

# The LAMP POST



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*50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala*  
May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Join alumni, parents, staff, and friends  
to celebrate 50 years of The LP

**COVER PHOTO:**  
All smiles as students  
engage in Field Day this fall.

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# The LP Difference

from JUSTIN HAJJ

The benefits of a quality elementary education are immeasurable...I know this to be true as a former classroom teacher, as The Learning Project's Head of School, and, perhaps most importantly, as the father of a child wrapping up her journey as an LP sixth grader. These years set the foundation for our children's future. As a school that strives to offer a top quality educational program, The Learning Project has always aimed to provide those immeasurable benefits – academically, socially, and emotionally – in abundance. However, many elementary schools can say the same — indeed, most share these noble goals. So, what makes The Learning Project experience unique? There have been a number of occasions over the past year or so, whether while crafting the school's new website, thinking through the school's strategic long-range plan, or speaking with prospective parents, where we have been challenged to consider The Learning Project difference. Certainly, in the school's 50th year, this question looms large as we consider and articulate what we hope to preserve into the future for the *next* 50 years.

What makes an LP education distinct from all others is as elusive as how we define 'The LP Way' itself. How do you encapsulate the unique benefits of a dynamic institution where a diverse population of students and families have an infinite array of experiences? While certainly challenging, the more I have gone through this exercise, the more I have found myself gravitating toward the end of an LP journey – Graduation – for evidence of the quality and characteristics of our school program.

Longtime Board chair, Jim Duane, has said often that "The Learning Project does a lot of things well. But one of the things

that it does *especially* well is Graduation." Graduation is a microcosm of the full Learning Project experience, and those who attend the event not only see The LP difference in action, but they feel it in the moment. It is a moment that fills me with great pride as I reflect on the impressive young adults that our sixth graders have become, and consider the joy and connection our community experiences as they join together. It's a time when The LP difference is transformed from a nebulous, obscure state to something clear and visible.

One distinctive characteristic of The Learning Project revealed during Graduation is the school's intentional and careful balance between community and the individual. There are various moments during the ceremony for recognition of the class as a collective group. As Head of School, I speak to the class dynamics, what makes the year's graduating class so special, and call attention to the moments to remember that we at the school have watched unfold throughout the past seven years. The Board Chair, too, takes time to speak to the class as a community. Each spring, the Chair sits down with the sixth graders over lunch and listens to their experiences, their inside jokes, and what they've valued about their time at The LP. The Chair then recounts what they've learned at Graduation.

There is, of course, time dedicated to acknowledging each individual graduate as well, as LP staff members truly know each child in their care. From how they learn to what they enjoy outside of school, our children are valued for the unique people they are. In order to shine a spotlight on each graduate, the sixth grade teacher selects and inscribes a book for each student, then reads these meaningful inscriptions aloud



**JUSTIN HAJJ**

*Michael W. McCord Head of School*

to the audience. Each inscription beautifully articulates the essence of who they are as individuals. Witnessing each student beaming as their teacher unveils who they are before the community is deeply heartening, and truly one of my favorite moments each year as a moving demonstration of The LPs 'power of small' in action.

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing traits of The Learning Project is its community connection, and nothing demonstrates this more than the deeply ingrained music in the school's Graduation canon. The LP builds community through song, by the collective voices performed in unison, melding together in harmony – moments of full community engagement and participation. Students sing together each week at Monday Morning Assembly and during Chorus rehearsals. They perform as a school at Winter Concert, Mayfest, and more. And it all comes together at Graduation as the community joins voices in songs that are sung year after year, bringing back memories, tying current families to alumni, merging children's voices with those of grownups, and where all are equal and all are heard in melody. To highlight this community connection among generations, the ceremony concludes as students, staff, and alumni join hands and collectively sing 'Long Time Friends.' I can't think of anything more powerful than this moment - a visual representation of the bonds between us: past, present and future.

Moreover, community is demonstrated a number of other times throughout the program. Graduation provides a beautiful bridge between our younger students and our graduates. The ceremony begins with first grade students delivering a branch of May to each graduate and standing before them as they sing, facing the audience. As if it were yesterday, I reflexively picture the graduates when they were first graders themselves, singing and offering branches, truly just beginning their Learning Project journeys. Other grades prepare handmade gifts to grant to the graduates and are provided time to deliver these to the students before the audience. Strong, valued, cross-age connections, joined by tradition, are noteworthy components of an LP education, with Graduation providing just a glimpse of what happens regularly at 107

Marlborough Street.

Also built into the program is a moment to grant an honorary Learning Project diploma to a deserving person, either connected to the school or from other outside organizations. The purpose of our Honorary Diploma is "To put before the children at graduation individuals who have led lives characterized by significant civic service to others." Because of our small nature, some people might believe that The Learning Project exists within a special 'bubble' where nurturing and care in a small environment might feel separate and apart from the 'real world.' While these characteristics of the school are quite true, the bubble, itself, is not. If such a bubble exists, it is intentionally popped, and repeatedly so, throughout a child's time at the school, where real world issues are brought into the classroom, where students venture out and experience the city on a regular basis, where they are taught about the world around them and real world issues that require grappling and are impacting them now, or will in the future, and where they take part in helping others who need their support through fundraising, service projects, or other initiatives. Learning Project students, by the time they leave us and stand on that graduation stage, are ready for life beyond our walls — they have a mature awareness of the world. This moment at Graduation spent acknowledging others through an honorary diploma is a quintessential example of The LP's commitment to broadening students' circles of awareness and of the school's character in action, providing mission-aligned models for future LP graduates.

While the majority of Graduation is focused on honoring our students, Graduation is also a powerful moment for parents. We know that a Learning Project journey is just as much about the parents as it is about the children. Families, bonded over seven years of school traditions like potluck suppers and Book Fairs, as well as countless birthday parties, afternoons at the playground, and shared experiences, have their final moments together as a class each June. Parents receive LP handkerchiefs at the start of the ceremony, just in case they are moved to tears — even the strongest often are. They are honored for all of the guidance, love, and support they have provided their children during their time here. The LP school-to-parent





connection is strong and while it's the end of the journey for LP graduates, it is the end of an era for their parents, as well. Saying goodbye to a community that you have grown a part of over many years is never easy. The tears and hugs at Graduation are sure signs of The LP difference.

While it's impossible to fully articulate all that makes a Learning Project education unique, we can look to school events and to experiences of community members, past and present, to get a sense for its distinctive character. Graduation places so many of these traits on full display, yet there are countless others that hold the truth of The LP difference in subtle experiences that we each feel in our own ways: the connection between two parents on the sidewalk, the moment at the dinner table when a child brings up a world issue that is on their mind and was discussed at morning meeting; the moment in class when a student works through a math problem, applying a new skill rather than giving up; when a student uses their voice to speak up about protecting the environment after spending the morning on the Esplanade, connecting with the city and their surroundings; the fleeting exchange on the weekend when a kindergarten student excitedly waves to a passing LP sixth grader across the street, shouting their name as if it's been weeks since they've seen them. These are the glimpses that, collectively, articulate The LP difference.

As we celebrate the school's 50th anniversary and plan for the future, we take stock of all that makes The Learning Project special. And while the end of an LP journey may very well be the most pronounced and apparent display of these traits, there are countless others, including what comes after the end. For those who have moved beyond the school know that The LP experience is not finished at the conclusion of Graduation – 'The LP Way' is something that is carried with students, parents, staff, and friends each step they take afterwards.

For me personally, I take heart in this

notion. On June 16th, I will be tasked with handing over a Learning Project diploma to my own child. And while the thought of it fills me with sadness knowing that she is leaving the place we have both called home for the past seven years, I know deep down that she is not truly leaving and that she carries The LP and its lessons in her heart as she steps off that stage. It is that LP difference that lives in her, as it does for all of our graduates, and it is that difference that will be carried forward into the next 50 years. The end of one journey is simply the beginning of another – and our bags, and hearts, are packed.







# 50th Anniversary Gala

by ALICIA TOWNS FRANKEN, GALA CHAIR

They say it's hard to create the magic of walking into a familiar space and feeling right at home. I believe this to be true — there's nothing quite like opening the doors at 107 Marlborough Street and instantly feeling like you're exactly where you should be. Comforted by the black and white tiled floor, a colorful, diverse set of books laid out on the windowsill, and inevitably a friendly LP faculty or staff member ready with a smile and warm greeting.

While it's impossible to hold our 50th Anniversary Gala at The LP, we all know it's not about the familiarity and comfort of the space as much as it's about the people.

We hope all members (21+) of The LP community will join us for a night of reconnecting, mingling, and bow-tie admiring. This 50th Anniversary Gala also provides us with the opportunity to formally (and finally) celebrate the McCords' retirement. Together, we pay tribute to Michael and Elisabeth McCord for founding this one-of-a-kind school: a constant reminder of the ability of a small group of people, sharing a common vision, to accomplish a large goal.

At the Gala you can expect a short program while the majority of the evening will be spent simply embracing friends and colleagues, past and present. Celebrating a 50th year is quite magical - there's something special about coming together to acknowledge this once in a lifetime event.

We hope to see you on May 20th at the MIT-Samberg Center. I want to thank the members of the Gala Planning Committee for all of their hard work and dedication.

## 50th Anniversary Gala Planning Committee:

Caroline Buttner, P '14, '16

Stephanie Fletcher, P '16

Rachel Whitty Hajj, P '23

Jamie Hayhurst, P '18, '22

Katherine McCord, '96

Will Murphy, P '14, '16, '19

Eben Pingree, '94, P '27

Alicia Towns Franken, P '14, '17

Dharshana Uppot, P '22, '26

Ivan Werning, P '21, '23, '30

Donnaree Wynter Grant, P '25, '27, '29

# New Faces

## Faculty and Staff

by BEN DUNCAN



### **BEN DUNCAN, ADVANCEMENT AND ADMISSIONS COORDINATOR:**

Ben was overjoyed to launch the next phase of his career in education at The Learning Project. Ben has had the opportunity to work within numerous schools in a variety of different roles while studying History and Social Studies Education at the University of Connecticut. As a student teacher, Ben gained experience providing direct instruction to students, planning and evaluating school curricula, mentoring and counseling students, and sponsoring school enrichment opportunities. While pursuing his Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, Ben studied at both the University of Connecticut and at the University College London. In Connecticut and abroad, Ben held internships writing and assessing social studies curricula with a social justice and equity framework. While at Ellington High School, Ben piloted Connecticut's Black, African American, Latinx and Puerto Rican studies course. As part of this coursework, Ben launched a two semester-long study of social activism and created space for students to make change in their community. He believes that reimagining what history classes look like can create classroom communities where students of all identities feel empowered and centered.

Along with his desire to connect students to high quality learning opportunities, Ben has passions for community organizing, fundraising, and advocacy. Ben has served on Boards for Community Outreach, worked for student mentorships programs like UConn's First Year Mentors and Admissions Ambassadors, led discussions as a Violence Against Women Prevention Facilitator, and volunteered as a morale captain for UConn's fundraising efforts. Working as The LP's Advancement and Admissions Coordinator allows Ben to seamlessly blend his passions and contribute to a closely connected school community. Ben enjoys most of his time outside of school by staying active on an international All Star Cheerleading team, coaching gymnastics at the YMCA, while also traveling and spending time outdoors.



### **NESANNE TAM, COORDINATOR OF PROGRAMS AND TECHNOLOGY:**

Nes has always enjoyed the opportunity to work with students of all ages, with most of her experience involving elementary-school age children. During her time studying Computer Science and Cognitive Psychology at Northeastern University, Nes worked as an Assistant Childcare Teacher at the Russell J. Call Children's Center, gaining experience working with children as young as 3 years old. Nes has also worked as a course assistant in an intro-level Computer Science course, where she gained experience in tutoring and explaining coding concepts to other students. During her internship as a full-time Software Engineer on the Vistaprint DevOps team, she was responsible for investigating and resolving technical issues and providing customer support. In her most recent position as Enrichment Associate at Hill House, Inc., Nes led and instructed several enrichment and movement-based classes throughout the week with children ranging from 15 months to 12 years old.

The LP's commitments to community-building and accessibility are values that resonate deeply with Nes, who is passionate about making education and careers in technology more accessible to marginalized communities. Nes is no stranger to organizing and coordinating large events and programs, having served as Events Coordinator of TechTogether Boston, one of Boston's largest and longest running hackathons, as well as the Content Director for the Filipino Intercollegiate Networking Dialogue, Inc.'s annual conference. When she's not at work, Nes enjoys cooking and baking, crocheting, reading, and endlessly convincing her friends to get ice cream with her.





**TARA VUONO, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS:**

Tara, P '22, '24, '27, '29, studied Accounting at Alfred University in Western New York. She moved to Boston after college and joined the auditing practice of PricewaterhouseCoopers. There, she focused on public and private technology and communications clients and earned her CPA license. After getting married in 2007, Tara and her husband, Nick, moved to London for two years. She continued her career with PwC, this time with entertainment clients like Disney and Paramount. After moving back to Boston, Tara took some time off from work to start a family, and eventually joined the Board of Charlestown Nursery School, where her children attended. After acting as the Assistant Treasurer for a number of years, she was hired into an administrative role as the Charlestown Nursery School Finance Manager in 2015. It was at this stage that Tara realized how much she loved being able to use her accounting background in an education space. It was also at this time that her oldest son, Sebastien ('22), started at The Learning Project. Tara and Nick immediately fell in love with The LP, the devoted teachers and staff, the incredible focus on character education, and the wonderful families whom they have met over the last eight years.

When the Director of Finance and Operations position opened up at The Learning Project, Tara jumped at the chance to apply. She loves working in an environment filled with the sounds of children and the challenge of bringing a non-profit's hopes and dreams to life from a financial perspective. She is very excited to join The LP team in this capacity and to have the chance to work with the administrators and teachers she has long admired as a parent. Outside of work, Tara spends lots of time driving her children to hockey and various other activities, while trying to squeeze in some reading, podcasts, and travel.

# Social Studies at The LP: Launching Inquiry Journeys

by KRISTINA ROYAL

In the fall, if you had been lingering on the Sunshine Floor outside the third grade classroom, you may have overheard, “Mine says Vietnam,” “Mine is from Thailand,” “I got China,” “I have China too.” Looking through the door you would see a room of eight and nine-year-olds checking the tags inside their shirts. What exactly had you stumbled upon? A Social Studies class, of course.

This past year, The Learning Project launched its new Social Studies curriculum, Inquiry Journeys, in the third grade. As our Mission states, we are a school that believes children learn best when they are actively engaged and interested. With that steering our decisions for curriculum, the school realized the importance of making a shift in our Social Studies instructional model, moving away from a traditional approach and toward an inquiry based model.

What exactly is Inquiry Based Learning? A classroom following this method encourages students to take the lead in their learning and become fueled by their curiosity to ask questions, find out new information, and form new answers and opinions. This approach decenters teachers from being the primary driver of learning and lets students take the helm. You would see less of the teacher standing in front of the classroom delivering the facts and more of the teacher circulating while listening in as the students are reading, discussing, drawing, and writing.

The program that the school selected, inquirED’s Inquiry Journeys, is a teacher created curriculum whose resources are completely digital. This allows the content to remain current as it is regularly updated. The designing educators took into account the various needs of students as the units provide learning experiences for diverse learners. Each unit follows the same progression of learning modules, or parts, titled Launch, Investigation, and Action.



## Launch

In this module, students uncover the “hook” as they learn the unit’s overarching Inquiry question. In the third grade Global Connections unit, this question is “How can we act as global citizens?” Its purpose is to activate the students’ thinking and excite students for what’s to come. Student interests are initiated through a video, photograph, map, or a read aloud, which ignites their curiosity. For some students, it is an opportunity to connect to prior knowledge as they ask, “How can you be a citizen of more than one place?” while for others it is an introduction to completely new vocabulary so they question, “What even is a global citizen?” One activity during the Launch phase is for students to work in small groups and list all the questions they have regarding the Inquiry question. These questions can be revisited throughout the rest of the modules.





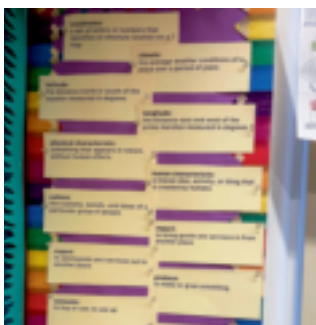


## Investigation

The bulk of the modules (typically five in total) are the Investigation phase. These lessons include videos, articles, books, and other primary and secondary sources. In addition to searching for the answers to their questions from the Launch, each module has its own guiding questions for students to explore. Some examples include, "How does geography shape culture?" or "How are we connected to the global community through what we produce and consume?" Collaboration and challenge are driving principles during the Investigation modules.

In one lesson, after watching a video and reading an article about the continents, students partnered-up to create bumper stickers with slogans about one continent in particular. The room was buzzing as they compared their individual notes and creatively collaborated to write a slogan that demonstrated what they had learned. Some of their examples included, "South America: The Nature Continent," "Antarctica: Colder than Ice!," and "North America: Nothing as Unique." In another lesson, table groups were given paper shopping bags filled with familiar items including a baseball mitt, a box of tea bags, a toy race car, and a package of glow sticks. Students worked together to map the countries in which each item was manufactured. An inquiry approach allows students to engage in lessons focused on tracing the ingredients of a banana split around the world or constructing a history of soccer. Lessons like these allow students to leap beyond seeing social studies as linear and concrete, but instead as fluid, interdisciplinary, and based around perspective. Thereby, a lesson on the "history of soccer" can become a lesson on concepts of cultural diffusion used to host an authentic conversation around the idea of cultural appropriation.

Following every lesson, students circle back to their initial Inquiry question and continuously layer on the ways they are connected to the global community through what they wear, the food they eat, or even the games they play. Over time, students' understanding of the world grows as they realize they are indeed related to countries and environments all around the world, including ones they have never visited or know little about.



## Action

All of the work completed during the Investigation modules lays the groundwork for the culmination of the unit: Informed Action. Every unit provides students with an opportunity to share with an audience what they have learned in a meaningful way. While the various products (e.g. a poster, diorama, newspaper article, video, community meeting, etc.) can be selected by the teacher, the reason for its completion is driven by the students.

To prepare for the Action module, third graders had a brainstorming session during which they were able to reflect and discuss with one another their discoveries about what it means to be a part of the global community. An overwhelming trend emerged from their responses about the importance for others to learn about different traditions and cultures of one another. Thus their Action product was to create a class cookbook with their own recipes and explanations of the traditions they represent.

In their process, students studied recipes to gather ideas for their own, as well as to create a class rubric. In order to write their recipes, students consulted with their family members to ensure they had all the correct ingredients, measurements, and procedural steps. Before completing the final copy of their recipes, the students held group critique sessions, which allowed them to practice and engage in peer feedback. Third graders were able to share their recipes with their sixth grade Pencil Pals, as well as be featured in *The LP Cookbook*, which will be published as part of the Celebration of Traditions event this spring.

The inquiry approach to Social Studies has captured the third graders' attention. Every lesson has allowed opportunities for students to talk to one another and work together on assignments and tasks. Our classroom has been constantly humming with the sound of student engagement and students beaming with the joys of taking the reins of their own learning.



# 50 Things We Love at The LP

by SASHA ZUFLACHT



*Learning Project students, faculty and staff stand in LP formation to celebrate the school's 50<sup>th</sup> year.*

Things turning 50 this year: Elton John's "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," Barbara Streisand and Robert Redford's star performances in *The Way We Were*, the first PC, the first handheld cell phone, Cup o'Noodles, The Learning Project Elementary School.

Technology, film and production, and microwave meals, have made great advances since 1973. So, too, has The Learning Project. The difference, however, is that these items from the 70's are nearly unrecognizable. Fifty years later, The LP is still that small yet mighty elementary school on Marlborough Street.

While the school has grown beyond that one-room-schoolhouse model, the core of The Learning Project is very much the same. With principles of equity, justice, respect, and caring, guided by the Mission, and driven by dedicated faculty and staff, The LP remains home to a community that flows in many directions and gives support to us all. The foundations of an LPer's elementary years remain influenced by the traditions and conventions that have encapsulated 'The LP Way' since 1973.

We challenged the community to come up with 50 things that they love about The LP. On the next page, you'll find a mix of voices, perspectives, and experiences - from students, from faculty and staff, and from the community at large.

1. "We love learning at The LP – everything we do here is fun."
2. Valentine's Day Bake Sale.
3. Field Day.
4. We have a strong community.
5. The Book Fair!
6. Winter Concert.
7. We have snack time every day.
8. We have Spanish and music classes.
9. All the traditions here, especially Read-a-thon.
10. Stuffed Animal Day!
11. Love going to the Boston Public Library.
12. "Everybody is treated the same way and we are kind to each other."
13. Ice Skating with Pencil Pals during the school day.
14. Music is fun!
15. Recess!
16. I love art – we get to use so many different materials.
17. Sometimes we have moments where we have upside down days. Some days are really funny and fun.
18. Olympics.
19. 7th Grade Yearbook Signing.
20. Reunions – when we see the kids 6 and 10 years out!
21. When staff and faculty greet each student by name every morning.
22. After School.
23. The stairs (well, yes and no).
24. Pencil Pals.
25. Celebrating birthdays.
26. Wake Up Club.
27. All School Meeting.
28. Performance Fest.
29. Choice time!
30. 6th graders making lunch to raise money for the Washington, D.C. trip. It gives parents a week off from packing lunch!
31. The Zoodio.
32. Morning circle.
33. Mayfest.
34. Snow Recess.
35. LP faculty and staff surprising the students with their Halloween costume theme!
36. Hanging the maypole ribbons in the stairwell after Mayfest.
37. Graduation – all of the songs and traditions.
38. "We strive for inclusivity and treat one another fairly."
39. The 6th Graders' farewell before the D.C. trip.
40. We have puzzles and chess in the lobby!
41. Randomly running into someone in the back (secret) stairwell.
42. Nobody else has a Ballroom!
43. The All School Song.
44. The LP Powers! Respect, grit, empathy, kindness, and creativity, to name a few.
45. The Clarendon Street Playground is our backyard.
46. The Kindergarten mega classroom!
47. Rent-a-Rainbow.
48. The secret staff treats in the kitchen.
49. The feeling you get when you return after a time away.
50. No one is a stranger.



# Alumni Spotlight: I'll Never Learn to Tie a Tie

by ZACK HARDOON, '99



*Zack Hardoon and classmate, Seth Stulgis, '98, performing The Music Man.*

Peter Pan sang:  
I won't grow up  
I don't want to wear a tie  
And a serious expression  
In the middle of July

As a little kid, I used to sing along to that song on the tape player in our family car. I made the words a sort of goal for my life, a barometer of success. To me they meant, "I cannot only wear what I want, but be who I want, and no amount of money or stress can make me lose sight of the joys of life." Going from childhood to adulthood happens one day at a time and you should never wish away or waste a day, because it happens whether you like it or not.

When I was at The LP, my mind was wide open. I was a kid with maybe a little too much energy and not enough patience. The LP culture and teachers helped me to hone my

energy, focus my creativity and confidence, and encourage my empathy. I still remember every teacher, every tradition, every inch of the school, and so many of the good times I had there. I remember what it felt like to run on the wood chip field playing soccer in a t-shirt in the winter and what the air smelled like outside 107 Marlborough when the magnolias bloomed. It was pure joy and I soaked it all in. Despite these formative years having been spent at a place where the Head of School was known for his bow ties, the Lost Boy in me pledged to never let anyone decide what I should or shouldn't be — including learning how to tie a tie.

A lot has happened in my life since I graduated from The Learning Project in 1999. There was no straight line to starting my own woodworking business. Rather, life has been more of a zigzagging rollercoaster ride where I've simply tried to say 'yes' to more experiences than I've said 'no'.

During my summers as a student at Roxbury Latin and UPenn, I worked for Gentle Giant Moving Company in Somerville. What better way, I thought, to stay strong over the summer and make money? Professional moving is a real



*Zack Hardoon pictured as an intern in 2013 with the Class of 2016, and Mary Curtain, Third Grade Teacher, '04 - '13 and P '08, '09.*

skill. Loading a truck is like solving a puzzle and everything needs to make it from here to there safely. I learned that I liked to work with my hands and body so that my mind could be free. I liked driving trucks, learning about customer service, and taking on the responsibilities of a crew chief. Because I liked to keep moving, literally, I started my own moving business in college and made enough money to afford summer travel. Eventually having saved enough, I was able to live in South America for a year.

After coming home from that adventure, I got a call from Michael McCord telling me that The LP needed a Third Grade Intern (now called the Teaching Fellowship). Keeping true to my more 'yes' than 'no' philosophy and not fully knowing what my next step was, I went to Goodwill, bought 10 ties (knowing that my dad would have to help me tie them each morning) and began making the same three-minute trek to The LP that I had made 15 years prior. For a time, I would wake each morning in my childhood bed, take the lunch my mom packed for me, and pass by the same Clarendon Street Playground that I learned to love so much.

Seeing The LP as a quasi-adult was a whole new world. You don't realize as a kid all the hours of discussion and preparation that teachers put in behind the scenes so that kids can have the best day possible. Being an Intern was a blast; Ms. Curtain's class of third graders was such a fun group. I got to sing all my favorite songs, watch all my favorite traditions unfold, and play on that beloved wood chip field again. It was strange to eat lunch in the science room, drink coffee on the back stairwell, and have a key to the building. It was strange, but so cool, to be co-workers with Mr. Robinson, Michael and Elisabeth McCord, and Michelle Duane. I learned that I love working with kids and exhausting the energy it takes to keep up with them. I also learned that the structure of the school day and the



*The Class of 1999 enjoying a trip to Plimoth Patuxet Museums.*

classroom, which was tough for me as a kid, was still tough for me as an adult.

When I left my role at The LP, the next stop on the zigzagging rollercoaster ride was to be an assistant first grade teacher in San Francisco. This school in California differed from The LP. There were ducks and goats living on the playground instead of wood chips and I wore sweatpants to work instead of ties. While I loved that teaching experience, I still felt the urge to be my own boss.

Fast forward, I'm back home again, starting over. I decided to try my hand at construction and luckily a high



*The Class of 1999 participating in LP Halloween.*

school friend took me on as a carpenter in training at his design-build company. With my belt on, tools in hand, and almost losing my thumb on the first day of the job, I once again found that I liked being on my feet doing physical work and learning a new skill. I became a believer that when you have mastered a physical skill, nobody can take it away from you. Coincidentally, the carpenter who hired me now runs a business, Shake Architecture and Construction, with Tim Pingree, '96.

I soon gained more experience within carpentry and construction, pausing to hike the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine with my now wife, Ali, and then going on to work for a barn building company in Vermont and a table making company in Boston. While these jobs had their highs and lows, I learned a great deal about what I did and did not want for my career, proving again that the childhood curiosity distilled in me at The LP, truly works wonders. Perhaps the most impactful takeaway following the job in Boston, was that I was ready to take on my next adventure — starting my own business and running it my way.

My guiding principles were honesty, feeling pride in the final product, and treating my co-workers well. With the help of old friends who were willing to invest and a new friend who was studying design, I began organizing my own workshop. The rollercoaster I had been on for the past few years, headed up a steep learning curve, eventually culminating in Cannon Hill Woodworking. Over the last four years, the business has grown to eight full time builders and woodworkers, one of whom is the son of my former LP first grade teacher, Lynne Dichter. Building a team of strangers has been a magical thing, as we have all gradually become a team of friends.

Some might say that what happens in elementary school doesn't shape who you are, but that just isn't my case. The Learning Project taught me how to write and how to organize ideas and thoughts. It taught me how to sing and dance in front of others so that I don't have to be shy or not be silly. At The LP I learned to love my neighborhood and my city, to appreciate Boston's amazing public libraries and parks. The Learning Project taught me to be kind to others, and to see those around me as teammates instead of as competitors. It helped me to not see every mistake as a failure because we are all imperfect and showing up is what counts. The Learning Project taught me to apologize when I don't get it right, a lesson I've used as a business owner, and that apologies through actions speak louder than words. Whether intentional or not, The Learning Project taught me that I didn't need to know how to tie a tie, as long as I owned it with confidence and conviction.

At 36 years old, I have a great wife and partner, Ali, and we have a one-year-old son, Ezra Forrest. We live in Hyde Park with Moose the Dog, and even though we occasionally act like kids at home, we are definitely adults now. *To this day, I still don't know how to tie a tie.*



# LP MILESTONES

by BEN DUNCAN



## ABBY AYRES

Kindergarten Assistant  
*5 years at The LP*

Abby Ayres is celebrating five years at The Learning Project. Prior to her role as the Kindergarten Assistant, Abby studied early childhood education at Lesley University. Throughout college, she

worked as an afterschool discovery teacher at Belmont Day School. Once she graduated, she worked as a fifth grade special education aide in Lexington Public Schools. After a couple of years in this position, Abby sought a role that would provide individualized support for students and a strong community connection, which she found at The LP.

This powerful sense of community is exactly what drew her to The Learning Project. At The LP, Abby finds that teachers are more than happy to lend a helping hand: a quality that allowed The LP to persevere through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Abby credits part of her success at The LP to the network of co-workers and families that she knows she can reach out to for anything she needs. Abby is also fond of The Learning Project's many traditions. Halloween and Mayfest are some of her favorites, as well as joining hands with current and former students at Graduation to sing the All School Song.

This summer, Abby will be living in Prague and is enrolled in a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification program. This certification will allow her to teach English in any country or remotely from the U.S. Abby is excited that this program will allow her to teach reading, writing, and conversational skills, all while exploring a new country.



## JOHN ROBINSON

Physical Education Teacher  
*25 years at The LP*

John Robinson (more widely known to the community as Mr. Rob) has been teaching Physical Education at The LP for 25 years. That's 25 Field Days. 25 Olympics. Countless steps and treks to the Clarendon

Street Playground, the Esplanade, and the Common. Given this tremendous milestone, Mr. Rob wrote his own reflection below:

"There are many things that are easy to love about The LP. Most notably is that chess is a sport. It's so great to talk to children about chess on the same level as asking them if they saw Jason Tatum's numerous three pointers during last night's game. Another thing is that for faculty and staff, the kitchen magically produces a diverse variety of mostly sweet, but sometimes savory, treats. My rule is, stay away from the stash of generic chocolate (they're just not worth the calories) but do dig into the delicious treats that come from people's homes or local establishments that have been displayed on the kitchen table. They are worth the calories. Moreover, in grade school I learned how our country is a 'melting pot'. My hometown just south of Boston didn't really match that moniker at the time. This school, on the other hand, does. It's diverse in so many ways and truly lives up to its Mission.

There are also a few things that have grown on me over time. The coffee here is among the things on that list. It's gotten much better over the past couple of years, but for a long time, it was subpar. It was free, but subpar. Something else that took some work to appreciate was the square dances. This goes back a ways, but once upon a time we were all made to enjoy "forced fun" by coming in on a Sunday once a year for a square dance. This was legit: they hired a caller and everything. While you were there and dancing, it was surprisingly fun. But the before and after told a horrifying tale of an awkward shuffling of feet and embarrassing moments of smiling at each other across the room. So there it is in the simplest of forms, the 'good' of The LP and the things that take a bit of adjusting. Once you're used to it all, there's nothing quite like it. After 25 years, I'll keep on playing chess and enjoying a well-crafted cup of joe, all while trying to forget about square dancing."



# Art through Kindness; Kindness through Art



by BEN DUNCAN AND MEG CARLYLE



In a school with limited room for expansion, there inevitably comes a time when you find yourself needing to get creative. The LP Ballroom often becomes that in-demand space, a catch all for anything and everything that needs it. Transforming numerous times a day from a gymnasium to a conference room, from an auditorium turned cafeteria, not a single inch is left untouched or ill-utilized. Such a space leaves an impression. The Ballroom, in many ways, has become the heart of The LP, being used for beloved community traditions such as the Book Fair Games Room and the Thanksgiving Feast, in addition to serving as an All School Meeting location once per week.

While always mindful to create inclusive spaces, The LP often strives to optimize strong small group bonds within its individual classrooms and amongst peers. The Ballroom, however, remains our community-wide space — our core, a place where everyone is welcome, always.

For a space so integral to our school community, it is only fitting that its physical makeup shines as brightly as those who occupy it. Thanks to the work of painter, Bren Bataclan, a bright and colorful mural now lines the stairs leading to the Ballroom: a welcoming invitation to come as you are and embrace your community. A muralist by trade, Bren is known for his work in schools painting large-scale murals, full of characters of student creation.

Bren first came into contact with The LP in 2010 when a student discovered his work and was then contacted by an LP staff member to give a presentation to staff and students. Often working in schools much larger than The LP, Bren was contracted by Arlington Public Schools in 2019 to create a mural, where he met future LP Art Teacher, Meg Carlyle. When Meg began working at The Learning Project, they reached out to Bren in hopes that he could return to The LP and paint a mural here. 13 years later, Bren returned for a week this fall to work with students and create a one of a kind mural along the stairs leading to our cherished Ballroom.

What made this visit to The LP so special is that, typically, he must choose only a few characters from students to feature in his work. However, because of the school's size, Bren was able to represent every student in this mural, reflecting The LP's Mission of ensuring that every student's voice is heard and empowered. Connecting with The LP's 'Power Up' framework, Bren strives to create art that represents kindness and promotes empathy: two of The LP's core values. Creating art with students is one way that Bren is able to create a culture of acceptance among a younger generation and bring as much joy into the world as he can.

Months following this newest addition to The LP, students and staff alike still stop to admire the mural on their way to the Ballroom, a beautiful reminder of what our community can accomplish when we work as one. We were lucky enough to sit down with Bren and learn more about his work, his inspiration, and his experience at The LP.





### How do you describe yourself and your work as an artist?

I am a full time artist and I'm an acrylic painter and I guess I fall into the Pop Art/Cartoon-style of painting. I am very heavily influenced by Anime because I grew up watching giant robot shows. More broadly, I'm a muralist too. It's an unexpected career — it's the best job I've ever had. Originally, I moved to Massachusetts anticipating becoming a college professor for Computer Animation and Graphic Design at UMass Amherst. Naturally, I took a lot of core digital art classes. All I wanted in undergrad and grad school was to create work using a computer, but I soon realized that I didn't like doing that very much. For the past twenty years, I've been painting with a paintbrush. I wasn't trying to work with kids, but I realized I work really well with them; it's such a gift.

### What inspires you as an artist?

I sort of have two types of work: working with schools painting murals and my personal work at my studio in the South End. My studio is home to other artists, so I often share ideas and collaborate with them. A big part of my personal art reflects my culture as a Filipino American. From Monday through Friday, I work with kids! While in schools, I show students how to draw characters in my style, which is fairly easy to mimic, and I give them a theme and a list of items to draw. Their brilliant ideas are then turned into the murals that I paint. It's wonderful to see students feeling empowered by creating art and seeing it become part of a larger piece.

### How does your identity influence your art?

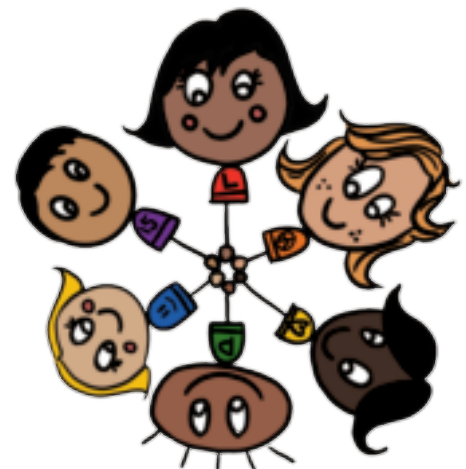
I am thinking about three different ways I identify. One is being Filipino-American, one is being part of the LGBTQ community, and the other is working with kids. The color schemes in my art are the colors I used to see as a kid in the Philippines. In the Philippines, there is a famous dessert called halo-halo which means "mix-mix." It has ice cream, candy, fruits, shaved ice and it's super colorful. Even though my murals don't have anything uniquely Filipino about them, the color scheme I use is really Filipino inspired. Sometimes, however, when I paint the sun, I'll make it have eight rays, which mirrors the flag of the Philippines. There have been moments in my career when I've requested to incorporate Filipino history into the murals I'm painting. Having been born in the Philippines, I often get to share my immigration experience through my work as well. I know a lot of undocumented folks who don't have this luxury. I have a traveling exhibit about my family moving from the Philippines to San Francisco which documents the first few years of that immigration process. Being able to share this story was empowering. Between my cultural identity and being part of the LGBTQ community, I feel a responsibility to be an adult that I needed as a child. Working in schools is an opportunity for me to connect with kids and be a safe person for them.

### What does creating art mean to you?

Everything. It means everything. I think about it 24/7. As I said, I feel really fortunate as an artist, I have a voice. I get to exhibit my work and people view it which is still mind blowing. I've painted thousands of paintings and they're in peoples' homes. It's amazing that I'm part of so many people's lives. It's great. And now I'm in schools across the country too! I've been doing this for twenty years and some of these murals are almost 20 years old with people still viewing them all the time. I can't believe it, it's such a gift. It's such an honor.

*“Your mural is special because most of the time students work in groups and I choose one or two drawings per class to include in the murals, whereas for your school, every single student is represented; it's a rare thing.”*

*-Bren Bataclan*



### What do you hope to accomplish through your work?

Kindness through art or art through kindness because I give away paintings throughout the world. I just spent the month in New Zealand and I gave away paintings all over the country. I don't expect anything back and I've been doing this for twenty years. It's the twentieth anniversary of this project of mine. Just spreading happiness, joy, and smiles— if a painting of mine has been a smile to someone, that mission has been accomplished. It's as simple as that.

Part of the reason why I love working in schools though is because elementary school kids are a lot more expressive about how they feel. If they like something— they really like something, and I love that and I thrive. Each week, when I'm painting a mural, I'm just full of joy. They say how they feel and I just love it.

### What was your experience like at The LP?

I love the size of the school. It's just a totally different experience because it's a smaller place and I felt like I was really part of the community. Plus, everyone was so welcoming and nice. Having each student draw something for the mural, I was able to relate to them more closely and actually work one-on-one with them as their ideas developed. There was a lot of traffic going up and down the stairs so I really got to know everyone at The LP, including the staff. It was also fun collaborating with probably one of the best art teachers ever. Usually I work on my own, and I don't work with the art teacher, so it was nice to have someone there to help me paint.



*Bren Bataclan pictured with LP Art Teacher, Meg Carlyle.*



# THE TRADITIONS CONTINUE

## FIELD DAY



## BOOK FAIR





## HALLOWEEN





# THE TRADITIONS CONTINUE

## THANKSGIVING FEAST



## WINTER CONCERT

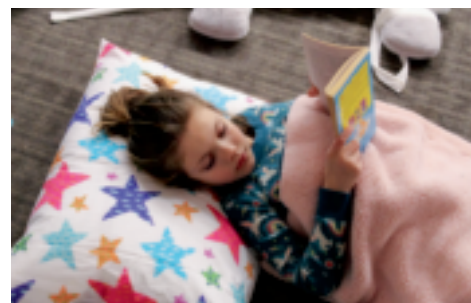
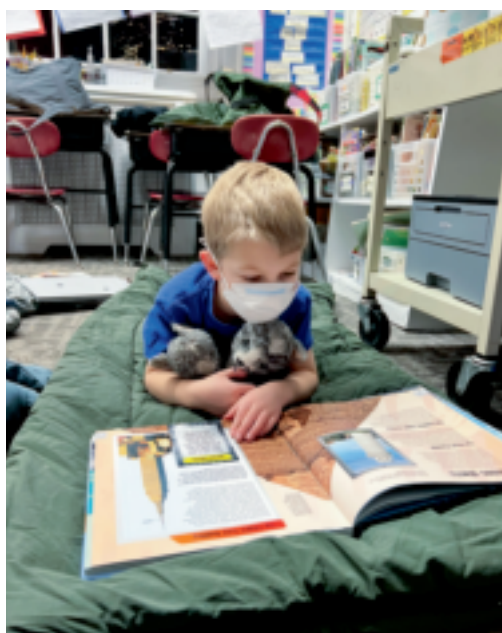




## PENCIL PAL ICE SKATING



## READ-A-THON



## ALUMNI

**Jenna Garr Aronson, '97**, defended her Ph.D. dissertation in Biotechnology. She was part of the team that discovered techniques to help with cancer & Alzheimer's research.

**Ben Casselman, '93**, an economics and business reporter for The New York Times, was featured on the Daily Podcast on February 1, 2023, discussing the state of the U.S. economy.

**David Kunian, '80**, remains in his position as the curator at the New Orleans Jazz Museum.

**Zack Stone, '16**, started college at Johns Hopkins this past fall. He is on the football team and having a great time, having found a built in fraternity of boys on the team and really enjoying his studies. He is an International Studies and Computer Science double major and is studying Chinese on the side.

**Zoe Stone, '18**, recently completed a semester in Switzerland and has been on the move ever since. She has become an avid rower and went to the Olympic Development Program rowing camp in Sarasota, Florida, and she continues to be on the Hockaday Athletic Board, plays soccer during the winter and is very active in community service.

**Henry Tweedy, '17**, is a junior at Nobles and earned ISL Honors for wide receiver on the Varsity Football Team this fall. Last spring, he was excited to be put on Nobles' Varsity Lacrosse Team, which went on to win the ISL championships.

**Jack Wagner, '18**, and **Annie Wagner, '20**, both attend the Taft School in Connecticut and write that they are "having a great time" in high school.



**Zakiya Fitzgerald, '08**, and **Khalid Fitzgerald, '13**, dropped in to say hello at the Book Fair this past October.



**Niccolo Imbrogiano, '17**, and **Andrew teDuits, '17**, play hockey together for Charlestown. They are all smiles after their semi-final game in the Small State Championships!



**Niccolo Imbrogiano, '17**, has committed to Penn State at University Park.



**Becca Goldklang, '01**, and Ben Grimm got married in September on Martha's Vineyard. Many of Becca's former LP classmates were in attendance and were even included in the bridal party. Congratulations, Becca and Ben! Photographed from left to right: **Bill Zielinski, P '01**, **Karen Lee Sobol, P '01**, **Sara Zielinski, '01**, **Leslie Colburn, P'98, '01**, **Anna Giangregorio, '01**, **Phil Flink, P '01**, **Anne Flink, P '01**, **Ira Goldklang, P '01, '05**, **Sarah Flink, '01**, **Ben Speicher, Becca Goldklang, '01**, **Ben Grimm, Cilla Lavin, P '01, '05**, **Lindsay Rabkin Kaiser, '01**, **Lee Rabkin, P '98, '01**, **Sandy Rabkin, P '98, '01**, **Cheryl Cronin, P '00, '05**, **Jake Goldklang, '05**, **Jack Cronin, P '00, '05**.



**Olivia Minn, '22**, and her father **Edward Minn, P '22, '25**, had a very positive and fun experience teaching English to children at a nursery school in Rabat, Morocco, as part of a community service project.



## ALUMNI PARENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF



**Emily Dolan, Administrative Assistant, '04 - '05, and Spanish Teacher, '05 - '07**, formerly Emily Gonzalez, stopped in during a trip to Boston to visit The LP. She enjoyed reconnecting with old colleagues on her visit, such as Caroline Carver (pictured above) and Juliana Brinkley.

**Emily Gaskin, Fellow, '20 - '21**, writes: I am currently teaching in a multi-aged (grades 4-6) classroom at Inly down in Scituate. I am certainly missing all the fun at 107 Marlborough!

**Chloe Ocain, Fellow, '19 - '21**, writes: I am currently teaching elementary English as a New Language at a public school in Brooklyn. I think about The LP a lot and am so grateful for my two years there!

**Bob Pflugfelder, Associate Science Teacher and Impresario, '87 - '95**, also known as "Science Bob" appeared on Jimmy Kimmel Live on February 2, 2023.

**Suzanne Thomas, Kindergarten Teacher, '06 - '12**, writes: We welcomed our fierce baby girl, BettyAnn Poppy to our family on May 6, 2021. She joins her big brother, Lleyton, who started kindergarten in September and, much to my personal delight, he absolutely loves it! In other fun LP news, our family moved to East Longmeadow, MA, in June of 2020 where we live in a house directly across the street from Erin Corbett (formerly Señorita Duffy) and her awesome family.

**Alicia Towns Franken, P '14, '17**, Alumni Board Member, is the Executive Director of Wine Unify. The organization's goal is to welcome, elevate, and amplify the voices of non-white, underrepresented minorities in the wine industry.

At the Neighborhood Association of Back Bay's Annual Meeting in the fall of 2022, the Community Service Awards were presented.

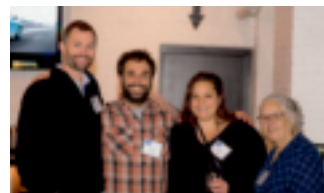
**Michael McCord**, Emeritus Head of The Learning Project Elementary School, was awarded the Paul Prindle Community Leadership Award for his important contribution to citizenship through the education of young children, and recently, his leadership of NABB's Green Committee.



Members of the 50th Gala Planning Committee spent a few days at The LP this March stuffing invitations for the event. Pictured from left to right is **Catherine Bordon, P '14, '17, Will Murphy, P '14, '16, '19, Alicia Towns Franken, P '14, '17, Claire Corcoran, P '14, '16, '19, Stephanie Fletcher, P '16, Dharshana Uppot, P '22, '26**, and, not pictured, **Ivan Werning, P '21, '23, '30** (behind the camera).

## REUNIONS

Many attended this fall's reunion held in November at PKL Boston. Pictured below: **Garrett Hatton, '99, Zack Hardoon, '99, and Intern, '12 - '13, Caitlin Duane, '99, Michelle Duane, P '94, '96, '99, and Events Coordinator, '95 - '12** (picture 1), **Michael McCord, Matt McCord, '02, Sarah Goodman-McCord, Violet McCord, Katherine McCord, '96, Elisabeth McCord** (picture 2), **Tim Pingree, '96, and P '29, Graham Pingree, '91 and P '24, '26, '29** (picture 3), **Ned Gray, P '07, Dina Catani, P '07, Linda Seely, P '07, and Riley Nelson, '08** (picture 4).



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4

## IN MEMORIAM

**Tom Birmingham, P '97**, former LP parent, LP Board of Visitors, Chelsea born labor lawyer (and Rhodes Scholar), former President of the MA Senate, Progressive Democratic Candidate for Governor, featured actor in one of the Wendy Cliggot/Bob Bezubka Kids' Night Out production ("The Great Pillbuster") and father of LP graduate, Megan Birmingham (now Megan Wolf), died on January 20, 2023, at age 73.



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# The Annual Fund



The Annual Fund closes on June 30, 2023, and we need your help. Every donation brings us closer to meeting our goals and the needs of the school.

Thank you for helping us celebrate 50 years of The LP!

<https://www.learningproject.org/ways-to-support>

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