

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools  
Parents' Association

# Annual Report

2015-2016



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June 6, 2016

Dear Parents,

Throughout the year, the PA focused on welcoming and integrating new families into the Lab community. Starting over the summer, we begin by welcoming new families through mentoring and support them through orientation programs and receptions throughout the fall. The PA organized many parent get-togethers including Parent2Parent, Restaurant Week, book groups, Mix and Mingle, and Parent Nights/HS Dinner. Parent volunteers also made it possible for families to meet for the first time or reconnect at events such as Bizaarnival, Fan Days and grade-level events like the 6th Grade Notecard Show.

As part of the effort to provide supplemental educational opportunities, the PA also sponsored three great events through our Speaker Series. Supporting Lab's faculty is also an important priority. The PA awarded nearly \$12,000 in grant funding toward curriculum innovation at the Lab. Considerable time and effort was devoted to reviewing the many teacher proposals. In addition, the PA invited speakers to engage Lab faculty on a range of topics, provided teacher's appreciation lunches, and helped with Nurses' clinics.

Finally, progress continued in representing parent perspectives at Lab. One of our major accomplishments this year was the launch of the PA

website (labparents.org). Parent volunteers created and maintain this website; feedback and traffic to the site has exceeded expectations. The PA Diversity Committee was also reborn this past September. All year, its new leadership solicited input from parents regarding the school's needs in the area of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. After a number of meetings to which all parents were invited, the Committee released its recommendations, which were shared with the administration and can be found on the PA website.

As this academic year comes to an end, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the administration, the PA board members, volunteers, students and all of you who have done so much to make this year an overwhelming success. I am also very grateful to my Co-President Sari Weichbrodt, who was not able to finish the year due to family relocation. I am thrilled that the PA is in extremely good hands next year with Tina Louie and Audris Wong, who will serve as Co-Presidents in 2016-17. I wish them the best of luck.

With much appreciation and thanks,

*Safi Runesha*  
PA President 2015-2016



The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools Parents' Association (PA) plays a vital role in creating a sense of community and supporting the mission of the school.

This past year, PA board members and volunteers greatly contributed to building a supportive school environment and promoting academic success. This Annual Report highlights our achievements in 2015-16.

We end this school year already planning for the next, with our focus on creating positive journeys filled with potential and (we hope!) less construction. In preparation, we've devoted significant work this year to investigating how effectively the PA spends its main assets—parent dues and volunteer time—and how we could better meet the needs of parents and families in a time of growth and transition.



## Looking Ahead to 2016-17

Tina Louie &  
Audris Wong

Across our three main bodies of work—community building, parent advocacy, and curriculum innovation—we saw a number of common themes. With two campuses and a shortage of informal spaces, parents across divisions were not meeting, socializing, and learning from each other as often as they had in the past. The sheer number of new families challenged our ability to orient them and access their interests and talents. There was still more potential for deeper learning and collaboration among staff, faculty, and parents. At the same time, some of our traditional events were no longer attracting sufficient volunteers, and financial constraints had limited our capacity to launch new events.

These daunting challenges, however, are outmatched by a deeply caring and talented community of parents, staff, and faculty. Collectively and consistently, we heard your desires for a stronger connection to each other, the chance to contribute and collaborate in a meaningful way, and the means to be heard and participate in the school's future.

With these thoughts in mind, here are a few things we have planned for 2016-17:

- We have already expanded our mentoring program across all divisions to greet the record number of new families coming to Lab this fall. Our Councils are also revising their orientation programs to welcome and welcome back families.
- Instead of competing for parent time and attention, we are coordinating with Alumni Relations Development (ARD) to take a holistic view of when parents are asked to participate or volunteer. Currently we are planning a school-wide event in the fall.
- We are also redesigning events like Rites of May and creating new events to provide more meaningful and desirable volunteer opportunities.
- This year we tracked volunteers for the first time and partnered with Director

Robin Appleby to celebrate them. With this baseline data, we are better positioned to expand our volunteer base and also empower volunteers to take on more leadership roles. We also see potential in making it easier for like-minded individuals to find each other and work on topics of mutual interest.

- In conjunction with our Speaker Series, Diversity Committee, and affinity groups, we hope to take speaker ideas from insight to meaningful practice through smaller discussion groups.

There is more to come—all of which we hope will be shaped by your ideas and input. In light of it being a transition year, working closely with the new administrative team and supporting parents in their concerns is an utmost priority.

We invite you to join us in setting the future direction of the Lab community.

In recent years, the Parents' Association has invested considerably in bringing a diversity of expertise to our community in the form of invited speakers. We endeavor to engage speakers who can address a range of issues that we and our children might encounter, along the arc from the youngest of scholars to high schoolers to emergent adults.

This year we were very fortunate to spend time with three speakers whose work has resonated in national and international discussions about parenting and education—on topics of independence, resilience, and the role of technology in our lives.

**Julie Lythcott-Haims** was featured in the first PA event in the Gordon Parks Assembly Hall, which drew about 150 attendees. Author of a bestselling book, *How to Raise an Adult*, she drew on her own experience as a parent and as former dean of students at Stanford and encouraged a move away from “helicopter parenting,” or “holding... hands too much, too hard, too often.” She shared her wisdom on how best to balance meeting children’s needs with helping them gain the skills they will need—resilience, resourcefulness, and confidence—to become adults. October 2015.

**Jessica Lahey**, author of *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, whose talk is profiled in the current issue of *Lab Life*, was the second speaker in our series, enjoyed by over 100

attendees. Lahey presented current research in psychology, education, and cognitive studies to underscore the importance of using life’s experiences, and the mistakes that come with it, to allow children to gain the competence and resilience they need in adulthood. She shared advice on ways to learn for specific age groups, and discussed issues ranging from homework intervention to managing friendships to the importance of shoe laces. March 2016.

**Catherine Steiner-Adair** is the author of the award-winning book *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*. She discussed how technology and media are changing the way children learn and grow, and shared myriad studies to illustrate the challenges in retaining healthy relationships in a digital age. Dr. Steiner-Adair held a workshop for ESH parents, with 75 registrants, an afternoon session with 50 faculty and administrators in collaboration with Curt Lieneck, Lab’s Director of Information Technology, and an evening session with over 100 parents. Her talks became the topic of a follow-up LS principal chat and may lead to new cell phone policies at ESH. The middle school teachers will be reading her book over the summer for back-to-school discussions. April 2016.



## Speaker Series

Christie Henry

We are also delighted to announce next year’s speakers. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, winner of a MacArthur “Genius Grant” and sociologist at Harvard University, will join us November 15, 2016 to talk about what we can learn from our children, the focus of her forthcoming book *Growing Each Other Up*.

In spring 2017, Eboo Patel, author of *Acts of Faith* and *Sacred Ground*, founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core, and a member of President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships, will speak to parents, faculty and administrators, and high school students about interfaith collaboration.

To recommend future speakers or to share feedback, please contact Christie Henry, [chenry@uchicago.edu](mailto:chenry@uchicago.edu).



## Earl Shapiro Hall Council

Monica Hughson  
Shrunali Rai  
Katie Williams  
Leny Leung  
Amy Liszt  
Shipra Parikh

The ESH Council works closely with Principals Susan Devetski and Carla Young to build a solid foundation for our youngest students and their parents. Entering our third year as a second campus, we continue to create new traditions while honoring celebrations that have come before us. This year, we welcomed over 140 new families to the Lab community in a Parent Orientation held over two days. An expanded schedule of Parent Nights provided parents an opportunity to connect with each other and the teaching staff.

Our programming focused on introducing parents to the culture at ESH and to each other. We were able to continue ESH traditions such as Back-to-School Bagels and Carline Assistance in the first weeks of school. Three Mix and Mingle events after drop-off (one per quarter) emphasized introducing key administration faculty to ESH parents so they could become familiar with the individuals who shape the philosophies and policies of our school. In addition, the ESH Council hosted

two off-campus town hall meetings to give voice to issues of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Our Teacher Appreciation Lunch is a yearly tradition that is greatly received, and this year we encouraged classrooms to take part in the celebration as well through homemade cards.

The ESH Council continues to identify and meet additional parent needs. This year, ESH coordinated on-site short-term childcare services during six different parent-teacher conference days. The ESH Council has also taken a more active role in developing its mentor program for new families. Increasing our participation from past years, the ESH Council has taken the lead in matching new families to mentors and we continue to co-host the Cookies and Lemonade Reception with the Admissions Office. Also as part of the April PA Speaker Series, we were able to offer a workshop geared specifically to the children of ESH parents and the impact of technology, social media and child development. Over 75 people took advantage of this personalized workshop.

This year, the ESH Council was proud to be able to fund six innovative teacher grants. One grant provided the seed money to purchase woodworking tools and supplies for the newly created MakerSpace located on the second floor of ESH. All of the grants awarded were designed to unify as many students as possible, from the MakerSpace and library signage project that benefits all of ESH to the collaborative 2nd grade headdress performance art project.

Next year, we hope to provide more opportunities for ESH parents to meet and create a positive, supportive community, with both each other and Historic Campus parents. It has been a privilege to serve the families of Earl Shapiro Hall.



## Lower School Council

Lena Jessen  
Tracey Quinn  
Cathy R. Lee  
Sara Skelly

The Lower School Council continued its mission this year of building community between families, faculty and staff. The year began with new family orientation and a back-to-school picnic prior to the start of school. We continued to reinforce connections across the campuses by supporting middle school sports teams during quarterly Fan Days, connecting families across divisions during Restaurant Week, and encouraging Lower School students to write Teacher Appreciation Day notes to teachers at both the Historic Campus and at ESH. We reinforced community within Lower School grades with events such as Walk to School Day, Pumpkin Carving and the Ice Skating Party.

Growth and change continued to be a theme for this year's council. The Lower School saw an increase in the school's population by 24 more kids, and welcomed 30 new families during New Parent Orientation. To streamline the orientation for so many more new families, the Council revamped the New Parent Orientation materials and spent more time thoughtfully

matching mentor families. Lower School families adjusted routes and routines as construction continued in Judd, Café Lab and on Kenwood Mall with the addition of Kenwood Café. The Lower School looks forward to being able to use its beloved play spaces again in the fall.

While much growth and change is evident in the Lower School hallways, we also continued to support many longstanding events. We continued to support the Halloween festivities, 5<sup>th</sup> grade yearbook, dinner during Parent Night, and teacher grants. As in years past, we will end the year with popsicles and a picnic on the last day of school.

This year, the Lower School Council awarded six teacher grants. The goal of the grant initiative is to support teachers in generating novel and exciting learning experiences. This year's grants were submitted by teachers across all three grades and have enabled our faculty to test classroom innovations, enriching the experience for all our children. New this year was a pilot to encourage more classroom speakers for Lower School, and we were able to

arrange for a Skype talk with author Nikki Lofton in conjunction with Lisa Sukenic's National Novel Writing Month project. We hope to grow this pilot with more speakers in the future. Additional funded grants include: start-up items for a Lower School MakerSpace, speaker Stephanie Cox-Suarez, and costumes that will be used to build Lower School's theater program. Finally, we were able to assist teachers who had visited Harvard's Documentation in Learning project to implement their professional development in projects that included watercolor reflection journals and embroidering pillows as three-dimensional representations of a book.

Next school year, with construction and growth in the Lower School complete, we look forward to being able to focus on growing the connections among Lower School families and helping to create an enriching environment for all.



## Middle School Council

Tracy Coe  
Amanda Norton  
Yvette Killian  
Karen Slimmon

This year the Middle School Council worked closely with Principal Sandy Bixby to enhance communication to parents, and organize events to build community among students and families. We began the year with an email communication to parents called "Middle School 101," which outlined all kinds of events and traditions for students and families. We thanked MS teachers and staff with an array of baked goods on morning in February. We also organized an open forum for parents to discuss issues of diversity, equity and inclusion with Lab Ken Garcia-Gonzales in spring, and participated in the interview process for a newly created position, Middle School Dean of Students.

Other longstanding events we were able to organize and support this year include:

- Parent Night refreshments
- Principal chats
- Two very successful Giant Gym Nights, in fall and spring
- Three Fan Days, creating enthusiasm for home sports games, once per quarter. As part of Fan Day, we also created limited edition

Spiritwear T-shirts!

- A 6<sup>th</sup> grade notecard event, held at Wright Gallery, for all Lab 6<sup>th</sup> graders and families
- A 7<sup>th</sup> grade roller skating party
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation

We are especially pleased to report on the outcomes of the Middle School grant process. In supporting these grants, the Middle School Council asked teachers to focus on innovation, experiences, and community building (especially across grades or among groups of students that might not engage regularly with each other). This year, we funded or subsidized four projects:

- Humans of Lab (a photography project for middle and high schoolers, modeled on the compelling photojournalism of Humans of New York)
- Middle School Robotics initiative (served 24 students who got together every Friday to build robots, featured in the spring *LabLife*, and next year will become a competitive club, like Math Team and Science Olympiad)
- Visit from Rene Arceo, master printmaker and former curator of the National Museum of Mexican Art, who shared his

skills with and led gallery talks for middle schoolers

- New globe and multiple Art of Problem Solving books for math students to use to improve their skills and visualize interesting problems

Next year, we are looking ahead to the challenge of welcoming such a large incoming class of new sixth graders and their families, and continuing to work on community building among students and parents and communicating effectively about events and opportunities.

It has been our privilege to serve the Middle School community this year.





This year, the High School Council worked with the administration to foster community and support on three fronts: parents, students, and faculty.

For parents, we ran a Q&A panel for parents of incoming freshmen during orientation. These panels fit well into our tradition of monthly parent-to-parent sessions with a HS counselor present that allow parents to share questions and concerns with us and each other. Before big dances, the principal distributed the facts/suggestion sheet on “Curbing Drug and Alcohol Use” that we developed last year, and we developed a new facts/suggestion sheet on “Managing Stress” this year to coincide with final exams.

In fall 2015, we matched 26 new U-High students with mentor families. Fall 2016 will bring the largest freshman class in the school’s history, and we have matched over 50 new U-High students with mentor families. All these families were invited to attend the Seniors’ May Project Reception so they could meet the families of seniors at U-High. We are thankful to the many families who are planning summer get-togethers at our behest for by

neighborhood. Finally, we spearheaded the first Restaurant Week outings for Lab parents to meet and mingle with other Lab parents, and plan for this to become an annual tradition.

For students, freshmen begin High School with a welcome gift from the Council. Throughout the year we hold events for students to socialize, manage stress, and celebrate. We sponsored a very successful S'MORE FUN event (s'mores and hot chocolate) before winter break. Snacks were provided for the PSAT and practice ACT tests. We continued the traditional pizza lunch for seniors before winter break. Fan Days to support our teams and promote school spirit were launched in collaboration with the Athletic Director and the MS and LS Councils. Our prom grants provide financial assistance for seniors to attend prom. And we continue to plan for our largest project—planning and executing the graduation reception for our senior class (event costs shared with administration). For the second year in a row, All seniors will receive a graduation gift from us—a stadium blanket embroidered with the U-High crest and graduation year.

On the faculty front, we co-sponsored both a teacher appreciation lunch in the fall and breakfast in the spring for faculty and staff. Our teacher grant program assisted with some exciting new initiatives, such as playwright workshops in English, a laptop orchestra in music, and a Humans of Lab photography project in art. And we were closely involved with the administration in interviewing candidates for the HS Principal position, as well as the Director of Student Services position.

It has been a privilege to serve on the PA High School Council this year. Next year, we are looking forward to working closely with the new HS Principal and the new Director of Student Services. We will continue to support our students and provide forums to bring the U-High parent community closer together.



# Teacher Grants

Teacher grants promote educational excellence by assisting teachers in pursuing novel and exciting initiatives. Through a competitive grant process, the PA awarded \$12,000 in fall 2015 toward grants that fund or subsidize projects designed to advance students' learning.

## HIGH SCHOOL

- Orchestra Guest Speakers: Program to bring in music career professionals. Performances and discussions with cellist Ben Sollee and designer Benjamin Miles. [Rozalyn Torto]
- Cold water aquarium for Biology:  
“[The aquarium chiller] will help strengthen the connection between Lab and the Marine Biological Laboratory. The goal is to have two large saltwater tanks as the focal point of the new Biology room...There is also opportunities to connect with research that occurs on campus using marine organisms.” (Daniel Callieri)
- Young Playwright Festival writing workshop:  
“Our students came out of this workshop enthusiastic about the prospect of writing their own play, and they each submitted an original play to the Young Playwrights Festival.” (Rachel Nielsen)
- Electronic Music Ensemble: “Seed money” toward a pilot to connect Music, Science and Computer Science to the

possibilities of music technology.

“Each group chose a poem, and then collectively composed an original piece using electronic instruments. ... This seed of MIDI controllers has helped me get a basic alternate interpretation of an electronic music ensemble off the ground quickly, and allowed students to dive in with creating.” (Francisco Dean)

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

- “Art of Problem Solving” textbooks and classroom globes [Christopher Freeman]
- Speaker and demonstration on Latin American Printmaking to run parallel with the “Migracion” exhibit in GPAH gallery. Rene Arceo, a master printmaker, shared his skills with and lead gallery talks for our students. [Gina Alicea]
- Robotics pilot, in collaboration with MS Mathematics and Computer Science, to initiate a long-term MS Robotics program which will prepare students for team-oriented robotics competitions. [Tom Luthy]
- “Humans of LAB” multimedia project. Students connect to the larger community through storytelling, photography and social media (in conjunction with High School):  
“My students are deep in the midst of making the photos of our Humans of Lab project. Enthusiasm for it has spread to the high school advisories as well, and I've been asked to introduce the project and invite the advisories to participate.” (Sunny Neater-Dubow)



# Teacher Grants

## LOWER SCHOOL

- 5<sup>th</sup> grade "Book in a Bag": An embroidery project that promotes students expressing their thoughts and insights in a tactile, 3D form. [Kristin Frank]
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade "Reflections Journal":  
"I see them growing in their ability to express themselves in thoughtful new ways, using the 'languages' of color, line, shape, symbol and metaphor. They are sharing their work with one another and practicing the art of giving meaningful feedback. I see this project exemplifying the "Kind, Thoughtful, Responsible" theme in the Lower School." (Stephanie Mitzenmacher)
- Lower School costumes: For a 4<sup>th</sup> grade play focusing on Christopher Columbus and to start Lower School's costume inventory for its theater program. [Linda Weide]
- "Power of Documentation" speech by Stephanie Cox-Suarez (with ESH Council).  
"Pictures, videos, written notes are traces of the learning left behind which can be "relaunched" in order to take something deeper. Documentation involves the pedagogy of listening." (Carla Young, on Cox-Suarez' presentation to faculty.)
- LS MakerSpace start-up items (electronic components) to bring together a tinkering workspace [Alison Beaulieu]

- Q&A Skype workshop with a published author Nikki Lofton [Lisa Sukenic]

## EARL SHAPIRO HALL

- Kindergarten-wide project to create a permanent outdoor art installation: "The Butterfly Project" (coming in fall 2016) [Sarah Abella]
- ESH Makerspace: Seed money to purchase woodworking tools and supplies for the ESH Makerspace.  
"Having the Makerspace gives first and second graders a chance to create projects and share them with other students making things. Making is something that is often done together. Even when students are working on their own projects they are talking, collaborating, learning, and sharing with other makers. They learn to value collaboration over competition." (Amy Landry)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade semi-performance art piece Students will study hats and headdresses and their impact on identity. [Ana Romero]
- Student-made library signage, a joint project among Library, Art and Computer Science. [Mary Ogilvie]
- Traveling exhibit for the "Power of Documentation":  
"Our hope is that our work will inspire others to make visible their collaborations with visible, written work so we, as a school, can know more about the dynamic thinking that is the foundation of Lab School." (Meredith Dodd)





Parents' Association  
Board  
2016-2017

**Parents' Association Board 2016-2017**

Presidents	Tina Louie & Audris Wong
Presidents Elect	Amanda Norton & Kim Stolze
Treasurer	Saima Sufi
Treasurer Elect	Liz Anderson
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Middle School Council	Karen Slimmon Lena Jessen Claudia Roeder Colleen Sheehan
Lower School Council	Cathy Lee Sara Skelly Vanessa Copans Andee Stacy
Earl Shapiro Hall Council	Leny Leung Amy Liszt Shipra Parikh Manali Barua Tiffany Flowers Sieglinde Lim-Seiwert

We are deeply grateful to our retiring Board members for their service: Safi Runesha, Sari Weichbrodt, Matthew Miller, Neetu Sharma, Tracy Coe, Yvette Killian, Tracey Quinn, Monica Hughson, Shrunali Rai, and Katie Williams;

as well as outgoing Event Chairs Brandi Sandner, Triste Liteau-Smith, Kimberly Picciola, Wai-Sinn Chan, and Christine Squeri.

Our heartfelt thanks as well to the countless staff, faculty, and administrators at Lab who partner with us every day.

And to our many parent and student volunteers, we couldn't do this without you!

THANK YOU!