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## **Environment Makes All the Difference**

### **A Proud Mom, Class of 2019**

At the end of the year 2000, our family was so blessed to adopt a healthy, precious baby boy. He grew up as a joyful, playful, funny, animated, imaginative and active little boy.

When he started preschool and kindergarten, we attributed his lack of interest in school work as just being a typical boy. Although he had good report cards in elementary school, we knew he was not doing as well as his grades reflected. He was never, ever a behavior problem at school. His teachers loved him, but we sat in many, many teacher conferences to discuss his lack of interest in completing his work. We turned to many diagnostic tests to try to determine what might be the cause for his difficulties... speech therapy, testing for learning disabilities, discussions about possible attention deficits but all of those came up with no explanation of why he wasn't thriving in school.

Academics became a bigger issue in Middle School when he was expected to more self-driven to complete his work. He began to make bad grades and receive zeros for work not turned in. High School was worse. He became more anti-social, withdrawn, and would fail courses and have to repeat them in summer school. He became frustrated and would do anything to try to not have to go to school. In his junior year, at the suggestion of his counselor, we took him to Vanderbilt University to be tested. After a half day of testing and evaluation, the doctor told us that he was an extremely sensitive individual that had a high level of anxiety about life, was depressed, and had a poor body image. He highly suggested that we seek out a small Christian private school for him with less social pressure and smaller classes.

We immediately came home to try to make a plan for his senior year of high school. Just when it seemed overwhelming to know how to make the right decision, a post came up on my Facebook feed about West End Academy. I had never heard of it before. We called and made an appointment to visit. Our son was immediately drawn to the calm retreat-like setting and the warm personality of Mrs. VanDyke. From that day on our son was at perfect peace about withdrawing from public school and transferring to West End Academy for his senior year. I'm still amazed at the turnaround that our young man began to make while at this school. We rarely had the struggle with him wanting to avoid school, he was completing all his work and willing to comply with the requirement of making passing grades. He was able to complete all the credits he needed to graduate on time. He earned his driver's license and began driving himself to school. Most importantly during this year he began to develop into a calmer and confident individual.

I firmly believe that public school is not an environment in which every child will thrive. I describe our struggle with public school as being like us trying to fit a "square peg" in a "round hole." West End provides the atmosphere in which a child, especially one with a sensitive and cautious personality, can feel confident and safe while being challenged to reach his potential. The availability of the instructors to address academic and personal accountability issues on an individual level was just what we needed. I only wish that we had discovered West End Academy earlier but thank God that we did before it was too late. Our son has begun his journey into adulthood more prepared and confident to take on the challenges he will face. Next, he plans to attend a trade school and we couldn't be prouder of him.