, but in my peace of mind as a parent.

Parent of student currently enrolled, age 15

## **Parent Testimonial 2:**

November 2025

My daughter is neurodivergent (like everyone in our family) and is often referred to as “quirky” and an “old soul”. She is extremely creative and enjoys expressing her creativity through many mediums- art, painting, multimedia, etc. She is happiest spending time outdoors in nature moving her body, whether going on hikes, swimming in a lake, or looking for wildflowers and mushrooms.

She has always had a love/hate relationship with school that mirrors her personality; she is very extroverted with friends, but introverted and shy in the classroom. Her teachers have often commented that she underestimates her abilities and she was constantly comparing herself to her peers. She has difficulty remaining focused and if she lost her place or didn't understand something she was being taught she wouldn't seek out or ask for help for fear of being teased or called “stupid” and bringing unwanted attention to herself. She also came out as lgbtq at a young age. She knew she didn't care for gender norms and was attracted to people for who they were- their substance- rather than gender. This created another layer of anxiety for her at school as it was a siren-call for bullies and teasing, which sadly included both students and staff. By middle school her grades dropped dramatically, and mentally she was in a very precarious state. She was struggling to find acceptance and safety and hitting walls at every turn. She was feeling hopeless and dejected and I was at a loss for how to help.

When the opportunity to attend this school became a possibility, I jumped. Here was a school where she didn't have to sit at a desk all day. She could go outside and be in nature. She could learn her core subjects in a smaller group of various abilities and ages and know she wouldn't be judged just for asking for help or an alternative explanation. Here was a school where she would be supported and even encouraged to just be her beautiful, creative, expressive *best self*.

Since attending Pride Learning Academy (now OCS), her self-esteem has improved significantly. Her confidence in her ability to learn and understand her core subjects- in particular math- has really grown. She loves that spending time learning outdoors is part of the school's philosophy and that there are always opportunities for her to express herself creatively; from learning how to make a “zine” to painting and tie dying shirts to sell at PLA's booth at the Farmer's Market. Mx. Wilder has created a truly unique and much needed learning space for kids like mine to feel free from bullying and judgement. A place for kids to thrive and be their *best self*. I am truly grateful for Pride Learning Academy and Mx. Leo Wilder.

Parent of student currently enrolled, age 13

**Parent Testimonial 3:**

November 2025

Our 14 year old daughter, who is trans and has ADHD, struggled emotionally and socially all through elementary school, and those struggles continued into middle school. She dealt with some school-related trauma early on in elementary, which exacerbated her difficulties. She felt she couldn't advocate for herself and felt overwhelmed on a daily basis. Even with a 504 plan, we struggled to get her the teacher support and attention she needed. She withdrew into her own shell and cried almost every night. She was unhappy. It became so difficult for her that we had to pull her out of public school and homeschool for 7th and 8th grade.

We were so happy to learn about this school! She was excited to start her Freshman year at PLA (now OCS), and she has NEVER been excited to start school. From day one, she has been LOVING the experience! The flexibility of this classroom along with its small class size and kids of similar backgrounds makes her feel included and free to be herself. The other students have all become her friends. She is able to open up and feel okay to ask and advocate for herself when she needs help. Mx. Wilder is able to spend either more or less time on the subjects our daughter is stronger or weaker in, which makes her day go by faster and her learning much more efficient. She is eager to go to school everyday - we often have trouble getting her to come home!

Parent of student currently enrolled, age 14

#### **Parent Testimonial 4:**

November 2025

This school has been an absolute game-changer for our family. As a micro school, it offers the individualized attention and nurturing environment my child truly needed. Since enrolling, my student has been thriving in a completely bullying-free space where he feels safe, supported, and genuinely excited to learn.

For the first time in years, my child actually looks forward to going to school. Every day he comes home happy, confident, and eager to share everything he learned. His anxiety has decreased dramatically, migraine days have become far less frequent, and his attendance has improved more than I ever thought possible.

Another wonderful change has been the increase in my student's social engagement. He now volunteers to participate in school activities—like helping at the farmers market booth—and is developing friendships and confidence in ways we hadn't seen before.

Academically, he is flourishing. [OCS] recognized his strengths and has supported him in dual enrolling in college, where he is currently taking three college classes, along with extracurricular art courses he loves. The school fosters strong learning habits and independence, which have helped him excel in the college environment—an impressive accomplishment at just 15 years old.

One of the biggest reasons we left public school was the ongoing struggle to get basic IEP accommodations implemented. At this school, that battle simply doesn't exist. My child is allowed to use the assistive devices he needs without any pushback, hesitation, or red tape. Even better, the staff actively encourages him to explore what works best—whether with adaptations or without—so he can develop his own learning toolkit. Instead of waiting weeks or months for formal meetings, we just move forward with what helps him succeed.

PLA (now OCS) has given my child not only an education, but joy, confidence, and the freedom to learn in the way that fits him best. I'm so grateful we found this school. Highly recommended for any family seeking a supportive, responsive, and truly student-centered learning environment.

Parent of student currently enrolled, age 16