The Lamp Post

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COVER PHOTO:
After years of renovation, Mayfest returned to Copley Square.

INSIDE PHOTO:
Members of the Class of 2026 signed the wall of 263 Clarendon to leave their mark on our new building before graduating!

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Independent Research Study: *Combining Curiosity, Creativity, and Academic Rigor*



JUSTIN HAJJ
Michael W. McCord Head of School

from JUSTIN HAJJ

One of the highlights of an academic year at The Learning Project is undoubtedly the school's spring fair for students to share the final products of their Independent Research Study (IRS). As Head of School, there is a certain magic to watching a child grow and develop during their upper grade journey. In particular, I am always in awe as I witness sixth graders turn in a sophisticated research report, coupled with a detailed project to demonstrate their learning – and speaking confidently to adults in the community.

The Learning Project has always been committed to providing students more than just the content of a subject - we want them to build the habits of mind that will carry them well beyond our doors. Nowhere is that commitment more visible than in Independent Research Study (IRS), the school's signature research program that engages every student from third grade through sixth. It is, in many ways, the fullest expression of what an LP education is meant to do.

The format for students sharing their final products has certainly changed over the years and, in its current form, entails a morning when all students in third through sixth grade display the culmination of their hard work all at once. It's a moment of great excitement to see on display throughout the school building vibrant trifold boards, digital slideshows, authentic artifacts and a vast array of homemade projects. Families are invited in to see what students have been working on and turnout is always outstanding. By 8:05am, the McCord Building is buzzing in the particular way a school full of proud students and their families get - adults crouched at eye level in front of posters about hurricanes and hovercrafts and Ruth Bader Ginsburg; a grandparent asking a genuine follow-up question about the history of LEGO and getting a genuinely thoughtful answer back; a fourth grader mid-speech, gesturing at a hand-drawn diagram like she's done this a hundred times. In a sense, she has. Every student in that room has been building toward this exact moment since they joined The LP in kindergarten – developing their academic tool kit, gaining public speaking skills, developing self-confidence, exercising their creativity, and understanding and embracing the value of challenge.

A Program That Grows With Our Students

Of course, the polish of that final morning doesn't happen overnight, or even over one school year. IRS is built to grow alongside its students, and the units – and resulting products – look quite different depending on which grade visitors walk into. What stays constant is the underlying design: students choose their own topic, conduct real research, and produce a written component and a finished project - but the scope, independence, and rigor expected of them increases meaningfully every single year, until the third grader adding supporting details onto a slide becomes the sixth grader defending a thesis of their own making.

In third grade,

IRS begins with a deceptively hard question: out of everything you just read, what's the *main idea*, and what actually supports it? Students practice developing key concepts related to their topics of choice, researching and selecting the most critical supporting details and - just as importantly - learn to revise their initial, general answer into a 'right-size' claim for their written component. It is an exercise in critical thinking and the craft of expository writing. Alongside this writing instruction, students are introduced to technology step by step, building a slideshow, formatting text and images with real care and intentionality. All of these components of an IRS project – researching a topic using nonfiction sources, pulling relevant details, developing main ideas, creating a slide presentation – are the building blocks for so much of what is to come in the upper grades and beyond.

In fourth grade,

IRS grows from a single slideshow into the creation of a nonfiction book, built page by page using Book Creator, an app installed on students' iPads. After selecting a topic of deep interest to them, students are responsible for using multiple graphic organizers to track their research and notes, layout and text features planning, works cited, and paragraph organization. Students also develop a cover for their book, a table of contents, introduction, three to five chapters, and a conclusion - written in full paragraphs with nonfiction text features like headings and captions. This is also the year that citation and revision become part of the process in earnest, as students learn to credit their sources and push their own drafts further through a structured checklist. Students engage in self-editing and revision, peer editing, and use a rubric to guide their work. Throughout this process, students learn the value of feedback, and come to understand that "writing is rewriting," as Ernest Hemingway once said.

Beyond the written component, students are excited to extend their learning through the creation of a visual project that further demonstrates their newfound knowledge. This is one of the activities that most excites students about taking IRS to the next step, and students create a brief speech that communicates what they learned, linking their research and the visual project into one cohesive presentation.

In fifth grade,

IRS shifts from a project *about* a topic to genuine research *into* a topic. Students develop a guiding research question, break it into subtopic questions, and write a multi-paragraph paper anchored by a thesis statement, in-text citations, and a works cited page. As an example, one student's guiding question, "What is Megan Rapinoe's life like?" branched into questions about her childhood, her rise to the national team, and her advocacy off the field - each one becoming its own section backed by paraphrased research and in-text citations, in a two-to-three-page paper driven by a genuine thesis statement. Fifth graders are also taught, explicitly, how to size up a source: is this a .edu or .gov site, or something less trustworthy? They take notes using a "read first, then take notes" method designed to stop them from copying sentences wholesale.

The presentation piece grows up here too. Students create an in-depth creative project and develop talking points with the goal of delivering a succinct and informative presentation. They practice it and receive structured peer feedback: was it rehearsed? Was the visual clear? Did the presenter sound like they knew what they were talking about? By this point in their LP careers, students know what a quality report and presentation entails, and they are ready to deliver.

In sixth grade,

The guardrails are ready to largely come off. Students may not repeat a topic they've researched in a previous year, so past projects give way to entirely new territory - everything from the history of the NBA to biographies of social justice leaders, to the development of electric cars and the evolution of ski lifts. Not much is off limits, as long as the topic is of deep interest to the student, warrants extensive research and has available resources in text and online formats. Over several weeks, students run the full research process with teacher guidance as needed: narrowing a topic, evaluating sources against a formal credibility checklist, requesting library books, and building an outline around a well-crafted thesis. The finished paper often runs 1,000-plus words with citations and a bibliography, paired with an independent project and a well formulated presentation. It is, in every sense, a culminating experience - the moment when four years of scaffolding give way to a student working,

thinking, and presenting largely independently. This expanded IRS allows for our oldest students to exercise much of what they learned through their LP journeys.

The Many Benefits of IRS

It would be easy to look at IRS as an unusually large, unusually long-running homework assignment. Talk to the teachers who facilitate it, however, and a different picture emerges.

IRS isn't really about any single paper or project - it's a four-year vehicle for building the habits that make many other kinds of learning and project development possible, and it works in large part because of one deliberate design choice made all the way back in third grade: *students choose their own topic.*

That choice does a great deal of quiet work. Oftentimes, a required topic is something a student finishes; a chosen one is something they're genuinely curious about and invested in. When a fifth grader keeps reading about the Mariana Trench well past the point the assignment technically requires, or when a sixth grader spends an evening researching the accomplishments of their favorite athlete, that isn't extra-credit-seeking - it's authentic engagement; the kind that is difficult to manufacture with an assigned prompt. Motivation research has long shown that autonomy is one of the strongest drivers of sustained student effort, and IRS is built almost entirely around it: choose your topic, develop your genuine questions, and - eventually - choose your own creative format for sharing what you've learned. The rigor is real, but it is rigor in service of something each student actually wants to know.

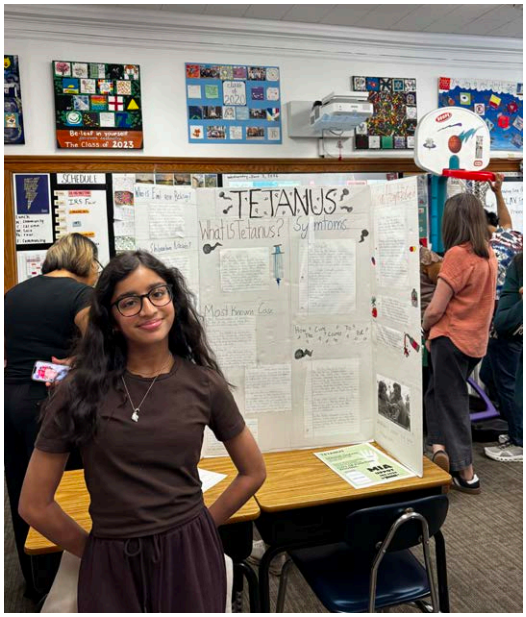
That engagement, in turn, creates the conditions for real skill-building, because a motivated student will dig into the harder and more time-consuming parts of research rather than rushing past them. Among the skills IRS is designed to build include:

- **Reading Development.** Students learn to read differently for research than they do for pleasure - skimming expository texts to judge relevance, using a table of contents and index strategically, and evaluating a source's credibility before taking notes. Then, learning how to differentiate main ideas from details, and what is most relevant.
- **Note-taking**. From third grade's main-idea-and-details structure to fifth grade's "read first, then take notes" method, students are taught repeatedly that copying a sentence is not the same as understanding it.
- **Organization.** Grouping research questions into categories, using graphic organizers, building an outline before drafting, and sorting notes by source all give students real practice in creating structure for a pile of seemingly loose information.
- **Time Management.** An IRS unit unfolds over 6-8 weeks, with regular check-ins that ask students to name what they've completed and what they still need help with - a skill in itself, and real life practice in prioritization and self-advocacy.
- **Public Speaking and Presentation**. Every grade level's IRS process ends with a presentation at the school's IRS Fair – a public display of their work and what they learned. This, in combination with the other opportunities that LP students have to stand in front of an audience and present, ensures that public speaking is not a novel or intimidating experience. It is something they can do, and do quite well.
- **Preparation for middle school.** Perhaps most notably, the heavy scaffolding of the earlier years - sentence starters, fill-in-the-blank organizers, guided slideshows - gradually give way to something much closer to how research actually works. Students who complete all four years of IRS arrive at middle school having already done nearly everything a middle school research paper will ask of them, which includes the 'soft skills' of bringing their creativity to a nonfiction report, breaking down long-term projects into manageable chunks, and developing a final product that they can, and should, be proud of.

HEADLINES

It is easy, in the middle of a busy spring, to lose sight of just how much sits behind that one bright morning as parents file into The Learning Project for the annual IRS Fair - four years of main ideas and supporting details, nonfiction books and peer-editing sessions, thesis statements revised countless times, and a great many students who decided, on their own, that they simply had to know more about hurricanes, or Rubik's cube algorithms, or Martin Luther King, Jr. By the time a student reaches the IRS Fair for the fourth and final time, they have done far more than finish a paper. They have spent months, collectively, learning to ask real questions, find good answers, organize them thoughtfully, and explain them with confidence - with a little more of the process handed to them every single year. And they have developed ways to demonstrate their learning in new, creative ways that are driven by their strengths and interests.

That, in the end, is what IRS is really designed to teach: not just how to research a topic, but how to become the kind of person who can stand in front of a room of visitors and say, with genuine confidence, "Let me tell you what I learned." Every spring, The LP fills with proof of exactly that - and it is one of the great privileges of a Head to watch it happen, one student, one topic, and one thesis statement at a time.





LP Past, Present, and Future: On the Road to 263 Clarendon Street

In the Fall 2025 LampPost, we shared "The Road to 263 Clarendon Street," tracing the winding path that brought us to our newest building, from the purchase itself through the many steps along the way. That story also previewed the launch of a fundraising initiative to support renovations at 263 Clarendon Street and updates to the McCord Building at 107 Marlborough Street. Now, as we celebrate the completion of that campaign, *Building for Tomorrow*, we take a step back to look at the school's long history of acquiring new space, renewing the spaces we have, and planning for the future.

1973-1999 → 2006-2023 → 2025-2028



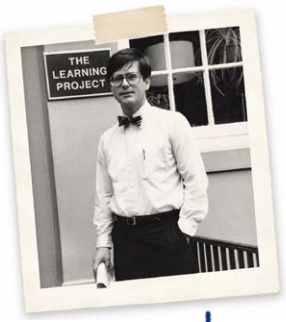
1973

The Learning Project opens its doors at 110 Commonwealth Avenue



1979

School moves into 107 Marlborough Street





1997

School's first Capital Campaign, Building on our Beginnings, launches. Raises $1M to support fifth floor renovation.



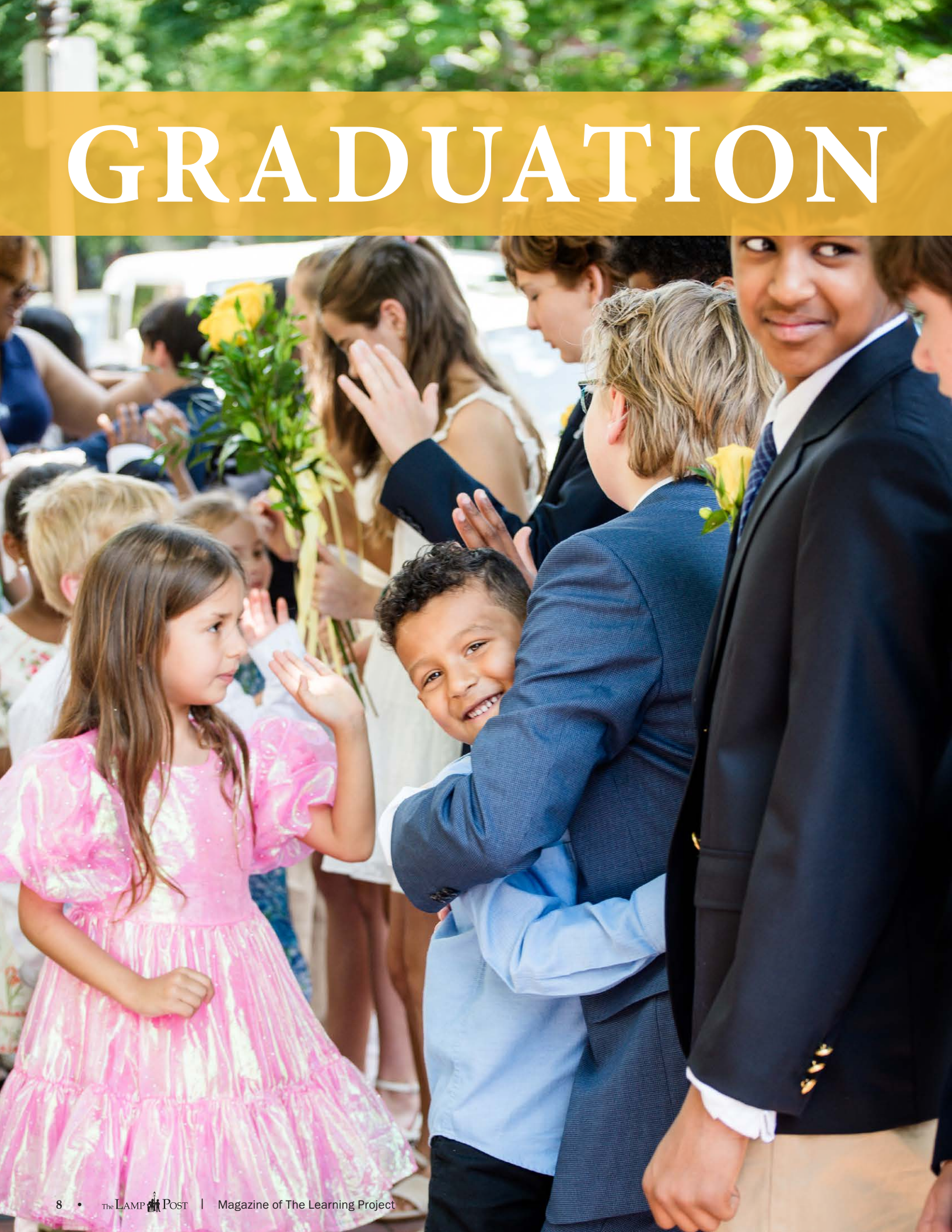


1999

Fifth floor is officially open as the Gamble Art and Science Center



GRADUATION



compiled by JAMIE HAYHURST

Graduation signifies the conclusion of a fulfilling school year and, for our graduates, the culmination of an incredible journey at The Learning Project. This moment also marks a time to rest before embarking on a fresh start in September, whether returning to the halls of the McCord Building or stepping into a new adventure in middle school. Below are the remarks given by LP staff and Board members as they bid farewell to the Class of 2026.

An abbreviated version of Justin Hajj's remarks:

To the Class of 2026, I want to start with your production of Macbeth that you put on for our community just last Friday. As you expertly illustrated, Macbeth is a play full of deception, disloyalty, violence, dishonesty…and pretty much every other adjective that would run counter to our standard list of LP values. And I mention this for the irony of it all. Because your class has truly exemplified our LP spirit and powers on a daily basis. Yet, you threw yourselves into the treacherous world and dark characters of the play with gusto. You brought your creativity, courage, and your class' characteristic teamwork. Bringing Macbeth to life required memorization, tremendous practice, patience, flexibility, and trust in one another. Some of you had leading roles. Some supporting roles. Some stepped up to pitch in when it came to props and costumes. Some helped classmates who were nervous or unsure. What made the production truly fantastic was not just the performance itself - though it was absolutely sensational - but the spirit in which you approached it. You understood something important: no line, and no role, is too small when everyone is working toward the same goal. That lesson matters far beyond the stage. It's a message about what it means to be part of a community, and what it means to value each person and each voice in that community - and you have embodied that this year.

I would be remiss if I didn't highlight for everybody here today yet another way you have demonstrated your class' characteristic teamwork, and that was with your Rent-a-Rainbow fundraising this year. One of our smallest graduating classes at just 13 students, you each put in extra effort this year to make it happen, and you not only raised enough funds to get yourselves to Washington, D.C., but had money left over to support future classes who may not be able to reach that high mark that you've set. Yet another way that your legacy lives on here at The LP once you leave this stage today for the road before you. You have shown your schoolmates what it means to work together, to rise to challenges, and to support one another through every success, surprise, and last-minute change along the way, to show up, to care deeply, and to work hard for something bigger than yourselves.

In short, on behalf of our entire staff - one of whom is a delighted mom of one of you here on this stage - we are incredibly proud of who you have become.

Not just because of your accomplishments, but because of the way you achieved them - with generosity, determination, and heart.

As you leave The Learning Project today and step on that road before, remember this: the qualities that made your class so special this year are qualities the world desperately needs more of. Classes like yours remind us of what's good and what's right. You remind us what positive leadership looks like, and you give us hope as you carry The LP with you.





Show the world what it looks like to put kindness and care over self-interest. Keep helping others. Keep valuing and supporting each person and each voice beside you. Keep stepping up when your community needs you. And keep believing that what you contribute matters - because it does.

Congratulations to our Class of 2026. Keep making us proud.

As is tradition at The LP, the Class of 2026 met with Board Chair, Louis Tompros, over pizza the week prior to Graduation. The following is part of his reflection on that afternoon spent together:

It is a long-standing tradition at The Learning Project for the Chair of the Board of Trustees to meet with the graduating sixth graders to conduct an "exit interview" of sorts. The Class of 2026 was kind enough both to complete a written survey, and to meet with me over pizza two weeks ago, to share some of their thoughts about their time at The LP. Here is some of what they had to say.

What is your very first memory of The LP? "My first memory was going for my Kindergarten visit day. It was so fun and all my classmates were so inclusive," and, "I remember walking through the front doors of the Kindergarten classroom and looking around excited for the year. But my mom kept on taking photos, so I was grumpy," and, "My classmate stole my block, and I got so mad, and I grunted at her," and, "My first memory at the LP was at show-and-tell when I brought in a rack of lamb, and was really excited about it," and finally, "I don't have a good memory. But many things. Like hanging wet socks on the pipe and doing choice time."

I then asked the graduates if they remembered anything about online learning back in first grade and the sixth graders answered with a myriad of memories recalling their times in online class. Some recalled "eating goldfish while doing math," others remembered, "how my parents said that I knew more about iPads than they did, because of how much time I spent on Zoom," and, "the very sad Thanksgiving feast where we had to draw our food."

When asked what their favorite art project was, answers ranged from Lego stop motion to drawing of Athena on an Olympic vase to Sixth Grade still life to a Fourth Grade air hockey table.

The class was then asked what LP tradition should never change. Their answers will probably ring true for many LP alumni:

- A play every year, including the Sixth Grade Shakespeare Play
- Lunch Week
- Read-a-thon
- Hot chocolate after Pencil Pal Ice Skating
- The Washington, D.C. Trip
- The Maypole Dance
- Graduation plaques
- Graduation songs
- The Branches of May

Finally, what piece of advice would you give to the kindergarteners about how to have the best experience at The LP?





- Do your homework before anything.
- Keep your desk organized.
- Don't put too many stickers on your water bottle: when you want to take the stickers off, they leave stains.
- Keep your innocence.
- Enjoy every moment you have with your friends and make amazing memories.
- Do things you are proud of, make a difference, and enjoy everything because graduation comes sooner than you realize.
- Work hard, stay calm, enjoy friendships.

During the ceremony, The LP presented its annual Honorary Diploma to Kannan Thiruvengadam, urban farmer, community organizer, and sustainability educator. Juliana Brinkley, P '20, and First Grade Head Teacher, introduced our Honorary Diploma recipient and shared the following remarks:

Kannan has been a partner of ours since 2024 when he visited the school as part of our Student Speaker Series and presented to our students about his work, about ecosystems around Boston, and the importance of environmental action. Kannan grew up in a farming family where caring for the land was part of everyday life. From an early age, he learned that strong communities are built when people care for one another and the environment that sustains them.

Guided by these values, Kannan has had a profound impact across the Boston area. During the COVID-19 crisis, he co-created Mutual Aid Eastie, which provided more than 5,000 meals each week to food-insecure families while also supporting struggling local restaurants. At a time of uncertainty and isolation, he helped create systems of care that strengthened community connections.

Through his work with Eastie Farm, Kannan helped establish the region's first geothermally powered zero-emissions greenhouse, a space for growing food, education, and community gathering. Eastie Farm now supports hundreds of East Boston families by expanding access to fresh food, supporting regional farmers, and strengthening the local economy.

Kannan also serves as President of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, advocating for the protection of Boston's largest salt marsh and its ecosystems. Through leadership roles on Boston's Community Preservation Committee, the Boston Conservation Commission, and the Massachusetts Sierra Club, he has advanced affordable housing, environmental justice, historic preservation, and the protection of natural resources while encouraging greater civic participation and community engagement.

As the first grade teacher, I have seen Kannan and his work in action. Each year, in connection with our City Study unit on 'Foods of Boston,' we take the first graders to Eastie Farm. Kannan meets us at the Maverick T station and proudly leads us on a tour of his East Boston neighborhood.

Our journey begins with stunning views





of Boston Harbor, where Kannan shares his knowledge about the tides and the waterfront. From there, we make our way along the Greenway, stopping to admire the murals that reflect the character and diversity of the neighborhood. Finally, we arrive at Eastie Farm, where it is time to get our hands dirty. In the fall, our students helped plant native species, and the year before, they planted garlic bulbs.

Kannan loves questions! And if you've ever met a first grader, you know they have many! With patience and enthusiasm, he explains how the greenhouse operates, what plants are grown, and the steps involved in producing food sustainably. Students also learn that the farm's fresh produce is made available to East Boston residents and to neighboring communities as well.

Kannan reminds us that meaningful change starts locally. It starts by caring for neighbors. It starts with small projects that improve people's lives right now - projects that inspire others to believe change is possible. This power of small and the emphasis on community connections resonates deeply with the mission of The Learning Project. Here, we strive to help children become thoughtful problem-solvers, compassionate citizens, and active participants in their communities. We want our students to ask difficult questions, to care deeply about others, and to understand that learning is not confined to a classroom. Kannan embodies those ideals.






2026
LEVEL UP







MAINTAINING "THE LP WAY":
WHAT THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACTUALLY DOES

by LOUIS TOMPROS, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Last May, I had a delightful conversation over pizza with the graduating sixth graders. I introduced myself as the Chair of The Learning Project's Board, and I asked what they thought the Board did. One guessed that I was Mr. Hajj's boss. Amusing, but not quite right. Another put it as "things like buying the new building, and deciding if it's a good idea or not." Getting closer! But most had no idea. The Board's work is mostly invisible on an ordinary school day, and that is by design. But here is a peek into what we actually do.

The Board is a group of about twenty volunteers, including current and former LP parents, teachers, staff, alumni and friends, who are responsible for the long-term health of The LP. The Head of School and administrative team run The LP day-to-day; the Board's job is to make sure The LP can thrive for decades to come. As our Mission Statement explains, The LP "promotes high academic and behavioral standards, and deeply values both community and the individuals within it." It is the Board's job to translate those commitments into action. In practice, that means three core responsibilities: supporting and overseeing the work of the Head of School, overseeing the school's finances, and planning for the long term. Just as important is what the Board does not do: we don't design curriculum, we don't make admissions decisions, and we don't hire or review teachers or staff. Those judgments belong to the educators who know our children and our community best.

The full Board meets five times a year, though most of its real work happens in committees:

- **The Finance Committee** oversees the budget and the school's commitment to keeping tuition accessible.
- **Long-Term Planning** looks years down the road, including overseeing the school's strategic planning and accreditation process.
- **Real Estate and Facilities** cares for our buildings.
- **Outreach and Advancement** supports fundraising and community engagement.
- **The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee** ensures that equity and belonging remains a focus at the center of governance.
- **The Trustees Committee** recruits and develops the Board itself.
- **The Head's Review Committee** supports and oversees the work of the Head of School.

Sometimes, when a project warrants it, we form a task force. *One of the coolest parts about being the Chair is the power to form a "task force." My inner ten-year-old is elated!* For example, we currently have a phenomenal Expansion Task Force, charged with overseeing the purchase, permitting, renovation, and opening of our new building at 263 Clarendon Street. The School's purchase of the building was a once-in-a-generation investment in The LP's future, and it put the whole Board to work at once, including the Finance Committee ensuring the numbers are sound, the Real Estate and Facilities Committee working with architects and contractors on renovation, and Outreach and Advancement supporting the extraordinarily successful *Building for Tomorrow* campaign that has helped make the renovations possible.

This coming school year, our Long Term Planning Committee will have a special role, as The LP begins its once-a-decade reaccreditation with the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE). This process includes a comprehensive self-study involving faculty, staff, parents, and trustees, followed by a visiting team of educators who provide us with outside feedback. This process will then feed into a community-wide strategic planning effort, in which we will ask the types of "big picture" questions that are rarely urgent, but are always critically important:

- What should The LP look like in ten years?
- As Boston evolves, how do we stay a small, diverse, academically strong, and financially secure city school?
- What should stay the same and what must change to maintain the school's commitment to justice, empathy, and character development that is so fundamental to "The LP Way"?

If I had to sum up the Board's job in one word, it would be stewardship. The Learning Project was here long before any current trustee arrived - and in fact before the majority were born! Our task is to make sure it is here - strong, accessible, and true to its mission - long after we are gone. It is a privilege to share that work with my dedicated fellow trustees. And on behalf of the entire Board, thank you for entrusting us with it.

WELCOME TO THE NEW TRUSTEES

by JAMIE HAYHURST



CANDICE CORVETTI P '29, '31, '32, is excited to join The LP Board of Trustees this year. Candice and her husband, Stephen, are grateful for the school's intentional, child-centered approach and its unwavering commitment to teaching character, kindness, and community alongside academics. Having grown up in a small community in the Adirondacks, Candice particularly appreciates the close-knit sense of community at The LP and the way families, teachers, and children know and care for one another. Candice and Stephen also value how purposefully The LP honors the partnership between school and family in striving to raise thoughtful, self-directed, and engaged children.

Candice is a Managing Director at Berkshire Partners, a Boston-based investment firm, where she helps lead the firm's investments in services businesses and works closely with management teams and boards as they grow their companies. She graduated from Williams College and received her MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. Outside of work, Candice loves spending time with her family, exploring Boston, and enjoying Stephen's considerable gardening talents - especially his dahlias and blueberries.



CAMILLE DELAITE, P '28, '31, is thrilled to be joining The Learning Project's Board at this transformational moment in the school's history. She and her husband, Akhill Chopra, are grateful to The LP for their children's academic experience and the sense of community it has given their family. They have enjoyed supporting The LP through fundraising efforts for the *Building for Tomorrow* campaign and the Annual Fund, and Camille is excited by the opportunity to help The LP on its expansion journey, while working to maintain the magic that makes the school truly unique.

By day, Camille is a talent partner at Charlesbank Capital Partners, a Boston-based private equity firm. Her work in talent and organizational strategy focuses on hiring, coaching, and building organizations and teams to scale.

Camille and her family live in Boston's South End. In her free time, she enjoys learning to ski, developing a green thumb gardening in the family's community plot, listening to show tunes (at the theatre or at home), and spending time with family and friends.



BECCA GOLDKLANG, '01, is honored to return to The Learning Project community as a member of the Board. After graduating from The LP, she attended Boston Latin School and Cornell University before building a career in marketing. She spent nearly a decade at Drizly, where she led advertising and strategic partnerships, and, following Uber's acquisition of Drizly, helped integrate and scale those efforts within Uber Advertising. She now leads Brand Merchandising at Chewy.

After living in New York City and Los Angeles, Becca recently returned home to Boston with her husband, Ben, where they are starting their own family. She credits The LP with lifelong friendships, the confidence to be herself, and a lasting sense of curiosity, values that continue to shape both her personal and professional life. During college, she returned to The LP as one of the first interns in the inaugural August Scholars program.

As The LP enters an exciting new chapter, Becca is grateful for the opportunity to help carry forward the school's legacy of community, belonging, and exploration. She looks forward to contributing her experience in marketing and brand strategy as the school grows and reaches new families, helping ensure future generations of students experience the same sense of connection and confidence that had such a lasting impact on her. Outside of work, Becca enjoys traveling, cooking and cocktail-making, and developing her amateur birding skills. She is especially excited to continue her involvement with The LP as she begins her own parenting journey.



AMBER REAM, FORMER SECOND GRADE HEAD TEACHER, joined The LP in 2007 as an Intern (now known as Fellows), and during her nine years of teaching, she earned her Masters in Elementary Education, moved into the role of Second Grade Head Teacher, and spent time working in the August Scholars summer program.

Amber left The Learning Project in 2016 to raise her kids and has applied much of what she learned from The Learning Project about education, empathy, community, and connection in her role as a parent. During her time away, she has maintained close relationships with her LP longtime friends and is proud to be formally back in The Learning Project community in this new role as Board member.

Amber lives in Holliston with her husband, Devin, and their two kids, Barrett and Sydney. She works for a small local business and in her free time loves reading, playing games, and spending time in her apiary as a beekeeper.



JENN TSAI, P '29, is thrilled for the opportunity to join the Board and continue to contribute to a community that has had a tremendous impact on her family.

Jenn lived in Taipei, Taiwan, for the first twelve years of her life, graduated from elementary school and moved to Dallas, Texas, to attend middle school and high school. When it finally came time to apply for colleges and feeling fed up with Taiwan's humidity and Texas' extreme heat, Jenn only looked at schools in places that snowed. After graduating from Babson College, Jenn worked at Reebok in Canton, Wellington Management Company and Stockbridge Investors in Boston for several years before uprooting and flying to Asia to work for her family's plush toy manufacturing business, currently based in southern China. For six years she traveled between China, Taiwan, Boston, California and Texas, but it didn't matter where they ended up, Jenn and her husband always found themselves wanting to go "home." So in 2016 they officially came back to Massachusetts and are very happy to have put down roots here again. These days, Jenn lives in the South End with her husband, Shi, and their son who is in the 4th grade. They also recently added a rescue dog to the family!

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

by LOUIS TOMPROS

At the final Board meeting of the 2025-2026 school year, Louis Tompros, Board Chair, paid tribute to departing members of the Board. Please note this tribute was written in May of 2026 and some information may be outdated. Below is an excerpt from Louis' tribute:



PAT BENZIE, P '12

Pat Benzie most recently rejoined the Board in 2020 after an earlier period of service. A past LP parent - his daughter, Carla, is a proud member of The LP Class of 2012 - Pat brought to the Board deep financial expertise, an unshakeable dedication to the school's long-term stability, and a deep passion for the school's broader mission. In his six years of service, he served as Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, as a member of the Personnel Subcommittee, and as a member of the Head's Review Committee, the Long-Term Planning Committee, and the Expansion Task Force. When asked to continue on as Treasurer to see The LP through the critical early stages of the 263 Clarendon Street expansion project, Pat said yes without hesitation - as he has done at every turn during his time on our Board. Thank you, Pat, for your extraordinary dedication to The LP.



ALEXANDRA DELAITE, P '24, '26

Alex DeLaite joined the Board in 2019, initially as a Parent Member before continuing on as an At Large Member. Alex is the parent of Eleanor, a member of The LP Class of 2024, and Oliver, who is graduating this June as a member of The LP Class of 2026, just as Alex graduates from the Board. In her seven years on the Board, Alex made a number of lasting contributions, not least as Chair of the Trustees Committee, the committee responsible for identifying, recruiting, and educating successive generations of LP Board leadership. Her work in building and sustaining the Board is a gift that will outlast her own tenure. She also served on the Finance and Long-Term Planning Committees, bringing analytical rigor and good judgment to our most important strategic and financial work. Thank you, Alex, for your significant contribution to the future of The LP.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES NEWS



MONICA SHAH, P ‘20, ‘23, ‘26

Monica Shah first joined the Board in 2016. Monica is the parent of three LP graduates: Nayan, ‘20, Leela, ‘23, and Kiran, who is also graduating this June as a member of the Class of 2026. In her ten years on the Board, Monica served in many critical ways, including as the inaugural Chair of the DEI Committee and as longstanding member of the Long-Term Planning Committee, bringing a thoughtful perspective and genuine commitment to the values that lie at the heart of The LP’s mission. Her leadership of the DEI Committee helped ensure that The LP remains true to its commitment to welcoming and supporting all members of our community, always with an eye on expanding faculty and staff diversity. Thank you, Monica, for your decade of dedication to The LP.



MAR WAGNER, P ‘18, ‘20

Mar Wagner joined the Board in 2017. A past LP parent, Mar is the parent of Jack, ‘18, and Annie, ‘20. In her nine years on the Board, Mar made magnificent contributions to The LP’s most consequential long-term work. She served for many years as Chair of the School Advancement Committee - now the Outreach and Advancement Committee - before taking over as Chair of the Long-Term Planning Committee, helping guide the school’s thinking about its future through a period of significant change and opportunity. As a member of both the Real Estate and Facilities Committee and the Expansion Task Force, Mar also played a central role in thinking in a big picture way about the 263 Clarendon Street expansion. She also served on the Head’s Transition Committee, helping to ensure a smooth transition from Michael’s headship to Justin’s, providing sound guidance and support through the process. We are deeply grateful to Mar for her vision, energy, and commitment. Thank you, Mar, for your service to The Learning Project.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES NEWS



WILL MURPHY, P ‘14, ‘16, ‘19

Will Murphy joined the Board in 2020. Will is the parent of Wills, ‘14, Richard, ‘16, and Robin, ‘19. In his six years on the Board, Will served on the Long-Term Planning and Outreach and Advancement Committees, contributing his talents to both the school’s forward-looking strategic work and its vital efforts to build and sustain the community of people who love and support The LP. Will was a consistently thoughtful, reliable, and collaborative presence at every Board meeting, and his contributions have strengthened The LP in lasting ways, always ensuring that the values that have always defined The LP guide key decisions during his time on the Board. Thank you, Will, for your service to The LP.

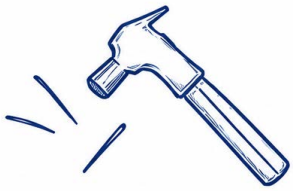


LISA GONCALVES LAVIN, P ‘27, ‘29

Lisa Goncalves Lavin joined the Board as Parent Trustee in 2024. Lisa is the parent of a current fifth grader, on track to graduate with The LP Class of 2027, and a current third grader set to graduate with the Class of 2029 - so even as she departs the Board, we have the great fortune of knowing that the Lavin family will remain a cherished part of The LP community for years to come. In her time on the Board, Lisa served on the DEI and Long-Term Planning Committees, bringing the incredibly valuable perspective of a current LP parent to our work. Thank you, Lisa, for your service, and we look forward to continuing to see you and your family in the halls of the McCord Building in the coming years.

LP Past, Present, and Future: On the Road to 263 Clarendon Street

1973-1999 → 2006-2023 → 2025-2028







2006

110 Commonwealth Avenue renovation

2006

First kindergarten class begins at 110 Commonwealth Avenue





2017

Preserve the Vision ~ Build the Future Campaign launches. Raises $6M to support the purchase of an additional LP building.



2023

Purchased 263 Clarendon Street







New Faces

by JAMIE HAYHURST

Faculty & Staff



ISABELA CIVIDANES, SCHOOL COUNSELING FELLOW:
Isabela is from Washington, D.C., and has been working with preschool through kindergarten aged children for the past five years as a camp counselor, aftercare teacher and substitute teacher. She received her undergraduate degree in Psychology from Wesleyan University and is now enrolled at Boston College to get her Masters Degree in Social Work. She is excited to be at The Learning Project this year and is looking forward to meeting everyone in the community.



MADISON RANKIN, PART TIME SCHOOL NURSE:
Madison is beyond excited to join The Learning Project as the School Nurse. She earned her bachelor's degree from Colgate University and her master's degree in nursing from Boston College. Madison has experience working in a variety of healthcare settings including pediatrics, women's health, orthopedics, and urgent care. She is currently pursuing a second master's degree at Boston College to become a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner. She looks forward to promoting the health and well-being of students, and contributing to The Learning Project community.



QUINCY SNELLINGS, LEARNING SPECIALIST:
Stepping in as our new full time Learning Specialist is Quincy Snellings. Quincy is no stranger to The Learning Project, as she served as a standout August Scholars teacher when we used to run the academic summer program here at the school, and is the older sibling of one of our former Fellows. Quincy brings a decade of elementary teaching experience and a strong track record of academic excellence, most recently serving as second grade teacher at the Croft School in Jamaica Plain. Quincy has also served as third grade teacher and instructional leader at KIPP NYC. Quincy holds a Master's in Education from Boston University and will be finishing up an Orton-Gillingham literacy instruction training program this fall. In her free time, Quincy enjoys distance running and spending time with her husband, Peter, and toddler, Wes.



REGGIE WALKER, ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND AFTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATE:
Reggie has his bachelor's degree from Cal Poly Humboldt and Master's Degree from UMass Lowell. He has spent the past 9 summers at the Tyler Hill Camp in Pennsylvania as a Division Leader and Head Counselor. Reggie recently relocated to Boston, is an avid moviegoer (his favorite movie is *Back to the Future*), and enjoys cooking in his spare time.

Fellows



CAROLINE GREEN brings a background in experiential education and youth development, most recently serving as a Teaching Fellow with Kieve Wavus Education in Maine, where she facilitated social-emotional learning and outdoor programming for students in both classroom and wilderness settings. With extensive experience leading groups of young people - from mentoring first grade students to guiding multi-week wilderness trips - Caroline is passionate about helping students build confidence, resilience, and a connection to the world around them. A graduate of St. Lawrence University with a degree in Environmental Studies and Sociology, she holds certification in Mental Health First Aid and is a Registered Maine Guide and Wilderness First Responder.



AVERY LOWE brings a unique background as a culinary educator and program leader, with a passion for engaging young people through hands-on learning. Most recently a Product Innovation Manager at SharkNinja, Avery is a 'career-changer' who is excited to move into the education sphere. She has led and mentored teams while translating complex ideas into accessible, engaging instruction - skills that will serve her well in the classroom. Avery's earlier experience includes designing food and cooking-based learning programs for youth. She is looking forward to joining fifth grade and sharing her passions for cooking, reading, writing, and her deep appreciation for the city of Boston. Avery was drawn to The Learning Project's tight-knit environment and is excited to jump in and get to know the community. A graduate of Connecticut College, Avery has her Bachelor's Degree in English.



MIA SWIFT comes to The Learning Project with years of experience working as a childcare provider. Mia has supported both ecotherapy programs for special needs children and religious education classes. In addition to her hands-on work with children, Mia has spent several years in administrative roles, supporting businesses and communities with her bright personality, stellar organization skills and commitment to her work. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Nova Southeastern University, and is currently earning her Master's Degree in Education through Merrimack College.

Why We Chose The LP

by SARAH AND KENT SANDS



They say you're only as happy as your least happy child. But what if that child is doing well enough - just not truly thriving? We wrestled with that question for a couple of years as we watched our son flourish at our local public school while our daughter, two grades behind him at the same school, did not seem as fulfilled or motivated. So we began looking for a school environment where she could thrive, too.

As we searched, we considered what our daughter needs most. Transitions can be hard for her, but she prospers once she's part of a tight-knit community. She asks outside-the-box questions and learns best by doing rather than memorizing. And as a deep thinker who often wonders, "who am I?" she benefits greatly from having trusted adults with whom she can talk.

With those needs in mind, it quickly became clear that The Learning Project could be an exceptional fit. Its small size and strong student-teacher ratio help ensure that each child receives individualized care and support. We were impressed by its commitment to hands-on learning and meeting children where they are. Its dedication to diversity and equity reflected our values and provided a welcome sense of continuity from the public school community we were leaving. Most of all, its dual focus on academic and social-emotional growth convinced us that our daughter would be supported as she discovered more about herself and learned how to support others.

We were thrilled to enroll her in third grade at The Learning Project in the 2025-2026 school year. From the start, we felt welcomed by the warm, caring community of educators and families. We expected that adjusting to a new school might take time for our daughter, but we could not have imagined how profound - or how immediate - her transformation would be.

"Within just a few weeks, she was arranging playdates, chatting with friends on her Tin Can phone, and animatedly sharing what she was learning in class."

Within just a few weeks, she was arranging playdates, chatting with friends on her Tin Can phone, and animatedly sharing what she was learning in class. By winter break, she approached homework with confidence and eagerly explained The LP's schedule and traditions as though she had been part of the community for years.

By the end of the school year, our daughter had blossomed from a child who often stayed in the background into a smiling, enthusiastic kid who could not wait to get to school each morning. She even complained when we picked her up "too early" because she wanted more time with her friends. She has always done well academically, but her first year at The Learning Project sparked an explosion of learning - and we have never seen teachers understand her quite like her teachers at The LP do.

Our daughter is clearly thriving at The Learning Project. She feels challenged, intrigued, encouraged, supported, safe, welcomed, and seen. We are so grateful to the remarkable community of teachers, staff, and families who have helped her grow, and we are excited for all that fourth grade will bring.

LP Past, Present, and Future: On the Road to 263 Clarendon Street



1973-1999 → 2006-2023 → **2025-2028**

2025

Building for Tomorrow Campaign launches. Raises $2M to support renovations at 263 Clarendon Street and updates to the McCord Building at 107 Marlborough Street.





2026

Demolition begins at 263 Clarendon Street

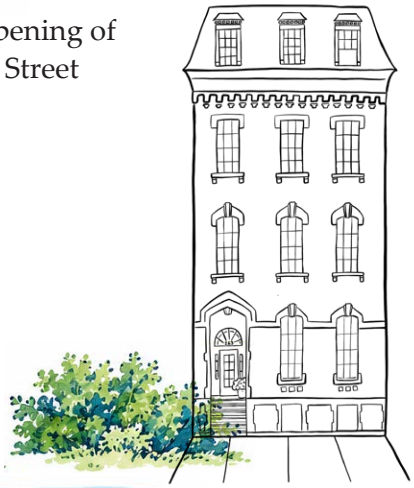






2027

Anticipated Opening of 263 Clarendon Street



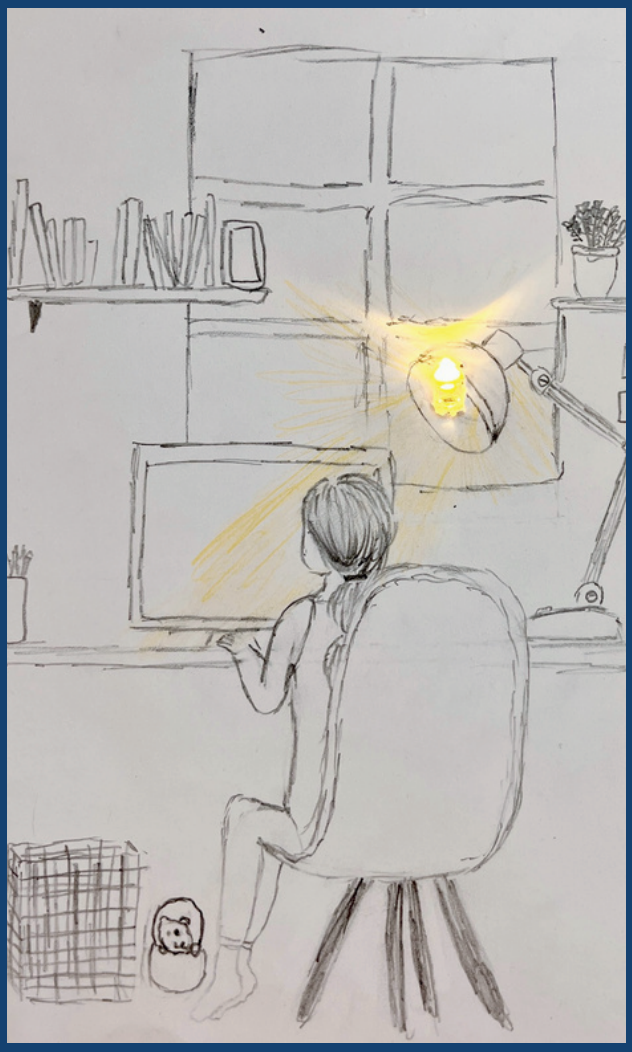
2028

Launch of The LP's Pre-K program


PEACE









The 2026 Annual Report Summary

BREAKDOWN OF GIVING 2025-2026

Annual Fund:	$496,917
Auction (gross):	$27,225
Building for Tomorrow capital campaign:	$2,026,849
Caroline Schmidt Arts and Inspiration Fund:	$1,250
Community Scholarship:	$20,000
Fall Book Fair (net):	$8,834
The Gary Hatton Mental Health and Wellness Fund:	$11,104
McCord Mission Fund:	$22,000*
The Prindle Scholarship Fund:	$2,800
Read-a-thon (gross):	$15,183
TOTAL:	**$2,629,162**

**Please note that the McCord Mission Fund line includes only new gifts to the endowment. It does not include gifts on pledges that were made in the previous fiscal year.*

CHARITABLE GIVING

Read-a-thon Donations 2026:

Proceeds from Read-a-thon have traditionally been used to buy books for the school, to plant trees, and to support literacy programs in the city. Below are the organizations supported from Read-a-thon donations:

Speak for the Trees Boston

Wondermore

Sixth Grade Philanthropy:

Each year, The Learning Project sets aside $500, plus any surplus Rent-a-Rainbow money for its Sixth Grade Charitable Foundation. This is intended to provide soon-to-be LP graduates the experience of philanthropy, and inspire them to develop a life-long habit of giving. In the spring, sixth graders research local, national, and international charities as part of their charitable giving project. The Class of 2026 elected to donate to:

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

FACULTY & STAFF TURN "TRAITORS" FOR TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

by TARA VUONO

This past May, our administration decided that a standard week of thank-you notes and cookies in the kitchen just wouldn't cut it. As the announcement email put it, the admin team wanted "the best Teacher Appreciation Week ever," and their solution was to borrow from one of the most talked-about shows on television (or at least one of the most talked-about shows in The LP kitchen): *The Traitors.*

The kickoff email set the tone immediately, promising staff "challenges, some mystery, a few surprises, and of course MUUUUURRRRDERRR" - with a quick reassurance that no one would actually be eliminated or voted out. Administrators leaned all the way into the drama of the show, promising their best Alan Cumming impersonations (the host of the *Traitors* show) and noting, with some pride, that they had "almost all" served in student council back in their own high school days - a résumé, apparently, that made them especially qualified to run the game.

True to its word, the week unfolded as a genuine game, complete with its own rulebook. Admin laid out the mechanics: staff could stop by the "Circle of Fate" - a wheel stationed in the first-floor offices and surrounded by battery operated candles - once per day. Each spin brought one of three outcomes: an instant win prize (a fancy seltzer or coffee drink), a "BIG PRIZE" worth celebrating with a hug (and a small gift card to a local shop), or a secret assignment pulled from a stack of "Faithful" or "Traitor" messages, each one directing the spinner to do something kind - or something delightfully sneaky - for a colleague.

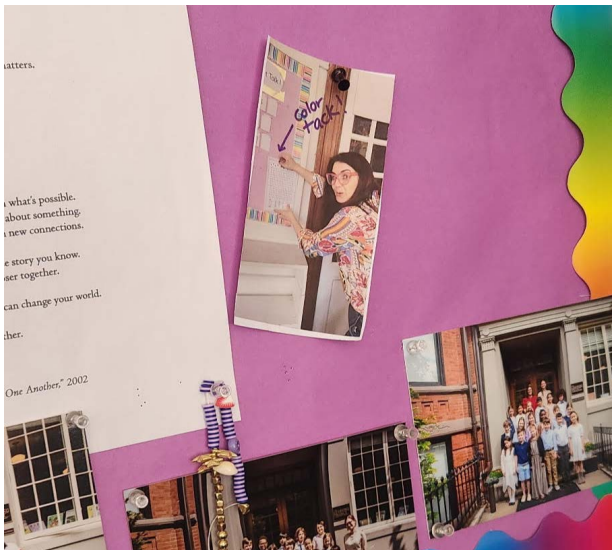
Completing a message earned the group points, and those points fed into something the emails breathlessly referred to as the "Treasure Pool": a stash of prizes that could only be unlocked once the whole staff hit certain point thresholds together. It was a clever bit of game design - turning individual acts of appreciation into a shared, cumulative goal, so that every note left on a desk or treat left in a mailbox was also moving the entire school closer to unlocking the next round of rewards. By week's end, everyone who'd taken part got to "fish" a prize from the pool, and the two staff members with the most points were crowned champions and took home the grand prize.

The energy only built as the week went on. A mid-week update announced that staff had unlocked the Level 1 Treasure Pool - and sweetened the pot with a bonus challenge: submit a photo in your most over-the-top, Alan Cumming-inspired *Traitors* look for extra points, "the bolder, the better."

The Parents Get Involved

The most meaningful part of the week, though, didn't come from the wheel at all. Parents were invited to submit messages of appreciation for the faculty members who have shaped their children's school experience, and the response was overwhelming - notes poured in, each one a small window into the impact a teacher or staff member had made on a student's year.

The reveal came with one final flourish of *Traitors* theming. After days of playful threats of "MUUUUURRRRDERRR," the closing email delivered on the joke - announcing not a murder, but a *murder of crows*. Staff were invited downstairs to choose a gift card and a small prize (or a "priceless" coupon, for things like lunch or recess coverages) from the Treasure Pool, and then to search out two paper crows bearing their name, each one holding a special message from a parent. For many, finding those crows and reading the notes tucked inside was the highlight of the week: a tangible reminder, in parents' own words, of why they do this work.



A few of those notes are shared below.

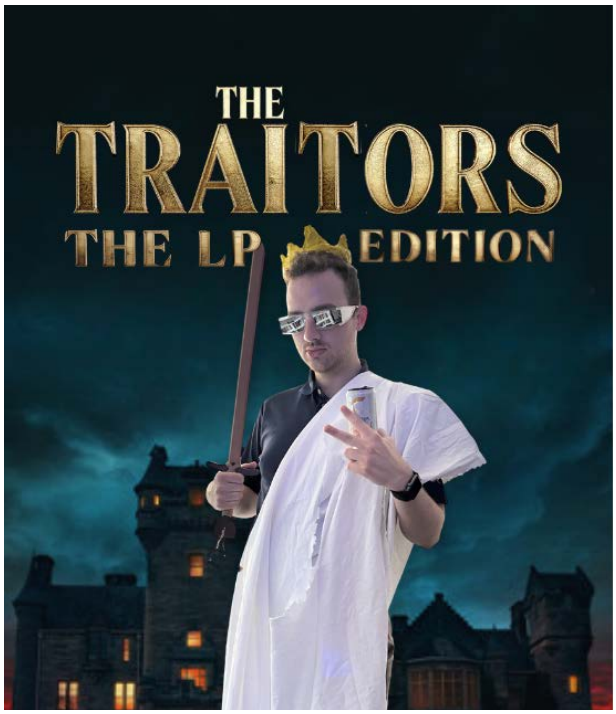
- LP teachers are your child's cheerleaders too. You can see and feel their joy when your child is successful. It's incredible!!
- Thank you for supporting and growing all of our big personalities daily. Navigating this while maintaining the love for learning is such a gift.
- I appreciate LP teachers' warm smiles, endless patience, and uncanny ability to know just how to challenge each child to make your classrooms a truly special place!
- Each and every teacher and staff member make school feel like an extension of home. My child remarked once at how happy all of the teachers are and how much they seem to enjoy each other. That is not something we take for granted. The joy and love, even in difficult moments, is felt throughout every inch of The LP.
- We are grateful to see how students continue to develop leadership skills by working together, speaking up and out, and demonstrating kindness when no one is watching. Thank you for all the energy and effort it takes to achieve this - at scale!
- Thank you all for continuing to provide a positive and safe environment for our children to grow.
- To The LP Teaching and Support Community - THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts for working as a team to create a collaborative, safe, welcoming and engaging school community. We are so grateful to each and every one of you for helping our child come out of his shell and realize his full potential! Never did we expect him to tell us he likes being on stage - but it is because of the environment you all foster he has let his walls down and been vulnerable and tried new things.
- You guys are seriously the best!
- To all LP teachers, thank you for your dedication, patience, and the care you show every day. Each of you goes the extra mile without hesitation, and the positive impact you have on our daughter's growth, confidence, and love of learning is truly appreciated!
- What a school year it has been, and we want to sincerely thank each of you for all that you have done. We see every day how deeply you love, support, and care for our children, and we are so grateful for the impact you make. We couldn't be prouder to have our children surrounded by such dedicated and caring teachers.

> *Teacher Appreciation Week is always a chance to say thank you, but this year's Traitors twist reminded everyone - staff and families alike - that appreciation doesn't have to be serious to be sincere.*

Grand Prize Winners

On the last day of Teacher Appreciation Week, the school's top point-earners were announced as the Grand Prize Winners. It was a fitting reminder that this year's champions were, in the end, simply two people who showed up, spun the wheel, and leaned into appreciating their colleagues all week long.

Teacher Appreciation Week is always a chance to say thank you, but this year's *Traitors* twist reminded everyone - staff and families alike - that appreciation doesn't have to be serious to be sincere. Sometimes the best way to say "we see you and we're grateful" is with small, meaningful prizes, a hidden treat, a paper crow with your name on it, and a stack of notes from the people who matter most.



THE TRADITIONS CONTINUE

MAYFEST













OLYMPICS

























THE TRADITIONS CONTINUE

ART SHOW













IRS FAIR





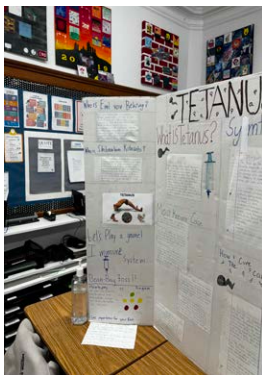












PRIDE PARADE













CURRENT PARENTS

Caroline Mullin and **Jed Kelly, P '28, '31**, welcomed the newest addition to their family, Joseph "Joey" Kelly in May.



CURRENT STAFF

Dempsey Gibbons, School Counselor and Student Support Coordinator, was invited to join the Kieve Wavus Board of Trustees last spring. While up at camp for a visit this summer, she took a photo with current LP students who were also at camp!

Dempsey was happy to report to everyone at school, as well as their parents, that they were all having a BLAST!



Kristina Royal, P '26, '28, Third Grade Head Teacher and Director of the Fellowship Program, married Alexis Castillo this past August. The joyful ceremony was officiated by **former Third Grade Head Teacher** - and Kristina's forever sunshine friend - **Lizzie Barcay.**



ALUMNI

Caitlin Duane, '99, and her husband, Dan Sargent, welcomed their first child, Emerson James Sargent, last spring! Emmy entered the world on April 2nd, weighing 8lbs 6oz and was 19.7" long.



Jack Wagner and **Harry White**, both members of the **Class of 2018**, met up this summer for a round of golf at the William J. Devine Golf Course at Franklin Park in Boston.



Members, family, and staff of the Class of 2020 at their 6-year reunion (L-R): Top row: Justin Hajj, Mikah Farbo, Lizzie Barcay; Middle row: Mar Wagner, Charlene Domenech, Geraldine O'Hagan, Juliana Brinkley; Liz Warren. Front row: Nayan Seetharam, Maureen McGrail, Emmy Williams, Naomi Brinkley, Noel Brinkley



Amelie Kassabian, '20, and **Annie Wagner, '20,** ran into each other at the 2026 New England Interscholastic Rowing Association (NEIRA) Championship in May.



COMINGS & GOINGS

Members of the **Class of 2021, Meryl Sutich, Paul Tompros,** and **Darian Nasseh**, ran into each other at the Winsor School Junior Prom last spring. Everyone was looking dashing!



Lucas Werning, '21, completed his Eagle Scout project by creating new first aid kits for each class at The LP and running first aid teaching tables at our annual Art Show last June. Congratulations to Lucas for completing this major project!





Abimael Degu, '22, ran into **John Krewson, P '33, Sixth Grade Head Teacher,** and played football with current sixth graders at the Clarendon Street Playground last spring.



Layla Grant, '25, stopped by this summer with her sisters who are current LP students, her mom, **Donnaree Wynter Grant, P '25, '27, '29 and current Board Member,** and their new dog, Sterling!





ALUMNI STAFF

Celia (Camacho) Kowalczyk, Intern '13 - '14, was married in August 2025. Her husband, Josh Kowalczyk, is a Chicago firefighter, and they've become a real-life "Brady Bunch." Between Celia's two boys and a girl, and Josh's two girls and a boy, their life is wonderfully busy. Celia is still working for Chicago Public Schools, teaching third grade for the last two school years.



Eli Gerstenlauer, former Sixth Grade Head Teacher, visited The LP last spring. He visited with former colleagues and took this photo with **John Krewson, P '33, Sixth Grade Head Teacher**, his successor in sixth grade.



On a lovely day in May, **Lizzie Barcay, former Third Grade Head Teacher**, married Kristen Estes in Falmouth, Massachusetts. She was surrounded by a handful of longtime friends from The LP to help celebrate their nuptials.



Amber Ream, former Second Grade Head Teacher, Kristina Royal, Third Grade Head Teacher, Mikah Farbo, Director of Academics, Faculty, and Inclusion, Kristen, Lizzie, **Eli Gerstenlauer, former Sixth Grade Head Teacher, Elizabeth McCord, former Director of Finance, and Michael McCord, former Head of School.**

Former Fellow, Hannah Yelnosky, is in graduate school in the Donovan Program at Boston College and will be doing her practicum in a first grade classroom in Somerville Public Schools. She reports that she's loving her program so far and learning a ton!

IN MEMORIAM

William "Tim" Barclay, former Board Member, passed away peacefully, at home, on April 7, 2026. In his career, Tim was an enthusiastic science and math educator. He taught math and physical sciences at Darrow School and at Commonwealth School. In 1971, he became headmaster of Cambridge Friends School. Tim was an active member of the Cambridge Friends Meeting, an avid writer, bird watcher, tennis player, sailor, baroque recorder player and activist for environmental and social justice. He was also a Trustee at The Learning Project and a longtime friend of the school.

THE
LEARNING
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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Class of 2026 Next Schools: Boston College High School, Buckingham Browne & Nichols School (3), Cathedral High School, Medford Public Schools, Noble and Greenough School (3), The Roxbury Latin School (2), Thayer Academy, Xaverian Brothers High School

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