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### Parcel slated for alternative school

#### Nonprofit's ultimate goal to teach special needs kids

**Heather Woodward**

The Olympian

The founder of a local nonprofit agency that wants to establish a private school for special-education students has purchased land near Tumwater for that purpose.



The Wyatt Holliday Foundation, an organization devoted to helping families of children with special needs, could open the school as soon as fall 2008, founder Therese Holliday said.

She created the foundation in memory of her 9-year-old son, Wyatt, who had Asperger syndrome — a high-functioning form of autism — and died in a car wreck in 2003.

The move to open a new school came in response to a swell of local parent complaints

that public schools aren't meeting their children's needs, Holliday said.

"The public schools try, but they can't be the solution for everyone," she said.

Using personal funds, Holliday has purchased a five-acre property south of the Olympia Airport worth more than \$200,000, she said. She expects to either build a school there or buy portable classrooms that could be placed on site.

Holliday had hoped to open the school this fall, but finding a venue proved difficult.

"I'm trying like crazy to make it happen next fall," she said. "I've put my own money on the line to make it happen, and I need others to step up with me."

The school could likely enroll 10 to 15 children at first, though Holliday isn't sure what grade levels the school would offer. It's unclear how much tuition would cost but if it had opened this fall, Holliday said she had been expecting to charge \$2,500 per month.

Trina Westerlund, founder of the 29-year-old Children's Institute for Learning Differences in Mercer Island, said the parent demand for such programs is huge. CHILD provides services to special-education students through contracts with and funding from 19 Puget Sound school districts. It also educates special-education students whose families pay private tuition.

In a typical month, CHILD officials hear from 25 to 45 families inquiring about the program, Westerlund said.

"There's no question it's a big need and a big market," she said. "Many parents are searching and wanting desperately to find the right fit for their child."

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