Anonymous Lab family to help fund development of
makerspaces and maker curriculum

A $2.3 million anonymous gift to the Laboratory Schools, from a Lab family, will fund major investment in the development of Lab’s maker-spaces and maker curriculum with the particular goal of jumpstarting this hands-on, interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning with Lab’s older students. The gift also supports the effort to revitalize Jackman Field in support of Connections 2018.

“The maker movement is a dynamic way to experience education,” says Lab Director Charlie Abelmann. “It is very much how a Lab education works in that it is simultaneously forward-thinking and an opportunity to lean into our past—our Deweyan, hands-on, student-led learning heritage.”

With new and renovated spaces, the Laboratory Schools have made a deep commitment to providing the tools and curriculum to integrate computer science, science, the arts, mathematics, and more.

This gift will provide funds to:

- Initially equip two makerspaces on the Historic Campus—a “clean” workshop and a “messy” production space. Over time, students will help define what work will happen in these spaces and a community build project will invite adults and children together to help build the spaces.

- Design mobile maker carts and provide teacher innovation grants. Understanding that hands-on experiences deepen learning, these resources will help teachers to develop “making” opportunities that can unfold in their classrooms or with smaller groups of students.

- Connect Lab to an array of outside experts, including individuals and local groups as well as UChicago educators and students, who can: assist with designing and optimizing Lab’s new maker spaces; arm Lab teachers with the knowledge they need to help the Schools run its new makerspaces with greater self-sufficiency; establish partnerships that will allow these spaces to be in use outside of the normal school day.

- Sponsor “study tours” so that a group of Lab educators (along with students and parents) can visit other schools to help us broadly envision how hands-on learning might be further developed at Lab, especially in the Middle and High Schools.
• Share Lab’s work out to the larger educational field by 1) providing the resources to document Lab’s “Arc of Making”—how making is leveraged across our curriculum from nursery through high school—and 2) helping Lab reclaim its role as a “laboratory school,” a convener and an innovative leader by supporting an annual conference at Lab to share our work with others.

Lastly, a portion of this gift will support a community effort to upgrade Jackman Field through its conversion to turf and the installation of a new practice track. This project will serve both Lab’s physical education and interscholastic athletics programs, and this gift will be integrated into the Connections 2018 community fundraising objectives.

Says Mr. Abelmann, “There is clearly passion in our community for the work that has always made Lab great and that is offering an outstanding educational experience by placing value on innovation and experimentation—and doing work that places the student at the center of our work. I am grateful for those supporting an effort so central to our mission.”

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