

State of the School Report – 2025

Houghton Academy

Prepared by Dr. Toby A. Travis, Head of School

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INTRODUCTION: OUR NEEDS

I am frequently asked, “What does the Academy need?” When I think of the needs of the Academy, the list can seem enormous and intimidating (to be frank).

Our needs include financial resources far beyond our anticipated income through tuition and current donation levels, updated and expanded facilities and grounds lacking sufficient care, maintenance, and updates, and additional personnel to fully meet the needs of our students.

All these are important and play a role in sustaining and growing our ministry.

However, suppose we step back and examine our needs through a biblical lens. In that case, many of our so-called “needs” are actually “wants”—things we desire for our students’ security, comfort, experience, resources, and success. Some are essential to our ability to continue operating as a school.

However, what we genuinely *need* is FOG. What is FOG? The Favor... Of... God.

Throughout Scripture, we see that God’s favor—not wealth, not buildings, not large numbers—is *the* determining factor in the success of His people. Psalm 127:1 reminds us, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.”* Our efforts, no matter how well-intentioned or well-funded, will be futile without His blessing.



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Like the Israelites in the wilderness who thought they needed meat but truly needed trust in God's provision (Exodus 16), or Martha, who was anxious about many things while Mary chose the "one thing necessary"—sitting at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:41-42)—we, too, must remember that our greatest necessity is not financial security but divine favor.

If we have God's favor, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). With it, doors will open, provisions will come, and hearts will be transformed. As a school community, we must continually seek His favor above all else, knowing He will meet all our true needs.

ACADEMICS & STUDENT PROGRAMS

Houghton Academy continues to flourish academically, embodying our mission of a college-preparatory education within the framework of a Christian worldview. Our goal is to prepare students to live authentically, learn deeply, love boldly, and lead globally for the glory of God. Our commitment to excellence is reflected in ongoing academic advancements, enhanced student support systems, and innovative program development—all grounded in best practices and research-based approaches to student achievement and holistic education.

Our strong partnership with Houghton University (HU) has deepened, with 36 of our 118 students currently enrolled in HU courses, providing them with real college experience while still in high school. This initiative aligns with our mission to LEARN deeply by immersing students in rigorous, university-level coursework that fosters critical thinking, self-discipline, and academic resilience. (Conley, 2012)

To further enhance this opportunity, I am delighted to provide a pre-announcement of a significant addition to our diploma pathways to be made in the coming months. In collaboration with HU, we are formalizing a pathway for students to earn an Associate of Arts Degree from HU upon graduation from the Academy. We hope to formally announce the launch of this new program before the end of this school year, making that pathway available to students starting with the 2025-2026 school year.



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The Associate of Arts degree pathway would then be our highest diploma path in addition to our College Prep, Advanced College Prep, Diploma of Excellence, and Diploma of Excellence and Emphasis. Structured dual enrollment programs significantly improve college readiness and degree attainment (An, 2013).

As an international school where most students are English Language Learners (ELLs), we recognize their diverse needs. Thus, we are restructuring our English program to support ELLs better while simultaneously challenging high-achieving ELLs and English as a first language students. We emphasize the necessity of differentiated instruction to maximize student success (Tomlinson, 2001).

Our approach ensures that all students, regardless of background, can develop strong literacy skills in a supportive yet challenging environment. In most schools throughout the USA, differentiated instruction is consistently among the most challenging teaching methodologies (Fordham). At Houghton Academy, we use differentiated instruction in every classroom every day.

Additionally, we launched IXL, an adaptive online academic support platform that offers remediation and advanced learning opportunities tailored to individual needs. Personalized, technology-driven learning platforms increase student engagement and accelerate skill mastery (Pane et al., 2015).

To further assess student learning and ensure college readiness, we implemented the full SAT/PSAT battery of assessments for students in grades 8–12. The results were outstanding, with Houghton Academy students scoring on average above state, national, and international standards. Although some concerns regarding standardized assessments may be valid, our accrediting authorities, ACSI and MSA, require these to occur annually. Standardized assessments do prepare students for postsecondary education (Maruyama, 2012).

Beyond traditional academics, we have introduced new and innovative programs that develop practical skills, leadership abilities, and personal growth:



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- A self-defense course developed in collaboration with the Allegany County Sheriff's Office promotes personal safety and confidence. (McCaughey, 1997).
- A sound recording and production course utilizing a newly remodeled classroom into a sound studio fosters creativity and technical expertise. As the demand for digital content creation grows, experiential learning in fields like sound engineering prepares students for emerging career opportunities (Kolb, 1984).
- An expanded club program, including Model United Nations, Investment Club, and National History Day, cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and public speaking (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003).

Our commitment to student leadership remains strong, with nine new members inducted into the National Honor Society (NHS) and an active Student Senate shaping campus life and student engagement. These programs align with our mission to LEAD globally, as they cultivate ethical leadership, service-oriented mindsets, and collaboration (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013).

Through these initiatives, Houghton Academy continues providing an academically challenging, Christ-centered, and future-focused education.

SPIRITUAL & COMMUNITY LIFE

At Houghton Academy, faith is not just a part of our curriculum but the foundation of everything we do. Our mission is to provide a college-preparatory education within the framework of a Christian worldview... for the glory of God. This commitment is reflected in how we cultivate spiritual growth, providing opportunities for students to develop a strong, personal faith that will guide them throughout their lives.

This year, we restructured our chapel small groups to align with student interests to foster increased engagement and deeper discussions (Smith & Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 2009).

By allowing students to explore faith in a way that resonates with them personally, we are helping them to LEARN deeply and build a lasting biblical foundation.



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Our student-led Worship Team has flourished. I recently heard from the mother of one of our new students that the highlight of the Chapel program for her daughter is seeing her classmates lead worship.

By the way - please mark your calendars as it is with anticipation; we are looking forward to the Worship Team's Night of Praise coming up on May 7. These experiences cultivate students' gifts and encourage them to live authentically in their faith. Worship has been shown to play a vital role in spiritual renewal, community bonding, and mental well-being (Koenig, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2012).

Although many of our students may not yet identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ, we know that through music, prayer, and testimony, the students who participate in the Worship Team engage in their faith journey and relationship with God as they lead their peers in worship. I developed as a young Christian through participating in a Youth For Christ performing group. The songs we sang served as my catechism experience, learning about the characteristics of God, His grace, and His care for me. Many of our students are having that same experience.

This year, as part of IGNITE Week, students and faculty engaged in unique learning opportunities related to various skills, talents, and interests. They also participated in meaningful service opportunities, putting love into action. Acts of service foster empathy, gratitude, and a long-term commitment to community engagement (Post, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*, 2007).

Through service, our students learn what it means to LOVE boldly, following Christ's command to serve others selflessly.

For the second consecutive year, we were blessed to receive an anonymous donation of Bibles in the heart languages of our international students. This initiative reflects a commitment to ensuring that every student can encounter God's Word in the language that speaks most deeply to their heart. The power of engaging with Scripture in one's native language cannot be overstated, as it fosters more profound understanding and personal connection (Hull, *Bible Translation and Spiritual Formation*, 2015).



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Providing these Bibles affirms our dedication to helping students LEARN deeply and LIVE authentically in their faith.

Each initiative reflects our mission to develop students who grow academically, spiritually, and morally. As we continue to foster a Christ-centered learning environment, we remain committed to equipping students to be faithful leaders who impact the world for God's glory.

FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Our dedicated faculty and staff are central to the Academy's success. As I have frequently stated, our faculty and staff *are* the Academy. Our school is *not* our buildings, grounds, students, or curriculum. Houghton Academy *is* our faculty and staff. They are the essence of the school.

This year, we achieved 100% compliance with ACSI and state certification requirements for eligible faculty, a testament to our commitment to professional excellence. Teacher certification is directly related to higher student outcomes (Darling-Hammond 2000; Goldhaber & Brewer 2000).

In addition to certification, our faculty's involvement in the accreditation process of other schools and our own provides a valuable opportunity for professional development. Several of our faculty members have recently served on accreditation teams for other schools, gaining insights that directly enhance our instructional programs. Faculty involvement in accreditation leads to institutional and instructional improvements (Toch 2003; Peterson 2016).

Several of our faculty members are pursuing advanced degrees (both master's and doctoral levels). Teachers with graduate-level education contribute significantly to increased student learning (Rice 2003, Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor 2010).

This year, we have made key hires to strengthen our instructional and operational pursuit of excellence. Our faculty and staff bring expertise, passion, and commitment to



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the Academy's mission, ensuring continued academic excellence, student life, and campus operations. Biographical information for all of our team members is available on our website. I encourage you to check it out. Go to the [faculty/staff page](#) and click on a photo for more information about each team member.

This year, we completed a long-overdue and comprehensive revision of the Employee Manual to ensure compliance with board policies, accreditation standards, and New York State labor codes. Clearly defined policies contribute to faculty satisfaction, retention, and school stability (Ingersoll, 2001).

Additionally, we introduced new teacher evaluation and professional development systems rooted in research-based best practices. Professional development that is job-embedded and collaborative is most effective in promoting long-term teacher growth and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

With these policy updates, faculty hires, and professional development initiatives, Houghton Academy remains committed to equipping educators and students with the resources and support needed for transformative learning experiences.

STUDENT SUPPORT & BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT

To support students holistically, we launched a Student Support Team (SST) to proactively review low-grade reports and implement intervention strategies that foster academic success and personal growth. This initiative aligns with research emphasizing the importance of early academic and behavioral intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The SST consists of key faculty members, including the Head of School, Academic Dean, ELL Coordinator, Spiritual Life Coordinator, and Boarding Program Assistant, ensuring a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to student support.

Data-driven student intervention models are highly effective and result in measurable improvements in student performance (Vaughn et al., 2010). Furthermore, non-academic interventions, such as mentoring and social-emotional learning, improve students' sense of belonging and overall well-being (Durlak et al., 2011). By combining



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these best practices, our SST ensures that academic struggles, behavioral concerns, and emotional well-being are addressed holistically rather than in isolation.

Recognizing the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' ability to adapt to structure, rules, and behavioral expectations, we are continually refining our discipline and behavior policies to align with research-based practices in restorative discipline and positive behavior reinforcement.

Zero-tolerance policies often fail to address the root causes of behavioral issues and disproportionately impact students from diverse backgrounds (Losen & Skiba, 2010). In contrast, progressive discipline plans focused on restorative justice, emphasizing relationship-building and accountability, have been shown to improve school climate (Gregory et al., 2016).

Additionally, it is essential to explicitly teach behavioral expectations rather than assuming students will naturally adopt them (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Given the pandemic's disruption to social and behavioral development, many students benefit from structured guidance in self-regulation, social interactions, and conflict resolution (Reinke et al., 2020).

Houghton Academy remains committed to nurturing students' holistic intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual development by combining proactive academic interventions with an equitable, research-supported behavioral framework.

FINANCIAL URGENCY AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Houghton Academy remains deeply committed to providing an exceptional college preparatory education based on a Christian worldview. However, achieving this mission requires more than academic excellence—it necessitates a learning environment that is safe, healthy, and conducive to student success.

While our Annual Fund has grown to over \$184,000 as of yesterday, we remain significantly short of our \$250,000 need by the end of June. More critically, tuition



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revenue alone cannot sustain the Academy's financial future or provide for necessary facility improvements. Without significant external funding, the Academy faces serious challenges in maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure, which will seriously challenge its ability to operate in the years to come.

To continue providing a safe and effective learning environment, the Academy must address the following urgent facility needs:

1. Replacement of the HVAC units—Almost all these systems are outdated, inefficient, and increasingly costly. Our existing units were installed with an anticipated life span of twenty years and are now approximately thirty years old. We received a quote on replacing the school building's HVAC units for approximately \$500,000.00.
2. A roof replacement project for the school building—The aging roof poses a significant risk to the structural integrity of the building, classroom environments, and overall safety. We anticipate needing an additional \$500,000.00 to replace the school building's roof.
3. Renovations in dormitories and housing – As an international boarding school, Houghton Academy must ensure that student and employee housing meets high safety, comfort, and well-being standards. Our residential facilities have been described as “rustic.” We are currently operating two dorm buildings, two house dorms, and one house for faculty. We are also renovating a home to accommodate more students and staff for the coming school year. I do not currently have a complete estimate of the funds needed to renovate these properties, but the need is undoubtedly in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

These critical infrastructure expenses far exceed what tuition revenue alone can support, even if we operate at a capacity with full-pay students in every bed. Substantial donor contributions, grants, and external funding partnerships of approximately 1.5 million dollars will be essential to securing the Academy's future. As stewards of Christian education, we must call upon our alumni, families, and friends to

invest in the legacy of Houghton Academy, ensuring that our mission can continue decades into the future.

Together, I believe we can build a sustainable future that reflects our shared commitment to excellence in education and faith.

BOARDING RETENTION AND THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Boarding student retention rates at Houghton Academy have been lower than desired, reflecting a broader trend among boarding schools nationwide. Many institutions, including ours, are grappling with the effects of rising mental health challenges among teenagers, which have been exacerbated by digital dependence, social media exposure, and the lasting psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The increase in anxiety, depression, and social disengagement among teenagers is well-documented (Haidt 2024) as the shift from a play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood—marked by reduced face-to-face engagement, increased screen time and social comparison—has contributed to a lack of resilience in young people and a direct cause for the increased mental health issues.

This decline in resilience has direct implications for boarding schools, where students must develop independence, navigate structured routines, and engage meaningfully in a community setting.

According to a 2023 report by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), *"boarding schools have seen an increase in student difficulty with self-regulation and emotional adaptation, leading to higher attrition rates and increased mental health support needs"* (NAIS, 2023). Due to these issues, all boarding schools are struggling to retain students.

Beyond social media's influence, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered adolescent behavior. Research confirms that pandemic-related disruptions have led to:



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1. Reduced responsiveness to rules and authority: Many students spent extended periods in remote learning environments with fewer structured expectations. As a result, returning to a structured school setting—especially a boarding environment—has been challenging. Students now exhibit lower frustration tolerance and greater resistance to authority than in previous generations (CDC, 2023).
2. Increased academic disengagement: The pandemic widened learning gaps and disrupted motivation (McKinsey & Company, 2022).
3. Greater difficulty with emotional self-regulation: Adolescents report higher stress levels and a reduced ability to manage emotions effectively (APA, 2023).

Houghton Academy is a college preparatory boarding and day school, not a reform school, rehabilitation center, or mental health clinic. While we are deeply committed to fostering student success and well-being, we must recognize that our resources for supporting students with mental and emotional challenges are extremely limited.

- We do not have a psychologist or professionally trained mental health personnel on campus.
- Our faculty and staff provide mentorship and guidance but are not trained mental health professionals.
- We cannot provide therapeutic interventions for students struggling with anxiety, depression, or behavioral disorders such as screen or substance addiction.

Given these realities, we must always ask the critical question: *"Can this student succeed here?"*

Success at Houghton Academy requires the following:

1. A willingness to develop self-control.
2. The ability to live within a structured environment with clear expectations.
3. A readiness to engage in a community with shared responsibilities.
4. Basic emotional resilience to navigate challenges with support but not professional intervention.



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If students struggle in these areas, Houghton Academy is *not* the best fit for them. We have had to withdraw students who cannot demonstrate the attributes of success simply because we do not have the resources to support them.

We acknowledge the growing mental health crisis affecting teenagers. Still, we must also ensure that students placed in our care can thrive within our structured, nurturing environment, yet with limited support resources—one that prepares them for college and beyond but does not function as a therapeutic or behavioral intervention program.

Houghton Academy remains committed to preparing young people for academic and personal success in a structured, faith-based community by maintaining realistic expectations about our capabilities and ensuring that admitted students can succeed within our environment.

CONCLUSION

Houghton Academy remains a thriving institution dedicated to authentic Christian education, academic excellence, and student success. However, we acknowledge that the academy's future sustainability depends on strategic financial growth, improved infrastructure, and expanded student support systems.

Our commitment to living authentically means we remain faithful to our Christian mission. We ensure that students receive a Christ-centered education that shapes their academic and spiritual lives.

Our rigorous academic programs reflect our focus on deep learning, which challenges students to think critically and engage deeply with their studies.

Loving boldly is evident in how our community supports one another, engages in service projects, and demonstrates Christ-like compassion in everyday interactions.

Leading globally is the culmination of these efforts, preparing students to enter the world as informed, compassionate, and visionary leaders.



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We invite our entire community—parents, alumni, donors, and community members—to partner with us in prayer, generosity, and advocacy as we continue to live authentically, learn deeply, love boldly, and lead globally for the glory of God.

Your support is more crucial than ever. Thank you for being part of the Houghton Academy community.

~ Dr. Toby A. Travis, Head of School, March 20, 2025

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