

Transcript: Parent Sharing at ALC-NYC Summer '17



On June 20th, 5 ALC-NYC parents attended our summer training program to share about their experiences. Questions were pulled from the audience of training participants.

I'm **Taasha Ramsay**. My son is Sterling. He is 8. And this will be our third year at this ALC.

Hi, I'm **Rachel**. My son Even is 11. And he just finished his first year at ALC. He had been in a public school, and we switched this past year.

I'm **Sarah**. Saylor is 9 and Zoe is 7 and a half, and this is their first full year. Last year we came in around February/March, smack dab in the middle of the public school year.

I'm **Diane**. My son Xander is 11. He will be completing his first full year at ALC. We too came from a public school environment and it is amazing here and we love it.

I'm **Alex** and my son, Douglas, just finished his fourth year at ALC. So he's one of the people that have been here the longest...him and maybe two other kids.

Introductions

Alex: So Douglas was in a traditional school for three years, and he was very unhappy. He used to cry to go to school every day. There was a lot of complaining...And I can't say that there was anything in particular about it, but I think that the traditional model of school just didn't work for him. And we said to him, you know, "What's the nice part about school?" and he said, "Sometimes when we sit on the rug in circle time and I can think my own thoughts..." And that sort of stuck with me. I thought it was kind of poignant.

He continued to be unhappy, and we didn't really know about any alternative schools...We hadn't really thought about it. So we thought the only alternative would be homeschooling him. So we enrolled him as a homeschooler for second grade. Then as the summer went on I got cold feet about it: I was worried about myself---what my life would be like running him around from place to place all day---and for him, especially as an only child, how would he have a dedicated group of children to make a peer group with and to fight with and to play with and to have good times and bad times with. It seemed to me that with the homeschooling model you can work hard to make that happen, and people do, but it's a lot harder to get that consistent group of children to get together for long periods of time.

So it was the fall, and I hadn't seen any other alternative, and he went back to his old school. And he cried for another year and really hated it, so we thought we *have* to find something else. And then we heard Peter Gray talk. Here at this space, in fact, and that's how we were introduced to this space. I was googling and found his blog and was like..."Wow a place like this exists...how wonderful..." and he came and visited. And he loved it. And that was that.

It's really been the right move for him. He's really happy here. There's no more crying. He loves school...He's sad now that it's the summer. He's really--well, some children participate more and some participate less and that's fine, it's all good--he's definitely more on the participating end. He joins a lot of the offerings that happen here and gets a lot out of them. And he has no intention of going anywhere else. He'll be here until twelfth grade.

Diane: My son and I came from a public school environment, and he'd been in the system from kindergarten through fourth grade. The principal of his elementary school passed away, which in turn, unfortunately, changed the culture of the school. Kids were starting to bully each other...Kids who had known each other since they were five years old had started to bully each other. And Xander was just so not having it.

Every day when I would pick him up, it was like he was being freed from prison. He was just so glad to be outside, so glad to see me. Then every morning it was this struggle...dragging him back into the building for him to go to school. It was completely awful. It broke my heart. I was actually looking for other schools in district 3 or maybe district 2. Because we live in district 5. I wasn't finding anything I thought would be suitable for him. So the end result was going to be me homeschooling him, which would have been a disaster for both of us. But that was my last

resort! Until a co-worker told me about ALC. She said, "I'll call Tomis," because Tomis was here at the time, "and see if they have a visiting week." And you now, I'm coming from this public school mentality, so I'm thinking "visiting week" was one day out of the week where he could come and hang out for one day of school. Then Tomis sent me this agreement saying "Ok...he's coming and it's the whole week and you need to sign this waiver." I was like, what? And then 'Ok...we'll still try with it..."

He came the first day, and when I picked him up he was in love with this place. By the conclusion of his visiting week, he was on the phone harassing me: 'Did Ryan send him a letter? When was he going back?' I was like...give it a minute. I'm sure he'll say something. Then we got word that he was in.

I'm big with closure, so Xander continued at his old school until the end of the school year, because I wanted him to be able to say good-byes and to close that chapter--he started here in September. It has been amazing.

I mean... "Mom, come on, we have to go. I'm gonna be late for school," and, "Can I stay another hour or half-an-hour at school?" And "I don't wanna leave yet." This place has been wonderful for him. His self-expression... There's no limits on his creativity. He's a STEM kid, so he likes to build things... to create these different things. This school has been so nurturing for that, for him. He can have these discussions, which usually make me want to pull my hair out, about programming or designing or things like that. Here, he's found a home, a community, where he can have these conversations with facilitators and they understand. They embrace him. This has truly saved us.

Sarah: I'll speak briefly. So Saylor had kindergarten and first grade, and Zoe had first grade and--well, half of first grade. I wanted to homeschool them at first, and I quickly realized that I wouldn't be able to do it on my own, not the way that I wanted to. I was having health challenges and I just couldn't be present for them and for me, taking care of myself at the same time, the way that I wanted.

Quickly we ran into public school policies, like the homework policy. Saylor couldn't keep up with the homework requirements. Because... I'd pick them up from school, and after school she would need to exercise. And the two of them would want to play on the playground for two hours. After school. And... we wouldn't get home until five o'clock, average. And then we as a family now had a problem where the physical fitness was more important to us than whether their homework was done. So right away my values were clashing with those of the public school system.

Saylor was getting farther and farther behind in work, and she was getting frustrated about going to school and getting confronted by her teacher... you know... "When are you going to turn your homework in" kind of questions. She felt a lot of pressure, and there was a lot of crying everyday before school. And Zoe... could never find socks that were comfortable. She would try

on two pairs of socks, three pairs of socks. We were two blocks away from school and we were late. Almost every single day.

Now, as you can imagine, we're one of the early families. A couple days a week, we open the school before the facilitators get here for other families and people who arrive early.

The way we found out about the school is that my husband and I were at a transformational weekend, called PAX: Understanding Women. We were both kind of astonished the first day to see a 12-year-old kid, who was Timo, and Eric Bear. At one point the workshop leader called them up on stage and introduced them and talked a little bit about the school. We were both like..."This is interesting. This sounds kind of like what we would like for our kids." So we arranged for a visiting week for Saylor, and it was in November. And she loved it, but we weren't in a position to commit. We were like..."Ok the holidays are coming, we're getting back to regular life...."

Then the Peter Gray talk at Spotify came up and I got us tickets to go. For both of us, that was the zinger. The remainder of--- Well, for me, I have a master's degree in English. I really appreciate academia. I love research. I love theory. So it was medicine for me to hear an academic, who had a kid who was struggling and put them into a more free environment and was able to see them thrive. And at that point I was like 'I'm willing to do this' but I understood right away that there was a leap of faith there. That I was going to have to take...and was really scared about.

And I talk to other parents about it as often as I can, whenever I feel it. And I think a lot of new parents come in the door also having that 'I'm taking a leap of faith and I'm really uncomfortable with it, but we're gonna do it anyway because it feels sort of right...well...really right, but still really scary.'

So that was where we came from, and after that Peter Gray talk we scheduled Zoe for a visiting week and...when it became apparent that they were both in love with the school we made the switch. Mid-school year. And that's it.

Rachel: Let's see...I'm a Jewish educator, at a private school. And my husband and I really wanted our son to go to a public school, because we really wanted diversity. We wanted him in an inclusive environment. We tried a public school...there were a lot of great things about the school...Umm...But at a certain point we realized that we'd always wanted our son to be an outside-the-box thinker and have his own mind. He loves learning, loves exploring. And...the setting that he was in--which was a pretty progressive public school--there was a lot of pressure to be a particular way, to think a particular way. Our son needs to move around a lot when he's thinking; there's not a lot of space for that in public school. So. That environment, in addition to some of the social pressures to fit in, weren't really working for our son.

We found ALC--via a Google search--and he had a visiting week, and he loved it. We decided to come and...I guess I'll say a few things about some successes for him here. First of all, even more than before, he has a really good sense of who he is as a person. He knows what he thinks, and he stands up for what he thinks. He speaks his mind. So he's really continued to gain a lot of confidence here. He loves exploring, and this is an environment where he gets to choose, with the facilitators and other young people, how to use his mind. And I think that flexibility has been great for him. And the other thing is...just...the sense of community in this space is really amazing. My son is really close with some of the young people, less close with some of the other young people, but it's really a community experience. And they have each others' backs. I've seen that in lots of different ways. So it's been a really great place for him to thrive, as a person and as a learner. We're thrilled to be here.

Like Sarah was saying, we have questions. I had questions when I first came in...There are still things I'm learning every day and...I guess...having the community and getting to talk to other parents and the facilitators when you have issues is reassuring. This model isn't really out there. It's not what we're used to thinking of when we think of 'school,' so it is a really big leap of faith. But totally one that's worth it.

Taasha: Like all the other parents...Sterling initially started in public school. The system didn't really work for him...He was isolated from other children early on, and forced to take tons of tests and...Sterling is a really good test-taker, so once they realized that he was just in a room, with headphones on, in front of a computer, taking tests to see what he could do. And then that became more oppressive for him because, it became a weird situation where socially he was not developing properly. He didn't know the kids in the class he was assigned to, and he had a desk next to the principal's desk. So that was his buddy every day. And they got along famously...as one can imagine. They adored each other very much, but that just didn't seem like a relationship that could continue on indefinitely and have him be a normal person. He also has, like, Even and Dougie and Xander and Saylor and Zoe, he had his own thoughts about how things should go, and he's never been shy about sharing them. So he'd been kicked out of a number of schools for sharing his thoughts. About...hypocrisy and...all kinds of things.

Sterling is the one that found ALC, because we had been to a number of progressive schools, and he was like 'that's not for me,' so he was searching and was like...“Let's go to this place.” And I'm like...‘Let's look at this place.’ So I called. And I spoke to Abby. And they had a visiting week coming up...It was very serendipitous. And he was like, “No, that's the place, we're just going to go there. Start paying tuition.” He's very good at that. Got good foresight.

He came here the first day and was like “I can be myself here. We're staying.” He wasn't even accepted yet, he just decided he was staying on his own. Then after the end of the week, we talked about it a little bit and...he really did decide this was a place he could be himself.

I was talking a little bit just now with Ryan and Abby and I was saying how much Sterling has grown here. I used to complain a little bit...I was like, “He's really just going to sit and play

Minecraft all day? What is he doing?” But he’s sort of evolved into ‘Oh I think I want to be a coder’ and he used to complain that he didn’t like books--except that secretly he really loves books, but he also explained to me the other day that he just wasn’t comfortable saying out loud that he likes books because other people would look at him and be like...‘Oh, you’re a nerd. You don’t want to bounce a basketball or play with a soccer ball--you wanna read a book.’ Now he’s so comfortable...and that comes from the confidence that’s built here. He got up this morning and said he missed Chuck. He didn’t even say good morning; he said, I really miss Chuck. It becomes this community that’s really unlike anything I’ve seen anywhere else. I mean...I want him to be a normal person...but, like, what is normal? So I think I just want him to be the best Sterling he can be, and he can do that here.



How long did it take deschooling the kids? From your answers it seems like none. And...what would be the major achievement of your children? Again it sounds like you answered being themselves, right? So...what is the biggest struggle you’ve had being here?

Rachel: Can I just say one thing about the deschooling? I think it actually depends on the young person, family life, previous experience, and...so many factors. So I think...I sounds like most of our young people fit in quickly but...Even with my son there was a transition period. He might even still be transitioning. Like Taasha was saying, my son spends a lot of time playing Minecraft and....I think it’s actually great...and I have questions about it. But I think he just needs time to find his way. And I remember a conversation I had, I think with Ryan, early on

about really needing patience and a sense of trust that if we give them the space to be themselves and love learning again, or maybe they haven't lost that--that they will find their way. So I do think that it's a process that looks different for everyone.

Alex: I would say that for Douglas' biggest achievement, I really saw him go from a very shy introverted child at his old school to one who's really not like that at all. I think he feels very confident here. He joins meetings, he participates. He even volunteers to lead things and organize things...That was a big--he really wasn't like that. And maybe part of it was growing up, but I don't think so. I think a lot of it was being in a small, nurturing, set environment here and being able to grow.

[Ryan shares that he's seen Douglas grow much more adventurous and confident in physical offerings over the past few years.]

He's much more open minded about what he agrees to do. He's open to everything...not saying 'this isn't for me' or 'I don't like that.' He's just...open to try things.

Diane: I'd say with Xander, what I'd call his biggest accomplishment this year is that he's learning Japanese. He's learning to speak Japanese, so all through my house, whenever I give him something...he's speaking Japanese to me. Unfortunately I'm language challenged, so I can't pick it up as easily, but I'm trying.

His difficulty...What I've heard is that his volume has been an issue. What I think is...learning how to move...He's been in public school so long, and this is such a different world. Him owning the responsibility of being responsible for his self and his actions throughout the course of the day. You know, no one's on you about your volume...someone spoke to you once. You need to understand that you need to maintain your volume at a certain level...You need to make the decision of whether you want to go to the math offering or you want to go to this offering and they're at the same time...No one's gonna tell you 'You need to go to this one.' You need to make that conscious decision for yourself. So he's...I think that's the difficulty for him. Cuz he's only eleven, so he's learning to make these choices and own the results of them. But I love it, because it gives him...There are so many great offerings here, so it gives him so many great benefits. Either way he chooses is wonderful.

Sarah: For me, on the deschooling note, I'm still deschooling. That's part of why coming to these things helps me: it helps me deschool myself. But their adjustment period was a lot faster than mine. Achievement wise, I think the biggest thing was them literally making the shift from public school to this kind of environment. It required that they decide what is it that they want to do. They have to set intentions, so...In our home life I started seeing that difference. They would announce: "This is what I want to do today." Them going from that push system to the pull system, in that process...they're both way more self-expressed. At one point when Zoe was in public school she said, "Mom, we can't even whistle!" In first grade. And I was like..."No." That's totally f-ed up.

They're both so self-expressed. That's just...not really an achievement, it's more of a by-product of the shift. Um...But, I've seen a lot of responsibility. I've seen them both be able to take on responsibility a lot more. That's also the biggest challenge...owning when they've made a mistake...particularly for my younger one. The older one doesn't have that same challenge. I think it's developmental, too. But those are the current challenges. And also, going back to the deschooling of the parent, I'm dealing with...I want them to have a certain amount of math, of reading, of this, of that...um...but...I realized from hearing the share earlier, about studying with the kids and how the facilitators do that, that's really what's most important to me. It's that they get...studying. I don't really care the subject. I want them to get... 'When I'm into something, this is how I'm going to go about it: I'll read about it. I'll watch videos about it. I'll talk to people who do it...' Like, I want them to have access to that, rather than specific curriculum. That's my challenge more so that it is theirs, right?

Rachel: I'll just say quickly...my son...successes...Two come to mind. One, just social growth. I feel like there's so much more attention on a mindful community and intentionality and how to deal with conflict and opinions and...I just see that. And something I think about a mixed-age setting, where he learns from older children and helps teach the younger children, and vice versa, and you know they're all...sharing. Another success, on the more, academic front: he loves history and philosophy on Thursdays. He's like, you know, right in there. And brings his ideas home. So there's stuff that...there's a lot of intellectual stimulation. One challenge...I see he has a certain challenge getting over his conflict with writing. So I'm curious to see how that continues to play out. They are blogging every week...He has great ideas, and I think at some point he will make that decision to put them down...but he hasn't quite gotten there yet.

Taasha: I think my challenge is very similar to Rachel's. It's that Sterling has a lot of stuff in his head, it's just not coming out...so...thankfully there are facilitators that can, um, help me with these things sometimes. I think that's my biggest challenge. It's...him actually being himself, writing that out on the blog, and putting that out. Successes...I feel like socially Sterling is just making better decisions. He's not just hanging out with whoever is available. He's like... 'Do you like me? Do you do well for me? Can I do good things for you?' And those are big questions for him. And this is coming from a kid who was socially inept to begin with. So...the fact that he says that...We talk a lot in the morning. We have an hour--hour and fifteen minute--drive in the morning, so we have a lot of time to sort through how the day is going to go for him. And he has made so many...I'm not going to say 'better' decisions, but they're definitely more informed. Because he wants his days to be worth-while. He told me the other day, "I want to make sure these days are very important to me, and I want to make sure they're good days." And I was like, "It's up to you to make the good day." Making good decisions socially is part of that--not just intellectually, but how he's handling himself in the day and who he's hanging out with.

How is deschooling yourselves as parents? When the kids come home to your own family culture...what has that meeting of cultures looked like?

And how is it talking to other parents or family members who think you're crazy?

Alex: We used to have a home business, and I've just started working outside the home again. And I'm working for a young man, in his early 30s, and we work out of shared office spaces--it was WeWork and now it's restaurants--and I was really inspired by that culture. That WeWork face-of-the-future culture, in a way, that these young people in their 20s/early 30s are starting to live. Which doesn't look like a traditional workspace anymore. I, before I had Douglas, I'd been going to a 9-to-5 job. And we killed time surfing the web. And we stood around the water cooler. It wasn't really productive...It was a lot like school: we were doing the bare minimum that we could get away with and still be officially at the job and take a salary. And...that felt like the way traditional school is. But what I'm seeing now, which feels like the way of the future, is that this guy pays me for the work I do. And it's on me to do as much as possible, do it as quickly as possible. Be there for people that need me when they need me. Not have to be there when I don't...and it feels like that matches more what ALC is preparing the children for. Like...those young people somehow fell into that, but how much better off would they be if they had gone through something like an ALC training. I think that these children...I think ALC taught me to be more open-minded about the way the world can be. And the future of work. The future of education. The future of how-can-we-move-forward now into the 21st century and make this all more productive and relevant.

Diane: I agree with Alex. I think ALC is preparing them for how the world will be by the time they graduate, they go into the workforce, or whatever. Xander's plan is to be an entrepreneur. So whether they own a business or they're working for someone else, I think this will help them be much more prepared.

ALC fell right into the family culture that we already had in our home. Basically, it saved me, because I was running around trying to support all these different activities and ideas that were coming out of Xander. So I'm running...taking him to Home Depot so he can build stuff, or when he told me, "Mom, I want to build a video game," I'm running him to Columbia University so he can learn to build a video game. He asked me a little while ago, before we came here, "How do we get to a junkyard? I need to get to a junkyard..." ALC has actually saved me, because now I don't have to figure out how to support him. And I'm all about supporting him. Whatever it is he wants to do, I'm all about trying to find a way to make it happen. But...this school has saved me. It fell into the culture that I was trying to create in the home of supporting him.

As far as family...the argument goes on every other day. "What are you doing? You got him in this place? You're paying for him not to learn...because they're not teaching him anything..." And...Ryan and Abby, Mel and Chuck have been very patient with me, because I have my moments where I slip into it and I buy into what they're saying. "Oh god, I'm a horrible mom...and I've got him in this place...and he's not learning anything..." But actually he is. And then when I take him out and they see him, and we're in a comfortable environment, and they give him something--a bottle of water--and he'll say 'thank you' in Japanese. And then they'll talk about "Oh my god, he had a great vocabulary before, but now his vocabulary is so extensive and he has these philosophical conversations with you and...Where is he going to

school?" They want to come for a visiting week. They want to know what's going on here. So...But the struggle continues. I rave about the school...and now conversations are starting to turn. When he initially came here, in September, "What are you doing?" I was beaten in the head every day about "You can't do this to him" and "You've been such a supportive mom and now you're dropping the ball..." Yeah, ok. I just took it all with a grain of salt. But then I just had a conversation with a friend who's telling me about the children in Denmark. About how they're doing so well with their education system. And I'm like, "Well, what are they doing different?" And she's like, "They don't have periods." And I'm like, "Well how does that work out?" "They basically can attend the classes that they wanna attend..." And I was like, "Oh. Like ALC." It continues with family, but I think it's getting a little better. The main stakeholders--myself and his father--are on board.

Sarah: The thing that is the biggest challenge for me, when the two cultures collide, is in the problem-solving area. I have two kids that go here, and the way that they resolve problems here and the way that we resolve them at home are not the same. I'd like them to be more the same...I'll leave it at that.

Rachel: I can add a few things...I think there's a lot of things that were very eye-to-eye already in regards to our culture at home. I will say that without the pressure of homework at home, it changes things and it's more relaxed. That's not exactly an answer to the question, but it does change the whole dynamic at home in terms of how we get to use our time together at home as a family.

Two specific things...One, Even does "Cook Noob" on Fridays, so at home, in part because he doesn't have homework, we've done a lot more cooking as a family. And that's been amazing. It's helped in terms of his eating stuff, and it's been great family time. That's a real gift. The other thing is...He's always been a kid that likes to explore and delve into things, and that's nurtured here, and then he comes home and we try to do that as a family. That's been really useful. Oh! And also, goal setting. That's definitely from ALC: we try to be more conscious about setting goals for ourselves in the evening, like, what are some things we'd like to do. We try to put that out, and I think that helps with time management and doing what we want to do.

One thing which is not a huge issue for our family, but I have heard people talk about, is what feels like the less-limit-setting at school...There's a lot of openness to use your time as you want, and at home, most of us parents have ideas about how time should be spent. So I think that's just...and in high school years...Teenage years are different, so that's a tension I think all of us feel a little bit and some of us feel a lot. So trying to navigate that...

And the last thing I'll say is about family members. I also have tension with my extended family about how they perceive this. I just remind myself, we've all come from a pretty traditional understanding of what 'school' looks like, and so it's hard not to get caught up in some of the questions and concerns. But the results of what they see in him--what he's learning, what he's able to do, how he's growing--that's the best marker for me. And it's an opportunity to have real

conversations about 'what is learning' and 'what does it mean to love learning' and different kinds of kids and...So, it's challenging and an opportunity.

Taasha: Our culture at home was already very much aligned with ALC. For me, it was the task of finding a place that supported what was happening at home. Sterling is the youngest of three children. I have a 25-year-old and a 23-year-old, and we already lived this life of 'what's your intention' and 'how do you plan to do this for the day.' And for my other kids, who are very much amenable to rules, that worked very well. But with Sterling, he was always like 'Why do we do this? Why is that a rule?' So with him...He had to ask a thousand questions, and when you come home from work after 9 or 10 hours, you're only good for the first 3 questions. Then you're like 'Ok...that's lovely...Stop now...' So. ALC and our family culture are very similar.

And as far as people that question, Sterling is my third child, so he's not so much the guinea pig. He's more like the masterpiece at this point. So when people ask me...I already have two successful children. I think the parenting is not always perfect, but it does allow them to make their own mistakes and come to their own conclusions and be accountable for their actions. And with Sterling, he gets to do all that stuff here and now. He gets to work out who he is and what he wants to do. He's not doing this in his third year of college. Or after he's graduated. He's doing this right now. Figuring out who he is, what he's supposed to do, and how to set forth and make those things manifest. And I think that makes such a big difference. So as far as people that question...it's like...“Sorry...It worked for the other two. I'm sure this one will be fine.”

[Mel thanks Taasha for the 'Focus Hour' quiet time practice that traveled from her family culture into the school this past year. Taasha explains, "Quiet time is from 7 to 8 every day in our home. You do what you want with your quiet time, but it has to stay quiet. And that's a big deal, because you need to collect your thoughts. You need to figure out 'what have I been doing all day' or 'what am I doing the rest of the day.' I use my quiet time to figure out what I'm doing tomorrow; Sterling uses his to figure out what he's done all day. My mother uses her quiet time to decide how she's going to work out the rest of the week...It's beneficial for all of us." Mel, Chuck, and Ryan field questions about what Focus Hour looks similar/different at school.]

You're a panel of mothers. For those of you in co-parenting relationships, what has that been like?

Alex: It's definitely stereotyping, but from what we've seen at school and by who's interested in the school...often the mothers are more on-board than the fathers. Not always. But it's often the case. I think it's often harder for the fathers to embrace something less traditional. Certainly, the school attracts non-traditional families and people that are very open to challenging other aspects of the culture and systems out there. And...I think...my husband's very much an exception; he's very much on-board. More so even than me. He's totally leading the charge. But that's rarer. It's often a harder sell to the dads, for whatever reason. Is that the case for you?

Diane: Well...Xander's dad lives in Vegas, and he's really had no input as far as the schools I've chosen or anything. But...when I did tell him that Xander was moving from the school he'd been in since he was in kindergarten to a brand new school, and I'm trying to explain this to him... that...the school is out-of-the-box and there's nothing traditional about this school, he's like, "Oh, okay..." This isn't a conversation for me to be having with me in New York and him in Vegas. So he came to visit, and he came by the school. So he was here and...when I talked to him after his first day visiting, he was like, "Oh, no, this school is great." He said, "I went to something like this when I was little. You know, I trust you when you make these decisions regarding his education, so that's not a problem. But I like this school. So whatever you need me to do to support, let me know." I thought this was going to be my biggest battle. I was like, "There's no way he's going to sign off on this, but that's fine..." Because I have custody. You know, I'm just trying to be courteous. But I'm glad he's on board, and he's supportive of the school.

Sarah: My husband and I both are into the idea. We both had that--it felt like a personal invitation. We're both at this workshop, and we see this kid, and we're like, "What the hell is this?" He actually came to a parent interest night before I did, so I got to hear him talk about it. His background is different. I have the MA; he dropped out of high school. He's an entrepreneur. He's used to being his own boss and doing things his way. So he really likes that about the school. But recently, in the past 4 to 6 months, what's coming up is his concern about their lack of traditional curriculum. So there's ongoing conversation for me about it. Constantly making this work for all of us, and making sure everybody gets their needs met. Making agreements and being willing to revisit them over and over again. If something stops working, to figure out why it's not working. So in some ways, the acculturation is a process for us, too. I think overall, the value that we both perceive from this kind of education exceeds the fear of it not working out. At least...we're enrolled for next year. So I'm going with that.

Rachel: So my husband, Even's dad, I would say he's as into ALC as I am. I mean...I'm the one who found the school, and I'm the one who brought up the idea to him, but he also saw how much Even was struggling and really not happy. So, I think the difference really is--and this is about society--that we've structured our lives so I'm working fewer hours in a job outside the home than he is, so I have more time to be involved in the school. And that's unfortunate in lots of ways and great for me in lots of ways...but I think we're both very much fully invested in the school and the community. But I was the one who took the initiative to make the change, I would say.

Taasha: For me, I'm a single parent. But Sterling is raised by the village that is the other people that are in my home, which is my mother and his older siblings. There's a 17 year difference with them, so it's not like brother-sister-to-wrestle-with; it's more like hey-don't-do-that and never-do-that-again. It's a different experience. So. He's raised by all of us, and we had a common conversation, like, "Is this a good place for Sterling?" And we all agreed it's a good space for Sterling. Because...we need to be able to support him at home when he's there with us, and it doesn't appear to be in contradiction to what's happening here, and everyone agreed at home, so we make sure everything all works together.



How can you participate in the school?

Rachel: There's lots of different ways to participate. I mean, like, do drop-off. Or coming to Assembly Meetings four times a year, which are evening meetings where we discuss the school. There are opportunities to come in and do offerings, like twice my family has come in to do Jewish cooking. We did latkes and hamentashen for two different holidays. So there's lots of ways for parents to be involved. There's field trips....It's a very inclusive environment. The young people know me, and I know them. It's a nice feeling.

Taasha: And Rachel shouldn't be shy...She's, like, the parent organizer. She's the corraler of the parents. Which is amazing, because we needed that.

Alex: I hear that's the main difference between here and Sudbury schools. Here, the parents offer a lot. I did a Maths offering...Parents bring their talents...

Taasha:...and are welcome...

Alex: ...they often offer different cooking things. There's a father who offers woodworking, and he offers theater. There's lots of parents sharing offerings. We want the kids to use their resources...

Taasha: ...and parents are resources.

[Ryan shares his experience of parents making offerings and how actively they do/don't in order to respect their kids' feelings about their being in the space.]

Sarah: We did get to go to the Charlotte campus this year, and things are a little different there. Their space is at least six times the size of this one, so there's an open invitation to parents to come as they need or want. They can hang out and talk to each other and connect while the kids are doing their thing. So...I think it's the kind of thing that would vary by school. This space? It's already full with 35 kids. It's New York City, so it's important to be here on time, do your thing, and leave. In the Carolinas...you can hang out.

Taasha: We're definitely welcome here.

Alex: Absolutely.

[Lots of gratitude for parents' time and sharing.]

Transcription: Abby

Photos: Liliana Carrillo