

HISTORY OF STAR CHARTER SCHOOL

written by Alyssa O'Connell, Benjamin Huggins and Andrew Dixon

edited by Mr. Barnett

Legacies are always rooted in the desire for better opportunities, and the birth of local entity Star Charter School is no different. Wanting to give his daughter more time to focus on her passion of figure skating, Austin veterinarian Dr. Kelly Drake dreamed of a compact school day that would not forfeit high-caliber rigor. Charles Collins, owner of Chaparral Ice (the rink where Dr. Drake's daughter practiced) had a similar vision as both of his daughters were also involved in time-intensive activities. Personal tutors and private school failed to suffice, for they proved to be financial burdens. By discussing their mutual problem and looking into alternative public education, both founders created a solution that still stands today.

Initially formed in the backroom offices of the skating rink, the new school, Chaparral Star Academy, Inc., was meager in appearance. Consisting of one classroom and six students, the then-private school had no idea of its future impact. A few years later, the board applied for and received a state-granted charter as it now housed a mere thirty students. The charter included a fifteen student limit on classes, creating a more intimate learning atmosphere and upholding the fundamental vision of rigorous education. The design of the school was unique: two separate four-hour sessions (a morning school and an afternoon one). This structure allowed for flexible scheduling – a need for athletes similar to the daughters of the founders. As word spread of its philosophy and mission, Star quickly outgrew its small boundaries at the rink, making it necessary to relocate. In the fall of 2001, a small house right off the interstate accompanied by several portables became the humble home of Star Charter School. Over the years, gymnasts, equestriennes, hockey players, figure skaters, and other young athletes strolled along the sidewalks of the simple, new and innovative campus.

Although it was meant to be a temporary location, the school remained in the house for close to a decade, with the gradual addition of four more portables to the gravel parking lot. With a current population of over 300 students, Star Charter School has witnessed tremendous growth along with increasing pride. Though the setting is modest, the students' ambition is surely not. Shorter hours do not imply less work; on the contrary, Star's kids work harder than those at most other schools in order to meet the high standards set by the teachers, administrators, and governing board. Each four hour session is formatted into six academic periods, each period lasting forty minutes. There are no lunch breaks or passing periods provided. Students are expected to arrive on time each day, eager to further their education. Lecture time is limited to this compressed schedule, thus time maintenance and strong work ethic are necessities for the students. A majority of the high school students choose to take AP classes, while others opt to take college courses concurrently to earn dual credit.

In January 2011, the school moved to its permanent campus sans concrete hallways and portables, and has restored the more formal name of Chaparral Star Academy to reflect its exemplary status and professionalism. Each student has his/her own reason for attending this school-of-choice. The school's obtainment of a 2007 National Charter School of the Year Award, its current TEA-Exemplary rating (2 years in a row), its nationally ranked oceanography team, and its receipt of over thirty Gold Performance Awards illuminate Star's excellence. The scholastic community of Austin should definitely be aware of this small charter school, as the legacy it has established is eclipsed only by its humble beginnings.