

From the Director



The generosity of our community has positioned us to realize this vision of a newly revitalized school campus.

This annual report is an opportunity to reflect on the year behind us, and this fall I do so with particular gratitude. By the time this report reaches your doors, we may have already reached our groundbreaking goal of 75 percent—or \$30 million—raised toward the Lab+ Campaign. Thus, we can move forward with construction on our project as soon as the University of Chicago's Board of Trustees approves the plans from our team of architects, which is scheduled for March 2010.

Despite a challenging economic climate unrivaled in my lifetime, the generosity of our community has positioned us to realize this vision of a newly revitalized school campus. The efforts of a team of committed volunteers and the generosity of each of you has allowed us to gather much-needed momentum in our Lab+ Campaign, while simultaneously sustaining the day-to-day efforts of Lab through operating support and financial aid and scholarships.

For the past couple of years, I've spoken about how this campaign will transform our historic campus and strengthen every aspect of a Lab education. But in the very near future, we will move from concept to design. I am sure that there will be difficult work ahead, as the construction itself will undoubtedly bring its own set of challenges. However, I can't wait to share the next phase of this remarkable endeavor with you. Thank you all for your support of this great institution. I am so proud to be a part of it.

David W. Magill, EdD
Director

From the Board Chair

It is with great pleasure that I write to you as the new chair of the Laboratory Schools' Board of Directors. As an alumnus and the parent of a recent graduate, I know that Lab is a unique place where highly motivated students, teachers, and parents come together to create an extraordinary educational environment.

We are quickly approaching the halfway point of the Lab+ Campaign. Although we've been fortunate in the amazing support of donors like you, it will take the efforts of our entire community of parents, alumni, and friends to carry us through to our goal.

As a member of the University of Chicago Board of Trustees, I have personally witnessed the mutually beneficial relationship between Lab and the University. Not only is the University contributing \$40 million to the Lab+ Campaign, they are supporting the Schools by securing financing and helping to shepherd this project to completion. However, it is also up to those of us who have benefitted from the Schools—and continue to do so—to ensure that Lab is a place that always exemplifies the best in education.

The relationships you'll read about in these pages resonate with my own and my daughter's experiences, and I hope with yours. Through the support of our community, Lab will continue to be strong now and for generations to come.

John W. Rogers, Jr.

John W. Rogers, Jr., '76, is the new chair of the Laboratory Schools' Board of Directors. John has served on Lab's Board for more than 20 years. He is also executive co-chair of the Lab+ Campaign and sits on the Alumni Leadership Committee.

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The power of Lab hinges on John Dewey's belief that "education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself." This belief informs how our families and faculty approach each child's academic experience. And it comes to life at Lab in the vibrant relationship between adult and child.

It starts with the notion that children are to be taken seriously—as thinkers and as contributors in a community of learners. And then, between teacher and student, adult and child, a relationship develops that is born of respect . . . and an understanding that each person's voice deserves to be heard.

The Lab+ Campaign promises to bring resources to every aspect of Lab. It will improve the school's physical environment, support outstanding teachers, and help build a balanced student body in which financial considerations do not block talented students from this world class education.

And even while we embrace these changes, we know that some things deserve to be left just as they are—

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STUDENT, PARENT,
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THE POWER OF
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THE CHILD

Building on the Power of Lab



To witness Illia Mazurek’s art classes is to appreciate her perseverance. And watching her give each child undivided attention while simultaneously keeping the rest of her students on task is to appreciate her focus and intensity.

In one class her third-graders are painting complicated papier-mâché masks designed to reflect an interest each child has outside of school. In another, first-graders are in the final stages of creating prints using three-color reduction plates made of Styrofoam. Over multiple weeks, the children have drawn self-portraits on paper, transferred the drawings to Styrofoam “plates,” and inked layers of color, etching their plates in between to add detail. As they see the result of the final inking, each child’s pride is palpable, and Ms. Mazurek is there to reinforce that pride, each and every time.

“Teaching art is about teaching how to be a creative thinker, and being a creative thinker is thinking independently,” says Ms. Mazurek. “And so there are lots of contradictions: even as I’m telling them to do it this way, I want them to think for themselves.”

Lab’s structure opens the door to more complicated projects like this but also offers Ms. Mazurek the breathing room she needs to connect. “I have the luxury of working in small groups and can talk to each child individually to learn how they work,” Ms. Mazurek explains. “The intimacy of the class allows you to get around, to check in with each child, to make sure they’re progressing.”

Ms. Mazurek feels that her connection to students is deepened by the very nature of the Schools: “Something at Lab makes it more like a family where people really want to connect.” Kids have more freedom here, she explains, so that even something as simple as being allowed to walk to the bathroom alone gives a child the time to poke their face into her class to smile, say hi, and broaden a relationship beyond the classroom.

“Art teaches you to see things in a new way. I hope that this is a skill my students will take into all aspects of their education and lives,” she says.

“SOMETHING AT LAB MAKES IT MORE LIKE A FAMILY WHERE PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO CONNECT.”

Art: teaching creative thinking



Lab+ and the arts

From music to painting, from drama to photography, the Lab+ Campaign will allow the Schools to build spaces dedicated to the arts that match the creativity and talent of our students and teachers.



SOMETIMES, THE CLASS' INTERESTS TAKE TEACHERS INTO UNNERVING TERRITORY, BUT CHILD-DIRECTED LEARNING MEANS THEY ARE WILLING TO FOLLOW.

Early childhood education: nothing is what it seems

There's a table in Blaine Lobby covered with complicated sculptures made by the kindergarteners in Maureen Ellis and Delores Rita's class. Hidden in this activity are some important lessons: the difference between abstract and realistic, the ways recycling affects our world, and the knowledge that if a child has an idea, an adult will listen.

"In early childhood classrooms children drive the curriculum," explains Ms. Ellis. "The teacher is continually figuring out each child and each class in terms of who they are and what interests them."

And, in the figuring, Ms. Ellis and Ms. Rita have learned that each class has its unique personality. Last year's class was very spatial—into building and recycling. So the teachers created a woodworking station, including a power drill that the kids learned how to use. A few years ago it was stories, details, and BIG questions: Are people born good or bad? Can a bad guy become good?

For the adult, this approach to building a "community of learners" is both more challenging and more rewarding. "You're not just redoing everything year to year," says Ms. Ellis, "Everything is open-ended until you meet the children as individuals and as a group."

Teachers start with the individual but, explains Ms. Ellis, "you have to be aware of what speaks to the whole group. You need to build the relationships between the children and show what they have in common. In that way they see how they are different and that it is ok to be different."

Sometimes, the class' interests take teachers into unnerving territory, but child-directed learning means they are willing to follow. When their class locked on the *Titanic*, Ms. Ellis and Ms. Rita were wary—themes of death and tragedy presented obvious problems, but add to that the challenge of teaching historic perspective to an age group that has a hard time understanding hours and days. "No early childhood teacher would choose this topic, but it worked," says Ms. Rita.

The two teachers shifted focus to age-appropriate topics and activities: icebergs and heroism and how procedures changed to protect people. And when the class had to decide on their piñata contribution for Rites of May that year, you can guess what they made.



Lab+ and early childhood education

Lab will build a new early childhood center to house the renowned N/K, first, and second grade program; accommodate increased enrollment at the lowest grades; provide our youngest learners with spaces tailored to maximize their independence; offer indoor gross motor skills areas; and connect indoor and outdoor learning more seamlessly.

“We went to the moon to have fun but the moon turned out to completely suck.”

Cynthia Oakes reads this first line from a new novel, *Feed*, to an eighth grade class. It’s not an overstatement to say she gushes over the choices from Rowley Library’s Summer Reading List. And sure, she gets some cool adolescent stares. But when kids file out, several take books from her table straight to the circulation desk. School’s almost out for the year, exams are in the offing, and these kids still want to read for pleasure.

Cynthia Oakes might just have the best job at Lab. She and the other librarians get to read youth literature voraciously (how else can they make genuine recommendations?). They work closely with teachers to make sure the library is fully integrated into the curriculum (not just humanities but science and world languages, too). And they get to connect with kids in a manner different from most faculty at Lab (no grades required).

In addition to teaching “information literacy”—the ability to search, assess, and recognize with a critical eye—and working with teachers to support lesson plans, the librarians simply get kids to read: they “sell books,” as Ms. Oakes describes it.

Much of their success comes from interacting with children as individuals. “Our goal is to reach everyone we can and connect really deeply. . . to *know* the kids,” explains Ms. Oakes.

The librarians at Lab have in common with all Lab faculty their desire to work with children of a specific age—at Rowley, that’s pre-teens and teenagers. “You get to know students because you want to,” Ms. Oakes says. “They come in, they ask for recommendations or help, and you don’t grade them. I get to know them in a different way. They are freer to ask questions if they do not understand something or are lost. There’s no tension about being judged.”

Keeping kids at the center of decision-making is central to Lab’s intellectual tradition. “If we want kids to be lifelong learners and lifelong readers, we need to give them a wide range of choices; even though I might not like a book, the range has to be there,” says Ms. Oakes as she explains why the library stocks titles as diverse as *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Clique* books, a popular series in the new “mean girls” literary genre.

And literature helps Lab students learn to interact over ideas. “When a book becomes all the rage, there is lots of dialogue about it, and that gives kids a chance to have respectful dialogue even when we disagree. You never want to put the kibosh on passion.”

Lab+ and libraries

Investment in libraries is one way Lab+ will guarantee teachers and students the resources and spaces they need for one of the best educational experiences in the country.

> Blaine Library will be expanded from its current location (once regular classrooms) into a space designed to hold books and facilitate greater use (i.e., story-time for one class while another accesses the stacks).

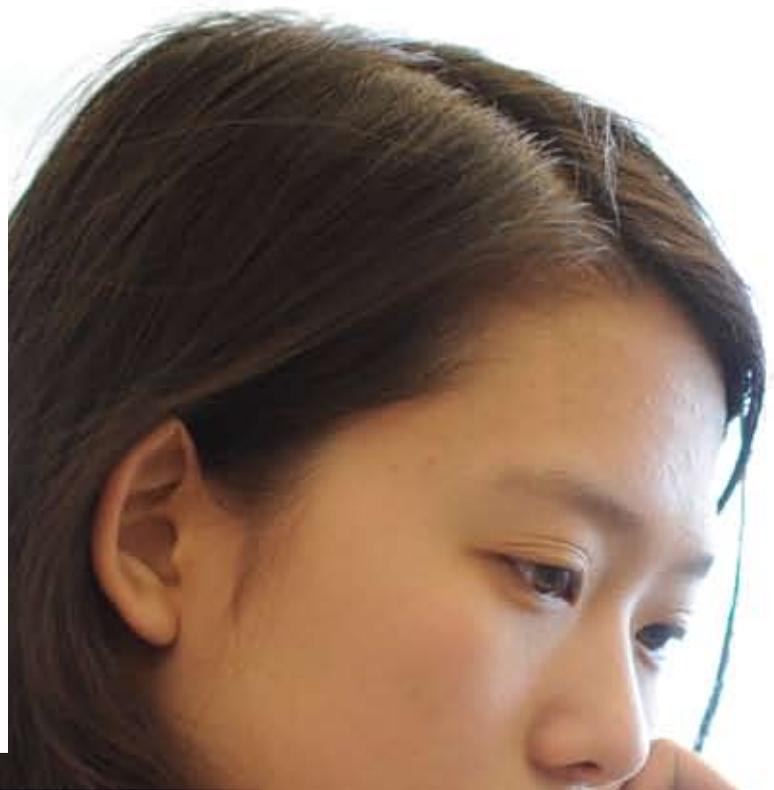
> The Middle and High School libraries will grow their age-appropriate collections and workspaces but stay linked in recognition of how children at these ages need to cross back and forth between levels of reading sophistication.



Libraries: critical thinking without the grades

SCHOOL’S ALMOST OUT FOR THE YEAR, EXAMS ARE IN THE OFFING, AND THESE KIDS STILL WANT TO READ FOR PLEASURE.

Technology: kids even in the infrastructure



Lab+ and infrastructure

In the coming years, Lab+ will allow us to update our historic buildings to meet 21st-century learning standards. Simple but critical improvements, like modernized heating and cooling systems, will address basic infrastructure needs and complement the creation of new spaces, including community gathering areas on both grand and intimate levels and additional science and computer labs. Throughout the campus, we will ensure that technology is brought into daily classroom life in the most appropriate and beneficial ways.

Lab teachers spend their days connecting with students to build relationships that translate into richer learning. You don't necessarily expect to find that dynamic in the office of Information Technology, but an ad hoc opportunity to bring kids into the IT group as part-time workers has turned into yet another way for student voices to be heard, valued, and acted upon.

"As is often the case at Lab," says IT Director Curt Lieneck, "a person has an idea and makes it real." He partnered with computer teachers to identify kids with the technical know how and work ethic to become IT troubleshooters.

Mr. Lieneck spent years as a teacher (some in the Lower School) and as a youth counselor before transitioning into a tech role. His background as an educator helps him connect with his student workers in a very Lab way—he recognized that setting up a positive work experience for the kids was just as important as getting the work done. "They made clear they were not interested in drudge work, and I accommodated that; they were not shy about speaking up."

Mr. Lieneck's job has two components: using technology to help move instruction forward and maintaining IT for a \$35 million organization. It's not small job. Lab has more than 900 lap- and desktop workstations, just shy of 100 networked printers, 15,000 active web pages, 14 servers, and a staff of eight full-time workers who keep it all going.

"WE GIVE KIDS RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE TO THE SCHOOL, AND THEY TAKE IT VERY SERIOUSLY."

Giving the students a meaningful role in this team—they join in at the project planning level—turned out to be good for both students and the Schools. "Kids give great feedback," explains Mr. Lieneck. "They bring insight and ideas about how students are using computers that has been invaluable, and they think of things we might not necessarily think of."

The students, all of whom graduated this year, had access to sensitive technologies and were asked to help teachers in "tech crises" whose classes wouldn't have been a success if materials were not getting printed properly. Even for students it can be a stressful job.

"A lot of trust permeates our interactions with these kids. We give them responsibility to make a significant difference to the school, and they take it very seriously," says Mr. Lieneck.

"They begin to understand the richness that exists in any learning community and see how technology touches every aspect of that community."

“I’m in a school with a bunch of weird kids, and I love it!” says Jolisha Johnson, ’12, Lab’s first Malone Foundation scholar. And while this sentiment might not resonate at most institutions, at Lab it seems entirely fitting.

In spring 2008, Lab was awarded a \$2 million grant from the Malone Family Foundation, making it the first and only school in Illinois to earn that distinction. The Malone Foundation provides scholarship endowments to select independent schools for gifted students who lack the financial resources to best develop their talents—a mission closely aligned with Lab’s own commitment to increasing scholarship and financial aid. Another shared belief: that learning works best in an environment where every individual is celebrated, and where teachers and students interact as partners in the learning process.

Jolisha’s developed that sort of relationship with many adults at Lab, including math teacher Joseph Scroll and music teacher Katy Sinclair, because, she says, she sees them not just as teachers, but as individuals:

“The way they introduce themselves to you is, ‘I’m a person. You’re a person. Let’s sit down and talk, and hopefully you’ll learn something.’ I just feel like the way they act in the classroom is the same way they would act if I saw them 20 years from now on the street.”

The Malone scholarship is just one of many resources Lab is developing as it seeks to create a balanced community of learners. In the past few years, full scholarships have increased from one to 18. Alumni are playing a strong role, with many creating endowed class scholarships, and this year’s graduating seniors were the third class in a row to get a jump start on their fellow alumni by creating a senior class gift to eventually support a Lab scholar.



Lab+ and scholarship

In addition to capital improvements, the Lab+ Campaign will ensure that financial considerations do not get in the way of attracting the best and brightest students to our Schools.

LEARNING WORKS BEST IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS CELEBRATED.

Scholarships and financial aid: fostering a vibrant community of learners