

Why I chose an alternative school:

"I chose Lady Evelyn's alternative program because it allows teachers the latitude to access and foster creative minds and emerging abilities in unique and innovative ways while utilizing a cross-disciplinary, integrative approach. My children receive educational and real life skills from the many opportunities to learn in out-of-classroom settings and off-site locations, and from a socially inclusive approach that engages with perspectives of fellow students of varying ages, parents, and members of the community." - *Submitted by a Parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

"I'm thrilled with the idea that in the Alternative Program, my child is being taught *how* to learn, not *what* to learn. This is going to set him up for a lifetime of curiosity and exploration. Watching my child interact in situations in and out of school, I see a passion for learning and willingness to explore new ideas and follow through on ideas that I think are directly linked to the learning environment of Lady Evelyn Alternative School." - *Submitted by Teresa McLean, parent of a grade 2 student at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

"Not only is Lady Evelyn Alternative our local school, it's a wonderful choice for our family. Families and community members are so involved within the school that it creates a bright and welcoming environment. That environment of warmth is echoed by the teachers in the classroom. The Alternative school concept allows our kids to complete all of the same work and qualifications as other students in the OCDSB, but in a way that appreciates that kids learn in different ways and walks a balance between teaching our kids and allowing them to complete tasks in a way that intrinsically helps them map their own success. It's this type of skill that will serve our kids well in the future when responsibility and self-awareness will be so important to their growth and impact on society." - *Submitted by a Parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

"I have worked as a teacher at Lady Evelyn Alternative School in Ottawa for nearly 5 years. The philosophy of alternative schools' programmes speaks to the creative forever-learner in me. It is this philosophy that brought me to teaching.

At our school, educators use the 7 tenets to shape our process for providing curriculum and to build students understanding of themselves as life-long learners and their connection to community. We have regular meetings with the whole school where we explore our tenets and see how they connect to us in our daily life at school and at home.

With these ideas in mind, we have used innovative approaches and developed community-based projects and events, such as our annual Cardboard Arcade Games' Day, or our annual Bread Festival- connecting the diverse cultures in our school and our upcoming Earth Day Celebrations. We will be holding a weekend of events, collecting e-waste, bringing in our famous Science Sue, from Let's Talk Science to share some of her ecology-based wisdom, parent demonstrations of environmentally-friendly soap-making methods. My class has been nurturing organic seeds of edible plants to sell on Earth Day to raise funds for a garden in our play-yard. Significant support – seeds, soil, geotextiles, has been given to us through the connections we have made to local businesses and the wonderful seed sellers of the Ottawa Valley. Students have been learning about ecologically sound home gardening

and how to take care of living things. We have connected in a pilot project with University of Ottawa Engineering & Science to bring in workshops on Robotics. We regularly collaborate with Boards of Education in Spain to bring teachers over to learn about our methods of teaching and for shared learning. One of our wonderful staff spearheads the Shannen's Dream project each year. Through this students have opportunity for reflection on their personal values, rights of all people, civic responsibility and more.

One of the most exciting things about our school is the planning for learning and the day-to-day work that happens in our classrooms, where curriculum from different subjects merge, to create works of art; where large-scale projects, incorporating all subjects, emerge from a desire to improve the learning around math problem-solving.

As a student and as a teacher, there is such a depth of possibility for learning in an alternative school setting." – *Submitted by Kim Symes, Grade1,2 Classroom Teacher*

Cooperation & Teamwork:

"We have been asked, as parents with a child who is currently enrolled in Grade 1 at Lady Evelyn Alternative School, to provide a testimonial as to why we chose an alternative school for our son. It is my pleasure to provide this testimonial, since we believe that Alternative Elementary Programs have an important place within the broader school system and as such should be appropriately funded, promoted and supported by the School Board.

Within the seven tenets of the Alternative Philosophy, the one that spoke most significantly to us relate to competition – a social value which is unavoidable in broader society. Too often, cooperation and teamwork are sacrificed upon the altar of zero-sum competitive values. We wanted our son to experience education in a different way, within a structure that emphasized cooperation and teamwork in all aspects of the school without necessarily eliminating the more positive aspects of healthy competition within the academic experience. Emphasizing and motivating our child with a deeper understanding of success that transcends hierarchical reward structures is extremely important to us, and this is one of the clarion reasons why we chose the Alternative Elementary Program for our son at Lady Evelyn Alternative School." - *Submitted by parents of a grade 1 student at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

"Cooperation builds opportunities to learn and opportunities to build community, with no one excluded. The Alternative Program speaks to the value of intrinsic rewards, which is that good feeling and satisfaction from knowing you've done your best, instead of requiring an external reward of some sort. This philosophy has nurtured an inner strength in my children, where kindness, not competition, rules" – *Submitted by a parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

Innovative Approaches:

“I like Innovative Approaches because I like big fun events and I think it is pretty cool that we get to learn a ton of stuff while having big fun events like Caine’s Arcade.” - Submitted by Rohan Gillis, grade 2 student at Lady Evelyn Alternative School

Balanced Student-directed & Teacher-directed Learning:

“What I love about the alternative classroom is that instead of a teacher standing at the front and rows of kids being "taught at", there are no rows; teachers are more often found right in the middle of the throng of students. Teacher and students are collaborators in their collective learning.” - Submitted by Duncan Gillis, parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School

Multi-age Groupings:

“Multi-age groupings have always been an important element to me as a classroom teacher. I have enjoyed working with my students for more than one year, having a split grade often allows me to do just that. It gives me that much longer to learn about my students: what motivates them, what interests them, the areas where they can be pushed, and the areas where I need to relax with them. Students remaining with me for more than one school year also get to know me better as a teacher, but perhaps more importantly, they can have a greater hand in creating and influencing the learning environment that they work in each day. They learn to take pride and ownership over our classroom space, our routines and our expectations for the kind of work we do on a day-to-day basis. Multi-age groupings also allow students to connect with children from other grades. I believe these opportunities strengthen our school community as a whole. Activities such as reading buddies and multi-age group activity days allow the children to meet the older and younger students in our school. This can often help facilitate mentoring opportunities and also helps to build connections on the schoolyard.” – Submitted by Geoff Paisley, Teacher (JK/SK and Resource) at Lady Evelyn Alternative PS

“One of the features our family has enjoyed the most about the alternative program is the purposeful use of multi-age groupings. In our experience our children have benefited from being on both sides of peer to peer teaching situations. When they are part of the younger side of the equation, they have the opportunity to learn from another child who might be able to explain things in terms that are more approachable or easier to understand. When they are on the older side of the equation, they have the chance to reinforce learning concepts and experience a clear sense of pride in being the "teacher". This promotes the establishment of respectful relationships between students regardless of age.

Another benefit specific to multi-age group classrooms is that the children have the opportunity to learn at the pace that is right for their learning since there are materials presented for more than just one grade level. Students in the younger grade might benefit from learning subjects a little ahead of their grade and students in the higher grade might benefit from the reinforcement of earlier concepts

which helps maintain a strong base. Being with a particular teacher for more than one year definitively has its advantages. We have found this particularly helpful in the second (and even third year) year with the same teacher in terms of easier adjustment period at the beginning of the school year, the teacher truly knows the students better and knows how to best motivate them and the teacher can assess learning, growth and development over a longer period of time.” - *Submitted by a parent of one former student and one current grade 5 student at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

Integrated Curriculum:

“Learning has much more meaning when we recognize that subjects don’t exist in individual bubbles. In the alternative program, subjects are explored in a way that recognizes the interconnectedness of many subjects, so that those subjects have relevance, and are interesting because of the multitude of ways you can approach them. I heard a teacher at Lady Evelyn Alternative School deliver a math problem to a multi-age group of kids. She called on a variety of curriculum areas including social studies, language, drama and of course math. Drawing from the popular book series, *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, the problem to solve was "Percy met three satyrs and 3 centaurs. How many legs were there altogether, including Percy's?" Students posed as these mythical creatures (drama and social studies), read and discussed the problem (language) and solved it using a variety of strategies demonstrated by the students (math). There were different ways to arrive at the answer, and the different ages and styles of learners all had their needs and interests met. Such a brilliant way to engage all learners, and shows the interconnectedness of many subjects in learning.” – *Submitted by a parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

Family & Community-centered School Environment:

“This testimonial is from the perspective of a teacher and parent, working together over many years at Lady Evelyn Alternative School. Our parent/teacher partnership began twelve years ago when my eldest son was in Danielle’s class for the first of two years in her multi-age class. Now my youngest son is at the school, and our partnership continues.

Danielle welcomes all to engage and participate in the learning process in her class, and in the larger school community, for the benefit of all involved. More hands on deck, variety in skills shared, more active participants in the education and lives of our children is like watching a thriving village caring for our children.

At times that has meant parents with particular skills or strengths have been welcomed to be active partners in sharing that skill with the class. Over the years, I have seen or shared art projects, music, dancing, meditation, social activism, the making of a movie and more; all contributions made possible by Danielle’s open door, mind and heart.

Other times, this partnership has emphasized brainstorming and creative exploration as we looked for new ways to enhance the curriculum and the alternative program.

At all times, this genuine friendship has meant creative engagement, respect for one another, open communication and meaningful learning.” - *Submitted by Ananda Kelly (long-time Lady Evelyn*

Alternative School parent) and Danielle Fontaine (even longer-time Lady Evelyn Alternative School teacher)

“Lady Evelyn Alternative School has created a welcoming family and community-centered school environment that is key to the alternative education philosophy. Home and school do not feel like two separate entities that a child has to navigate; rather, it is a partnership. Parents are encouraged to share their expertise within the classroom, which helps to create strong roots in the community when students, parents, and teachers interact in such a meaningful way. As a parent volunteer, I am always impressed with the number of grandparents who participate in school events which helps to further strengthen the connection between home and school. It really feels like a collaboration at Lady Evelyn Alternative School.” - *Submitted by a parent of a grade 5 student at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

“A community is like a big team, and we are all members of that team at Lady Evelyn Alternative School: students, teachers, staff, parents and other community members too. And because we are all part of this big team, we work together to help one another as far as we can reach.” – *Submitted by a parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*

Ongoing Assessment & Evaluation:

“By placing the emphasis on student-led conferences, self-evaluation and personal growth instead of letter grades, the alternative model fosters an environment where learning is never-ending, not final, and holds intrinsic personal value rather than value being assigned externally by teachers, parents or institutions.” – *Submitted by a parent at Lady Evelyn Alternative School*