

My name is Mary Tabler. My husband and I are the proud parents of two young men Aaron 13 yrs old and Andre 9 yrs old. We are older parents; my husband works third shift, and I am retired, but started a small business recently.

My sons have attended the Open Doors Academy after school program at Malabar Intermediate in Mansfield, OH. I appreciate that some of the staff in the program are their teachers. The first hour of the program is spent on homework and tutoring. If my child didn't have homework assigned that day, he's given math sheets to reinforce what is being taught in his classroom. At other times he may have been given cursive writing sheets or handouts to strengthen his reading and comprehension. Both of my sons' grades have improved as a result of their participation in the program.

The next hour is spent on activities, and they vary each quarter. My 9-year-old got to do to archery; I would never have taken him to archery because it's not something that's really offered anywhere else. Other afterschool programs usually just have them sitting around coloring or playing on the computer. Open Doors Academy offers unique things that we wouldn't be able to find anywhere else. They both learned self-defense in martial arts. There is cooking; they are more willing to try different foods now and prepare small meals for themselves. They both love to swim. I don't swim, but I always wanted my children to learn and so I made sure they learned. Unfortunately, our city does not have a public pool at this time. Mr. Hager, the principal, at Malabar opened up the pool at the school to Open Doors Academy; my youngest has become a better swimmer.

The program helps realize all the things my sons are capable of doing. The teachers know how to structure the sessions with them and make it fun. Something that isn't always an easy thing for parents to do.

Another advantage to the program being in the school is that transportation is provided. Transportation is a big convenience that very few programs offer. It's very helpful to not have to worry about getting to the school to pick up my kids after work.

I am a big fan of Malabar Intermediate School, because the administration and teachers go over and above for their students there. I am also a fan and supporter of Open-Door Academy too. I, so believe in what they are doing; that I have volunteered with the program and school as my time permits. This after-school program opens up doors not just for my children; it gives them the experience of doing things they would not normally do like archery and martial arts and the opportunity to do things that they don't get to do as often, like swimming. They have a higher self-esteem from trying new things and are able to express themselves better. I also believe it sparks the idea I can do something more in this world than play basketball or video games, and that one day I can explore other opportunities outside of where I live.