Dear friends,

I admit that I don’t like the thought of writing a farewell letter. I much prefer looking toward the future. And so it is with deep gratitude, confidence in Lab’s leadership, and many years of experience that I offer some personal thoughts about Lab going forward.

Lab is not like any private or “independent” school. We have a diverse student body, a faculty that is immediately linked to the University of Chicago. And as great as a Lab education is today, it is essential to become even more powerful if we continue to build on the strong partnerships with the University and preserve Lab’s most important attributes:

- Learning joyfully
- Thinking independently
- Reflecting upon the connections of learning
- Developing confidence
- Taking social responsibility

Together is scheduled and kept a priority. Kindness and decency at Lab will only flourish as quality time together is scheduled and kept a priority. The quality of my life has been enriched exponentially since arriving in Chicago. Each of the many on any professional journey has prepared me for the next one, but no stop has cleared my appreciation for generating, purposed thinking and deep learning more than my time at Lab. This remarkable place has let me make an indelible impression on thousands of young people and on the adults who have had the privilege of working here. In stellar reputation has been earned. It has been an honor to be a part of this community for the past eighteen years, and I will cherish the relationships and the common cause that we share.

With gratitude and love,

David W. Magill
Editor

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**Fostering an old-school trait in 21st-century kids**

With owl pellets, “there are lots of different things that can go wrong,” says seventh-grade life science teacher Michael Wong. “If the goal of the assignment is to build a full skeleton from the undigested parts regurgitated by an owl in the form of a ‘pellet,’” as explains Mr. Wong, “Maybe your owl had only the lower half of a prey item in that particular pellet. Maybe the pellet had different organisms in it, and you don’t know what belongs to what. Maybe the bones are broken. What are you going to do then?”

At moments like these, students need to exhibit grit—the ability to keep trying. Long-term projects like this “teach how to work as a group,” Mr. Wong says. In November, Angela Lee Duckworth, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania and MacArthur fellow, spoke to the Parent’s Association about the importance of such perseverance. In her lecture, “True Grit: Why Effort is as Important as Talent,” Ms. Duckworth defined grit as “the tendency to sustain interest and effort towards very long-term goals.”

“Talent and effort don’t go hand-in-hand,” she said. In fact, “there can be a weak inverse effect.” As a professor, she often encounters students who calls “fragile perfects,” who’ve always done “just okay” academically. “There will be problems in life, so we have to raise problem-solvers.”

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**In the halls**

“We need to let children know it’s natural to be upset when something goes wrong, but they don’t need to be rescued,” Ms. Garner says. “There will be problems in life, so we have to raise problem-solvers.”

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**Stac Garner**

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In the Halls

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**LabNotes Spring 2014**

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For more information, please contact Lab Notes:

Ingrid Gonçalves, AB’08

Editor

Catherine Bronfman, 312-937-5611

Contributors

Amy Rossmann-Pate

Laura Arentz

Stacie Conlin, CS’90

Jennie Chen

Gina Glick

AMAB, AAMIS

Publisher

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools

1840 E. 59th Street

Chicago, IL 60637

website: www.uchicago.edu

Please send comments or updated contact information to info@uchicago.edu or call 773-702-2141.

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David W. Magill

Director
Poet in Residence, 1949: Langston Hughes

Poetry has many practitioners at Lab, from first graders who carry poems in their pocket during National Poetry Month (April) to teens who perform original work at citywide poetry slams.

His time at Lab was “full of interest, revelation, and a re-affirmation of my faith in American youth,” the poet wrote. “There is about the school a sense of fun in learning.”

In 1949, Langston Hughes gave poetry a boost when he spent the spring quarter at Lab as a visiting lecturer. Already famous at age 47, he set aside his own writing and theater projects and left his home in Harlem to teach at Lab. He lived in a seventh-floor room at International House, just down the street from the Schools.

The 14-page typewritten report that Mr. Hughes submitted at the end of his stay, and a 2002 biography by Arnold Rampersad, chronicle Mr. Hughes’ time at Lab. Mr. Hughes had never worked with students younger than college age before, although he did read his poems to audiences of all ages. On his first day at Lab, he found himself sitting on the floor of a kindergartners classroom helping children invent stories about a princess who kept losing her possessions…and a lion that escaped from the zoo.

Soon the friendly and charismatic poet was in demand throughout the building. During his residency, he ran ten creative-writing groups—all voluntary—for students in grades six through ten. Mr. Hughes noted in his report that writing gave adolescents the chance to “get down on paper some of the things that trouble[d] them.” The weekly sessions were popular—one girl wrote in an evaluation that “Mr. Hughes seemed perfectly at ease and put his audience at ease.” By May, 67 students had submitted manuscripts for him to read.

Mr. Hughes worked hard for his $2,000 stipend. He taught a weekly seminar on jazz with Bob Erickson, who led Lab’s Unified Arts Department and had an extensive record collection. Mr. Hughes taught poetry recitation to eighth graders, advised a choral production called “America in Song,” and talked to a geography class about his travels in Mexico. He offered a four-part seminar called “The Negro Theme in American Poetry,” inviting Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks to speak with U-High students. (A few weeks later, Ms. Brooks squeezed 100 people into her 63rd Street apartment for Mr. Hughes’ farewell party.)

The goal of these activities, Mr. Hughes explained in his report, was to relate poetry to every day living, to show how the things one does become materials for creative writing, and to indicate how pleasant an adventure writing can be.” Mr. Hughes liked to sleep late, and getting up early to teach in the Lower School may have been the hardest part of his assignment. In his report he lamented that eight weeks was not enough time to have a lasting effect on his students’ writing, but he praised them for being “delightful, attentive, and courteous in every way.”

His time at Lab was “full of interest, revelation, and a re-affirmation of my faith in American youth,” the poet wrote. “There is about the school a sense of fun in learning.”

The pleasant adventure of writing

In Washington, Rahul and the other 39 Intel finalists presented their projects, met with inventors and Nobel Prize winners, and visited with President Obama at the White House.

“He was a guy who always did something really big,” says choir director George Housinger, who worked with Mohammed on his Intel Science Talent Search project. “We have only had one Nobel Prize winner who came from Lab.”

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When Rahul Mehta took AP Computer Science as a sophomore, “nothing we did was enough for him,” says computer science teacher Rahul Franke. Mr. Franke introduced Rahul to professors in the University’s Computer Science Department. As a junior Rahul took an advanced algorithms class with Professor Janos Simon, who became his adviser on his Intel Science Talent Search project, “A New Max-Flow Algorithm for Sparse Networks.”

The project won Rahul a finalist spot and a trip to Washington, DC, in March for the finals. Senior Mohammed Muslin became an Intel semifinalist for his project, “Directed Synthesis of Gold Nanostructures for Bioelectronic Applications.”

“Our recent results with the Intel Science Talent Search are very unusual even for Lab,” explains science teacher Sharon Housinger. “We have a large number of semifinalists and finalists compared to many other schools, but our recent results, a semifinalist and finalist last year (Danny Zhang, ‘14, and Lane Gundersman, ‘14, respectively), and another semifinalist and finalist this year are unprecedented in the history of the school. We have had only a handful of semifinalists since I started in 1996, and only two previous finalists, Michelle Tam, ’97, in 1997 and Beckett Sterner, ’02, seventh place winner, in 2002.”

For his project, Rahul created a new algorithm to solve what’s known as the maximum-flow problem, which, “simply put,” he says, asks: “Given a network of nodes connected by links of varying capacity, what is the maximum amount of a single commodity that can be sent from one particular node to another?”

Professor Simon gave him several journal articles to read, and Rahul noticed a connection between a 1989 paper and a result published last year. “That’s when I got the idea for my specific project,” he says. He applied the newer technique to the older algorithm. “I was able to describe a way to shrink the network while still preserving its important structures. This, in turn, gives a faster algorithm.” Such algorithms are already in use, he says, “in routing and scheduling applications, and recently have also been applied in computer vision and image processing.”

Animal Census

Having an animal in the classroom helps to teach by example the care of living organisms, and in foster curiosity about nature. Kids at Lab care for all sorts of animals, from an African clawed water frog and a Russian tortoise to a red-eared slider turtle and fire belly toads. Here is the current creature headcount in grades N–5:

In addition to regular school-day activities, the BFHS group enjoyed some sightseeing, including a visit to the Museum of Science and Industry, a concert at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a tour of the University of Chicago campus. “They tried to visit as much in the city as they possibly could while they were here,” says Mr. Fech. “And of course, there was shopping to do.”

To bid farewell to the Beijing guests, Lab organized a hot pot lunch with all of Lab’s Mandarin Chinese students, and held a dinner the next day with the BFHS students and their host families to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Mr. Fech expects the Lab and BFHS students will stay in touch through social media until their reunion in June, when 12 Lab students will travel to China as part of the exchange program.

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In Beijing, the Lab students will stay with host families and travel to other cities and rural areas around the country. Mr. Fech visited China last year to ensure the program would provide a safe and positive experience.

The language barrier will be a challenge for the Lab students, Mr. Fech says, “but I do believe they’ll be able to have basic conversations and hold their own. The benefit is that they’ll be with [the BFHS] students, who speak English very well.”

Hunger Game

Middle School students get a taste of global inequality through Oxfam exercise

Statistics about hunger may or may not grab students’ attention. Actual hunger usually does.

On the way into lunch on December 6, each Middle School student received a card, assigning the student randomly to an income level: low, middle, or high. Those in the high-income group were directed to tables set with tablecloths and flowers. The middle-income group sat at cafeteria tables. The low-income group sat on the floor.

Service-learning coordinator Hannah Evans read statistics about global poverty and hunger—for example, that hunger kills more people worldwide than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

The high-income group enjoyed chicken, vegetables, pasta, and salad, served and cleared by wait staff. The middle-income group received rice and beans. Students in the low-income group—reflecting global figures—stood around a table to get a bowl of rice and a cup of water.

Service-learning—in which students perform community service to learn about social justice issues—has been part of the U-High curriculum since 1986; this year Lab administrators extended it to the Middle School for the first time.

Oxfam’s Philippines typhoon relief or canned goods for a local food pantry.

Now that the students are familiar with hunger banquets, Lab cannot do it again next year, but Ms. Evans is considering a follow-up volunteer activity later this year. “It’s such a powerful experience,” she says, “that to do nothing would waste it.”
in the halls

Emeritus Retirements

Ann Beck
A French and Spanish teacher for 55 years, Ann Beck, MAT’87, earned her U-High master’s in education at U-Chicago, and first came to Lab as a teacher of Russian. (Lab stopped offering Russian the following year.) Then, after teaching French exclusively, Ms. Beck studied Spanish in Chicago and Nicaragua and added the language to her repertoire in the 1980s. She taught at every level—third graders still perform a play she wrote, El Salón de Dante—but her forte is middle school and high school. “I try to do my best to make the language program cross-cultural,” assigning literature from da Vinci’s Young Hare, Warhol’s Mona Lisa, and Dürer’s Young Hare. Since the early 1970s, and returning in 1988 as a Lower School reading specialist. In 2012, her title changed to “academic specialist.”

Annie Catterson
In her next chapter, Ms. Catterson will return to her family home in Concord, MA, where she will continue to walk her Michigan driveway. “That,” she says, “may lead to something.”

Brenda Coffield
A self-described “real river rat” from St. Charles, IL, with family from the Quad Cities, Brenda Coffield has walked the Illinois River and been all over the world, never knowing where or when she’d hear, “Hey, Ms. Coffield!” from former students. Joining the Laboratory Schools in 1973, right out of Northwestern University, she left a few years later to earn a law degree at John Marshall. Then she worked as an athletic director at another school system before returning to Lab in 1980. She influenced students from her many positions, from physical education teacher to adviser to business manager.

Molly Day
Molly Day has lived multiple lives at Lab, teaching second grade for three years in the early 1970s, and returning in 1988 as a Lower School reading specialist. In 2012, her title changed to “academic specialist.”

Steve Farver
Steve Farver took the scenic route to the Laboratory Schools. Growing up on an Iowa farm, he earned a master’s degree at the University of Illinois and moved to Paris, where he taught English. Four years later, a friend from graduate school persuaded him to move to Chicago, where he taught at other schools before joining Lab in 1988. Mr. Farver has taught French at every level from third grade, when Lab students start world languages, through high school (except for seventh grade). In the lower grades, he says, “you want them to feel a sense of accomplishment, such as speaking only in French for 15 minutes. In the High School, the focus is on communicating in the language proficiently, using correct grammar.” Among both his students and his fellow language teachers, he says, “There’s a sense of everyone moving through it together,” progressing through the language program. He’s appreciated that sense of fellowship among his colleagues. “I’ve learned a lot from them,” he says. “One of the strengths of this place is that there’s teamwork.”

Liese Ricketts
Mr. Farver has enjoyed his time in the classroom as well—students joke with him about his home state. “How do you say that in Iowa?” they ask. “Oh stop, they say it the same way you do!” he retorts.

Retirement he plans to travel with his partner, and he also hopes to gain a new set of students. When he first moved to Chicago, he taught English to Spanish speakers, and now plans to volunteer teaching English to other communities. “It’s very satisfying,” he says, “to teach people a skill that actually makes their lives better here.”

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Liese Ricketts
A half-dozen years into teaching photography at Lab, Liese Ricketts turned her classroom into a camera obscura. She and her U-High students darkened the room by covering vents and taping windows. They brought Lower School classes in and opened a hole in a window shade. “Within seconds their eyes adjusted, and they could see everything going on in Scannum Garden and 58th Street upside down and reversed, all along the wall opposite,” Ms. Ricketts says. “I told them they were inside a camera.”

Ms. Ricketts, who joined the Lab faculty in 1988, has taught Middle and High School photography and philosophy. One year her beginning photo students were making pinhole cameras during a full solar eclipse. Heading outside, she told the students to aim their cameras at their foreheads, “so they took a picture of the eclipse on their head—the whole dark circle and the rays of the sun coming out.”

Born at what was then called the University of Chicago Lying-in Hospital while her parents studied at the University, Ms. Ricketts attended Manhattanville College in New York, then moved to her father’s native Pennsylvania. She married and had two children before heading back to the United States, where she studied at Governor’s State University and an MFA at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ms. Ricketts has her own photography around the country and the world—recently in New Orleans, Iowa, and Sweden. In retirement she plans to continue to show her art, including an exhibit next year at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Based in Homewood, IL, she plans to spend warmer months traveling and taking photography, and the rest months designing books she will self-publish.
When Ellen Everson, who teaches third- and fourth-grade music, posted a notice for a new Lower School choir in November, the turnout of ready and willing singers numbered so many that she had to find a larger rehearsal space than her classroom. She relocated to Judd 126, a large meeting room. “About 70 students showed up on a regular basis each morning,” she says, to rehearse before school, three days a week. “There’s something about singing first thing in the morning. It’s just a wonderful way to start the day.”

Ms. Everson, who previously taught Middle School music, thought up a Lower School choir to sing at the new monthly assemblies and also to replace the Lobby Sing performances, which were displaced during the construction. After ten rehearsals with Ms. Everson and Katy Sinclair, the accompanist and fifth-grade music teacher, the choir performed at the December Lower School assembly at Ida Noyes Hall. The next day the students reprised the concert in the school cafeteria for parents, who provided a breakfast of doughnuts and cider.

During Lab’s construction, rehearsals were on hold as Ms. Everson relocated her classroom and found a new space for the students to gather. Now that she is settled, she is thrilled to start her mornings off singing again.

Voices come together for the new Lower School choir

When a chorus first appears, Ms. Everson is thrilled to start her mornings off singing again.

Eighth Graders Dig into Chicago History

For each of the ten years that Jan Yourist has taught at Lab, her eighth-grade students have put on a Chicago History Fair. They conduct primary-source research on an event, movement, historical figure, or institution from the time of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition to the 1935 Century of Progress in Chicago. After five-and-a-half weeks of research and preparation—including writing a formal research paper—they share their findings with parents, friends, and staff during a poster presentation in Rowley Library.

The projects range widely, but Ms. Yourist recognizes some trends. “Kids in the eighth grade love murder and mayhem,” she says. This year one student used the FBI’s profile of a serial killer to organize her research on H. H. Holmes. Another student, studying Leopold and Loeb, splattered red paint on her poster board and included a replica of the eyeglasses that incriminated the pair.

Other students focused on civil rights. A student from Evanston visited the Frances Willard House, previous home to the temperance figure and suffragette, as part of her research. Another student studied gay culture in Towson and Bronzeville during the 1930s. In addition to the common themes, Ms. Yourist sees constants in the creativity, pride, and energy the students display during the evening show: “There’s a point every year that this happens. When the kids are doing their thing, I just stop and look at the energy. I look out over the crowd, I give a big sigh of wonderment at the journey we’ve taken together to get to this point. It’s the highlight.” Some history is worth repeating.
Bringing Back Tradition

Regular Lower School assemblies build community

When Lower School Principal Sylvia Anglin researched Lab’s past, she discovered a way to strengthen the present. In recent years, the Lower School congregated occasionally for presentations, but “there was not a formalized time that was reserved for assemblies,” she says. That changed in fall 2013; when, reading over some 1920s Lab records, Ms. Anglin realized that the Lower School used to gather together on a regular basis. “It was a time that students could share what they were learning in their classrooms with each other,” she says. “I wanted to bring that back.”

Regular assemblies suit the Lower School’s new grade range, Ms. Anglin says. “The difference between first and fourth grade is huge, but the developmental range from third through fifth grade is the perfect age for the students to learn from each other.” Now, about once a month at 9 a.m., the students assemble for events like a school choir performance, trust exercises, or group reading time. “It gives kids the chance to feel like they’re part of a larger community instead of just their class community,” Ms. Anglin continues to evaluate the best ways to use the group’s time and handle logistical challenges during Blaine Hall’s renovation. She says, “we are really interested in having our students be a part of deciding what the assemblies will include, and a new faculty committee has been formed to help plan for future assemblies.”

Music Makers

Students learn to hear anew from University composer

“Eggplant,” a poem by 12th-century Portuguese author Ibn Sura, is noteworthy for being only 27 words long and shaped like, well, an eggplant. In music teacher Bradley Brickner’s eighth-grade music workshops this past fall, Michael LaCroix, an advanced PhD student in the composition program at UChicago, prompted students to explore composition through rhythm and text, such as trying out various ways to recite “Eggplant” by placing accents on different words. Ms. Anglin and Ms. Power say the students have been excited to try out various approaches to music in different ways, “and have a sense of wonder and curiosity about the challenges of making music.”

Built to Scale

Fourth graders plan their new classroom’s layout

From the east side to the west side and back again, Lower School classrooms have been moved and refurbished this school year during upgrades and renovations to Blaine Hall. But what could have been viewed as disruptive or inconvenient often became an opportunity for hands-on learning and empowerment. Nicole Power, for example, incorporated the renovation into her curriculum by having her fourth-grade students plan the layout of their new space. Others had students help with hands-on moves and arranging the new spaces. Kids even took reading breaks nestled among the moving boxes.

While Ms. Power’s students were housed in a temporary classroom on Blaine’s west side, she gave them the floor plan for their classroom under renovation on the building’s east side. Working in teams, they measured the furniture that would be moved into the new classroom, including bookshelves, desks, and a couch. They made color-coded cutouts of each item and arranged them on a scaled floor plan. “We tied it into measuring,” says Ms. Power. “They had to learn about scale but also about flow space and actual space. If you have a desk and a chair, you have to consider the person in the chair, too.”

Ms. LaCroix visited the class once a week to give the students a more hands-on and active approach to music. Projects included a “sound walk,” where the students visited sites—like Rockefeller Chapel or the corner of 58th and Kimball—to listen for all the sounds they could hear at each location. Another project was “sound composition,” where the students brought in household objects, such as empty cans, to see how many different sounds they could make with them.

In addition to the projects, Ms. Brickner says, it was enlightening for the students to meet with a practicing composer and ask him for feedback on their work. It was important for them to “just be around somebody who does this for a living, and to see that not everybody who writes classical music is eccentric or dead.” Mr. Brickner hopes to bring in a University-affiliated composer or musician again next year, if the project receives funding. “It’s good for the students to think about music in different ways,” he says, “and have a sense of wonder and curiosity about the challenges of making music.”

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“The halls also wanted a lot of table space. But even the best-laid schemes can go astray. When the students moved into the new room in mid-February, they discovered challenges they hadn’t foreseen. There were no electrical outlets along one wall, so they had to move the refrigerators—and therefore other pieces of furniture—elsewhere. And there was bottlenecking both to leave the room and to get to the rug. So the project morphed to include hands-on problem solving. The rug space was important to the students, so they separated the bookshelves and moved them, creating three access points to the rug instead of only one. Beyond measuring and scale and problem solving, Ms. Power says, the students learned how spaces work socially. “They have to think more consciously about their bodies and physical actions.”

After all that hard work, what do the children enjoy most about the desk and modernized space? “They love the drinking fountain,” Ms. Power says. “Good water pressure.”
in the halls

Line Dances

Teaching through the kinetic language of dance

How do you draw a line? As Donna Mandel’s Nursery School students are learning, the answers to that question are more numerous—and fun—than they first appear.

Since fall, Ms. Mandel has led her class of three- and four-year-olds in an exploration of lines, which are foundational to writing, drawing, geography, geometry, choreography, and architecture. In addition to drawing lines, identifying lines in nature and in the school, and making lines with objects, Ms. Mandel had the students make “art paintings” by dipping their hands into imaginary paint buckets and painting, curved, straight, wavy, angled, and zigzagged lines in the empty spaces around them.

Three-year-olds “learn through their bodies,” Ms. Mandel says. “Movement is the most developmentally appropriate thing we can offer. If you ask, ‘What is a line?’ they’ll often hold their arms out and say, ‘This is a line.’”

This form of kinetic learning is natural to Ms. Mandel, who started dance classes at age four or five and ultimately became a choreographer, dance teacher, and co-founder of the former Fluid Measure Performance Company, which blended storytelling, performance, and dance. The educators of Reggio Emilia, upon which much of Lab’s early education program is based, often talk about “the 100 languages,” and to Ms. Mandel, “a language is any discipline or material that allows us to make meaning and communicate from a line on a piece of paper to the linear shape of a stick to a line drawn in the air. The excitement for her, and the learning for her students, comes in watching them translate the thoughts and ideas into imaginary paint buckets and painting zigzagged lines in the empty spaces around them.”

For one or two students, going to the theater was an entirely new experience, so this particular performance proved an introduction to theater that had significant meaning for them personally and intellectually.

“We came to the Court’s performance of An Iliad, with a firm grounding in the text, its historical setting, composition, and themes,” says Ms. Spaltro, “and they came away speechless and utterly amazed at the power of performance to bring this to life in ways they’d never expected. For one or two students, going to the theater was an entirely new experience, so this particular performance proved an introduction to theater that had significant meaning for them personally and intellectually.”

Cindy Jurisson also argued for students in her Early World History classes (and their parents) to see An Iliad together. About 140 people attended and participated in a Q&A session afterwards with the actor, Timothy Kane.

“An Iliad is a performance of Homer’s translation,” says English Department Chair Colin Renner, “but we’re interested in strengthening problem-solving and critical-thinking skills,” Ms. Blinstein says. “Another big motivator is encouraging kids who haven’t seen themselves as good math students before and turning them onto math. The more hooks and different ways of thinking you offer, the more opportunities there are for kids to find their particular mathematical strengths.”

In homework, those hooks come in the form of “Big Problems.” A recent example asked students to figure out how many cigarettes are in a pyramid of pennies. The goal wasn’t getting to a right answer; it was having students explain how they reached that answer. So the assignment asked students to state the problem in their own words, describe the process they used to solve the problem, and explain their solution.

“There are some kids who love math because it doesn’t have writing,” Ms. Blinstein says. “You have to convince them that explaining what they did, being able to break it all down, is part of their math education.”

Let Math = a+ha

A new teaching strategy helps engage Lab’s algebra students

Students in Anna Blinstein’s second-period accelerated algebra class are fast. They multiply polynomials at lightning speed, barely deaccelerating as they shift into factoring trinomials. On this Friday morning almost all the students have a hand in the air before their teacher can even request volunteers to walk the class through a few problems from the previous night’s homework.

“Wooo, a student at another table says. His teacher, looking on, agrees: “Wooo, indeed.”

U-Chicago Court Theatre performances add depth to Lab curriculum

U-Highers in Frans Spaltho’s elective class, Performance and Competition in Ancient Greece, spent six weeks engaged in a careful reading of Homer’s Iliad. They read the entire poem (Fagles’ translation), as well as numerous essays and articles, and spent most class periods reading aloud and discussing themes such as honor, ritual, grief, song, mortality, war, and peace—and the effect each of these themes has on community. Ms. Spaltho’s was just one of several classes to take advantage of the University’s Court Theatre performances this year—an experience that brings added perspective to the classroom experience.

“An Iliad has given us a wonderful alternative,” says Mr. Rennert. “And a trip to the theater became part of the sophomore curriculum when, last spring, the English 2 teachers decided to experiment in the winter term. Says English Department Chair Colin Renner, ‘We have taught Romeo & Juliet in that quarter for many years, but we knew that it would be impossible to teach that play and accommodate a unit on personal essays. Court’s production of Steven Gurner gave us a wonderful alternative.’”

The play presents a few days in the life of Fiddler Barton, a blues musician from Pittsburgh. Many of the teachers began their study of the play by examining different blues lyrics, in a way of connecting music and character. “The story raises interesting questions about fate, love, opportunity, ambition, heritage, and race,” says Mr. Rennert, “and in our classes, we looked at how the characters’ statements, some of which could seem quite casual or off-hand, might reflect deeply held values or beliefs.”
Science Down Cold

On a winter Wednesday afternoon, huge, light flakes of snow started to fall, and blanketing the school grounds. Lisa Harrison’s Earl Shapiro Hall second-grade classroom made everyone feel like kids were in a snow globe. It was the perfect time to step outside and use their “snow cap” to make snowflakes and study the magically varied crystal forms, and a fitting end to their study of the science of snow and the water cycle.

During the winter quarter, the teachers encouraged children to read and listen to weather forecasts, looking for new words. Kids made virtual snowflakes using computer apps, learned about symmetry, and practiced reading a thermometer. Ms. Harrison and assistant teacher Aliya Hamilton brought concepts like evaporation, condensation, and frost to life through experiments. One experiment involved watching a small snowman melt, shrink, and shift throughout the day. Says Ms. Harrison, “During this experiment, we discussed the three states of matter—solid, liquid, and gas. Before the children were dismissed, our snowman visitor was placed into a frying pan on the stove and we watched it begin to evaporate and turn into steam! Yikes! The water cycle started all over again. The children loved this activity.”

Another experiment involved a dozen ice cubes and a cup of iodized salt in a sealed metal can, which allowed the children to see water condense, and then morph into ice. “In the halls and so ice cubes and a cup of iodized salt in a sealed metal can, which allowed the children to see water condense, and then morph into frost around the edges of the container. Supported by traditional and interactive, electronic texts, the kids got the concepts down cold.”

Athletic Award Renamed in Honor of Bill Zarvis

This winter, the Athletics Council (an advisory committee for athletics comprised of the Middle and High School principals, three faculty, two coaches, and three students) elected to rename the Athletic Director Award. The newly named Bill Zarvis Award started in 2006, and is presented to senior student-athletes who have made significant contributions to the athletic program. William K. Zarvis worked at Lab as a PE teacher, coach, and athletics and PE director from 1948 to 1978. He and his wife, Chris Zarvis, started, ran, the very popular Zarvis Day Camp from 1959-1979. In 1971, Mr. Zarvis hired longtime Lab teacher and Dean of Students Larry McFarlane, and then in 1975, the day camp program morphed into Max/Willie Summer Camp (jointly run by Mr. McFarlane and teacher Mary Williams), the precursor to today’s Adventure Kids, Fun-in-the-Sun, and Lab Sports Camp programs.

“I learned to swim as a result of the required physical education program that Bill Zarvis developed,” says Murray Dray, ’58. “I also received what turned out to be my first experience as a teacher from this very dear man, first in the Lab After School Play program, then as a counselor at the day camp. When I studied law at Harvard for a year, one of my former campers, Daniel McFarlane, became one of my teachers.” Says Athletics Director Dave Ribbens, “I had the opportunity to meet Bill in spring 2008 in San Antonio at the home of his daughter, Gerry Bradley, ’60. Bill passed away in 2009, but Gerry and her family are thrilled to have this award named in his father’s honor.”

The newly named award will be presented for the first time in June at Lab’s 10th Annual Sports Awards Ceremony.

Boys Swimming

The boys swim team re-wrote the record books, setting an amazing six varsity school records (most nearly two decades-old) at the IHSA Sectional meet in February, where the team finished third. Five of the record-breaking swimmers are freshmen and sophomores: Eamonn Keenan is a freshman, Nigel Van Ha, Junior Lin, Fabrice Gayot-Siinestr, and Kevin Xu, are sophomores; and Eliot Leavmore is a senior. The new records are:

- Varsity 200-yard Freestyle: Nigel: 22.22. Previous record: 22.27.
- Varsity 100-yard Backstroke: Nigel: 55.34. Previous record: 56.02 in 2013.

Boys Basketball

The boys basketball team has had a great season, finishing with a 20-6 record, winning the ISL Championship with a perfect 12-0 mark and a thrilling IHSA 3A regional championship win over Chicago Vocational with a late fourth-quarter comeback victory. The Maroons were led by senior Max Rothchild, MVP of the ISL, ISL Coach of the Year, and ISL Honorable Mention. Senior Jonathan King and junior Jordan Moran, both All-ISR First Team, and senior Logan Crowel was All-ISR Honorable Mention. Coach John Moran was named IBCA and ISL Coach of the Year.

Girls Basketball

The girls basketball team had their third consecutive winning season, led by seniors William Eckstein and Maude Jansen, and junior Kendall Rettinger placing third in the ISL, and the Mother Holiday Tournament. Kendall was named to first-team All-ISL and ICBA Honorable Mention All-State. Lillian was second-team All-ISL, Mather All-Tournament, and Maude was Midway Classic All-Tournament, and Honorable Mention All-ISL.

Sports Highlights

Reading Mollie is Three: Growing Up in School, by Vivian Gussin Paley, contributed to Nursery assistant teacher Paige James’s desire to become an early childhood educator. As she retires from Lab this June, she thought it fitting book to recommend. Mollie is brought to school every day before eight. In the empty rooms, her large vocabulary pours out in search of time and place.

“I’m not too big to reach that,” she says, trying to hang up her jacket. “But my already big to reach it.”

“When is your birthday, Mollie?”

“Tomorrow. It’s called October ninth.”

“October is the next month after this one. Called September.”

“When is your birthday, Mollie?”

“Today is the month after this one. Then you’ll be three, Mollie. This month is called September.”

“When I get to be four, I’ll be three.”

And so we meet Mollie, a child in one of Ms. Paley’s classes at the Laboratory Schools. Ms. Paley, now retired, is a master teacher whose books brilliantly illuminate child development, particularly as it occurs in the classroom, more clearly than any textbook can. The only early childhood educator to have received a MacArthur Genius Award, Ms. Paley’s close observations led her to discover that having young children act out the stories they dictate to adults gives them a voice and provides a powerful way to understand and give meaning to their world.

By listening carefully and respectfully to their preschoolers and recording their conversations, investigations, negotiations, and discoveries—and later transcribing them—Ms. Paley is able to write about children’s development in a specific way. She presents us with particular, concrete experiences—children’s interpretations of them, Ms. Paley’s description of Mollie’s first year in school enables us to see Mollie’s moments of emerging clarity, and her progress toward understanding her own role within the classroom and the world. It is a year later, and Mollie has just turned four.

Last year you always wanted to be Fire Star. Now you’re Rainbow Brite. I wonder what you’ll want to be when you’re five.”

“But I’m still going to be four a very long time.”

“Takes a long time when you’re an older child.”

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Originally it was an Elizabethan fair for U-High featuring a Shakespeare performance, a Maypole dance, and guests outfitted in period costumes. Nearly four decades later, Lab’s longest-running annual tradition, Rites of May, has evolved into a school-wide, multicultural happening, celebrating the school’s global reach through a weekend of cultural, culinary, and carnival events organized by dozens of parent and student volunteers. The activities reflect the incredible cultural diversity of the Lab community, where families report speaking more than 50 languages at home.

More than 950 parents, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the Laboratory Schools gathered this year at Connections to honor retiring Laboratory Schools Director David W. Magill and Board President John W. Rogers, Jr., ’76, for their visionary leadership and to raise funds—nearly $900,000—to support student financial aid. Hosted by University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer and vice-chaired by Kate Collins and Christopher J. McGowan, the event featured a tribute video to Mr. Rogers (directed and produced by Stephan Mazurek, Mary Frances Budig, and Andrea Wishom) in which former Lab parents Valerie Jarrett, X’73, and Penny Pritzker and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, ’82, shared kind and funny memories, as well as a video honoring Mr. Magill which featured former Lab students and friend Kobe Bryant.
Cretaceous Park

Fourth graders bring a dinosaur to life, with help from UChicago paleontologist Paul Sereno

by Maureen Searcy
An amber-tinted eye sits in a bone socket, secured by a glob of clay. Paleontologists don’t know what color dinosaur irises were, so Lisa Sukenic’s fourth-grade students make do with glass mountain-lion eyes. Paleontologists don’t know what color dinosaur feathers were, so Lisa Sukenic’s fourth-grade students make do with fabric—black and brown, blue and white, scarlet and green. One student rolls a ball of gray epoxy clay in his hands—“trials and tribulations,” he says, as he squishes the clay on the table. Another student makes do with glass mountain-lion eyes. Paleontologists don’t know what color dinosaur skin was, so Lisa Sukenic’s fourth-grade students make do with pink and purple, yellow and orange. One student makes an eye with two irises: “on one side, it’s a blue eye, and on the other side, it’s a golden eye.” Another student makes an eye with two irises: “on one side, it’s a blue eye, and on the other side, it’s a golden eye.”

Dinosaur collaboration was more than an art project, informing the students’ other lessons too. They studied geological eras—Rajasaurus was thought to have lived in the late Cretaceous period—and they wrote dinosaur-inspired haiku.

A lab life story: Art is another way to communicate, says Ms. Alicea. “Not every child learns the same way. We have to have different modalities of teaching.”

“I don’t do anything in isolation,” says Ms. Sukenic. “Everything I teach the students is in full dimension. When we work with the dinosaurs, I don’t see much separation between science and art. This is a really interesting project for Gina, Paul, and me because Paul started off as an artist.”

Ms. Alicea agrees that art informs other areas of learning: “Art isn’t a separate activity. It’s part of life. Art is another way to communicate,” she says. “Not every child learns the same way. We have to have different modalities of teaching so if a child is struggling in one area, they’ll get it in another.”

Art and science—there’s no strict line,” says Professor Sereno. “They’re really married together. Visualizing something, which is exciting. It had horns, but where on its head? What texture were the horns? Did it have lips, eyelids? What color was it? Ms. Alicea made copies of these sketches, which the students consult as they add details to the clay-sculptures. Stamped, horned, and scarred—are the dinosaur collaboration was more than an art project, informing the students’ other lessons too. They studied geological eras—Rajasaurus was thought to have lived in the late Cretaceous period—and they wrote dinosaur-inspired haiku.

Several factors combined to activate self-hardening. Teacher Ms. Alicea puts her nose to the Construct a hunk to another student, who rolls it into a ball and smooths it out. The clay is still soft, the students can add details to the clay-sculptures. Stamped, horned, and scarred—are the dinosaur collaboration was more than an art project, informing the students’ other lessons too. They studied geological eras—Rajasaurus was thought to have lived in the late Cretaceous period—and they wrote dinosaur-inspired haiku.

Rajasaurus makes a good model because: “it was big enough, but not too big. It was a meat eater, which is exciting. It had a horn and areas of bill and scale,” says Professor Sereno, who was part of the team that discovered Rajasaurus in 2001 amid a jumble of bones collected in 1983. The 30-foot-long, eight-foot-tall theropod lived 66 million years ago in western India. Professor Sereno wasn’t always passionate about dinosaurs; he was a fun of fossils. When he was six or so, living in Naperville, he took a trip to the nearby Mason Creek Quarry, where he found a fossil—not a beautiful fossil like his brother found, but a small worm which made him happy. He remained enamored even when his “worm” turned out to be fossilized shark skin. Professor Sereno, whose mother was an art teacher, studied art and biology at Northern Illinois University. A behind-the-scenes visit to a natural history museum showed him that paleontology combines science, art, and adventure. After earning his PhD in geological sciences, he began fieldwork in 1988 in the Andes, where his team discovered the first dinosaurs to roam the earth.

In September 2012 the famed dinosaur hunter introduced himself to Ms. Alicea at an open house and suggested a science–art collaboration around dinosaurs. The collaboration with Professor Sereno exemplifies Lab uncommon privilege of being part of a funding research institution. “Dinosaurs’ philosophy is still living at Lab,” Ms. Alicea says. “We’re still learning by doing. When we’re studying architecture, we walk over to the Robie House. For this lesson, the students toured the Field Lab, located just a few blocks away in the Accelerator Building.

When the project started this academic year, Ms. Sukenic was thrilled. Also a writer, she spends many summers at a writing workshop in Abiquiu, New Mexico, at Georgia O’Keeffe’s Ghost Ranch, which hosts the Field Hall Museum of Paleontology. A resident paleontologist often took her to the nearby dig site, where Ms. Sukenic documented the excavation process, and even dug a little. The experience gave her the idea of “Juggling Lab,” she says. “Let’s think from the bottom up and go from the beginning of time all the way through the built environment.”

Before modeling, the children all sketched out their ideas for Rajasaurus. It had horns, but where on its head? What texture were the horns? Did it have lips, eyelids? What color was it? Ms. Alicea made copies of these sketches, which the students consult as they add details to the clay-sculptures. “Can we give her a scar?” one student asks. Ms. Fitzgerald, a Field Lab employee since 2007, agrees, showing how Raptorex has a bloody wound on its upper lip. “This will have spikes on her snout and protruding from her cheek, and one substantial horn atop her head. While the clay is still soft, the students can add details to the clay-sculptures. Stamped, horned, and scarred—are the dinosaur collaboration was more than an art project, informing the students’ other lessons too. They studied geological eras—Rajasaurus was thought to have lived in the late Cretaceous period—and they wrote dinosaur-inspired haiku.

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A Legacy of Learning, Leadership, and Innovation

As he retires after 11 years as director of the Laboratory Schools (one of the longest tenures in Lab history), David Magill looks back on a decade of change.

What originally drew you to Lab?

My entire life prior to coming here was in public education. For 20 years I was a public-school superintendent in two separate school districts in suburban Philadelphia. I was also on the board of Educational Records Bureau in New York City, a company that catered mostly to independent and high-achieving public schools and it made me think about doing something different.

I created a number of private schools around the country. None felt quite as if I were a fit. They were too informal, they lacked diversity, and in many cases they were just an escape from public education rather than a true, genuine, and better educational experience.

When it came to Lab, I was intrigued. It was a school of excellence, attached to a great university, with opportunities far and above what we had. When I came here, I was intrigued. It was raising taxes on people, and they needed to know why that was important. That experience transferred pretty easily to fundraising at Lab, which I enjoyed much more than raising taxes (laughs). It’s been very rewarding, and the best part is giving people who love this place an opportunity to express it through their gifts.

Can you talk about some of the ways that Lab is supporting students?

My background before I became a school administrator was in special education. It was clear when I came to Lab that we didn’t have an coordinated program, for nursery through grade 12, to identify learning differences and address those in appropriate ways. It also was clear that we had many bright kids and teachers who, if given a little additional help, would succeed very well.

“Leader’s job is to ask the right questions and to pose the right challenges and know the capacity that your organization has to respond. We have incredible capacity here.”

What will you miss when you retire?

The happiness of children is what I’ll miss the most. I love turning around in my seat and watching our youngest children playing out in the courtyard. I loved it when the little ones would knock on our window to see if I could come out to play. I love the enthusiasm of our High School students who are involved in things like Model United Nations. I love the grandeur of our graduating seniors in Rockefeller Chapel where our students march in to “Doom and Circumstance.” I like to observe kids who excel in the classrooms also playing their heart out on the tennis court or on a soccer field—or just enjoying being teenagers. I love to see the light bulbs go on in the eyes of our students when a teacher poses questions that force them to think. I love the opportunity for give-and-take and the Socratic method in our classrooms in Middle and High School, where kids are debating issues.

What will you do next?

I love the provocative kinds of questions that teachers ask—and the relationships in a courtyard. Some things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate.

What are the biggest challenges that Lab and other independent schools face?

We were very fortunate to hire Ken James as our first director of student services. He made recommendations in terms of learning and social counseling, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate. Those things I’ll miss, which all can participate.

What is the dream of every head of a school, including me, to have a needs-blind enrollment policy. That means you have enough money built up through endowment, through people who want to see that school succeed well into the future, that you don’t have to worry about whether a student can afford it. Lab has increased financial aid and scholarships significantly over the years, and we must continue to keep that as our focus.

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If anybody knows his way around a university campus, it’s Dan Huttenlocher, ’76. From a childhood spent at the institutions where his parents taught—Harvard, Yale, Columbia, then the University of Chicago—to his undergraduate education at the University of Michigan, graduate school at MIT, and decades spent teaching computer science and business at Cornell University, Mr. Huttenlocher has spent most of his life around students and professors. But Mr. Huttenlocher has never had a campus experience quite like the one he’s having now. Cornell Tech, of which he is dean and vice provost, didn’t exist, even as an idea, until 2011. Now it boasts about 30 students, ten faculty, and 30 staff, working out of space donated by Google in New York City’s Chelsea neighborhood. The permanent campus, on Roosevelt Island near Manhattan in New York’s East River, won’t open until 2017, and the school will not reach its full size for an estimated 25 years.

In the meantime, it seems rude to say that Mr. Huttenlocher and his team are making things up as they go along, but—

“Sure we are,” he says. “It’s like any startup.” Cornell Tech focuses on preparing its graduates for careers in the tech sector, especially to hold and test for startup companies. In addition to technically oriented graduate programs, the school offers a year MBA for students who have completed computer science or computer science-related work, which Mr. Huttenlocher jokingly calls “finishing school for geeks.”

It’s a daunting task, but one he believes in passionately.

“It’s always hard when you’re in the beginning stages to have any kind of clarity,” he says. “But it’s clear the needs of the information age are not being met by the current educational system.”

Mr. Huttenlocher compares this stage in the digital age to the early industrial revolution, when engineering schools emerged because “people in industry said, ‘The needs of the industrial economy are not being met by physics and chemistry.’”

To meet those needs, Cornell University, which US News ranked the 13th-best engineering school and the fifth-best computer science department in the nation last year, launched Cornell Tech. The new school does things a bit differently than a traditional engineering or technology program; its goals are to hone students’ technical skills while also developing their communications and business skills. In addition to professors, industry leaders spend time with Cornell Tech students, both in front of projects and in classroom sessions, for practical sessions every Friday. Students practice pitches for new projects or startup proposals, which are subject to critique by their peers, a common practice in business schools, but almost unknown in engineering or computer science.

Engineers are wired to get things right, especially when they have ‘the needs of others,’ says Mr. Huttenlocher, whose research has mainly focused on computer vision, or the ability of computers to analyze and process images. In contrast, entrepreneurs cannot be afraid to fail, multiple times if necessary, before finding a successful business model.

“What we’re really trying to do is bring together the classical computer science master’s-level curriculum and the more practical orientation,” Mr. Huttenlocher said in a June 2013 interview with Brian O’Kelley, cofounder and CEO of the tech company AppNexus. “Our goal is to produce graduates who can succeed in having a major impact in a high-growth environment.”

Mr. Huttenlocher and Cornell envision a school that will both learn from and contribute

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by Jeanie Chung

Not your Average Startup
printing, among other innovations. He’s been a member of the Cornell faculty since 1995.

Having worked extensively both within and outside of academia, Mr. Huttenlocher tries to draw on the best of both worlds to create a new kind of educational institution. “I’ve never viewed academia, and the ivory-tower view of it, as separate from what’s going on in the outside world,” he says.

Straddling science, technology, and business, Cornell Tech’s emphasis on experiential learning is very much of a piece with the Laboratory Schools. Mr. Huttenlocher draws connections between his experience of U-High and his life and career.

“One of the things I definitely learned at Lab was how to articulate things clearly,” he says. “Not just how to talk to people, but how to think clearly about things and express them.” In particular, he says, his experience on U-High’s debate team helped him develop those skills. Like many Lab alumni, Mr. Huttenlocher grew up in academia. His father, the late Peter Huttenlocher, was a pediatric neurologist and gained renown for his research on synaptic pruning: the idea that a multitude of neurons develop as a child’s brain grows, followed by a gradual “pruning” of the synapses that are not used frequently. His mother, U-Chicago-William S. Gray Professor Emerita of Psychology Janelle Huttenlocher, focused her research primarily on how children learn. Together, they made sure that their own children—Dan, Carl, and Anna, ’79—kept as many synapses intact as possible.

“There always was the expectation that what we would do would be quite intellectually challenging. But I’m not sure they believed that anything outside of academia was intellectually challenging,” Dan says with a laugh.

“Exhilarating,” he says, “and terrifying at the same time.”

All in the Huttenlocher family

U-High also was a “breath of innovation and discovery” and “a game-changer” for New York City school public school system, Mayor Bloomberg said. The school was a “credible, major institution of higher learning,” and an “honor to get to submerge in the best.”

“HUTTENLOCHER”

“I was amazingly lucky to get to submit my project, share and spend time with incredibly smart students from across the country,” Mr. Abella said of the science competition. “I wish more people had the opportunity to participate in programs such as the Science Search because it really turns people on to the sciences at a young age.”

In 1988 Mr. Abella took 1st place for pioneering research on genes, chosen over 1,400 other entrants. He now teaches theoretical physics at Brandeis University. And in 2002 Beckett Stern placed 6th. He went on to earn a PhD in Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science at the University of Chicago.
Leaders and legacy

- The DePencier Society recognizes alumni who give $1,000+ annually to Lab
- The Dewey Society honors alumni, parents, and friends who contribute $2,500+ annually

An elementary-school teacher at Lab from 1925 to 1958, Mrs. DePencier taught future luminaries such as Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens and influential historian William H. McNeill.

Donors at either of these levels are invited to a special Lab reception and your gift can be made in honor of any Lab teacher who has made a difference to you.

For information
Contact the Office of Alumni Relations and Development at 773-702-0578 or at development@ucls.uchicago.edu.

The DePencier Society and Dewey Society are two ways that Lab honors leadership donors—and one way you can honor a teacher that has made a difference to you or your child.