

ALUMNI ECHO NEWS

LABORATORY SCHOOL ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL WINDY RIDGE



Principal's Message

Dear JICS Friends and Alumni Families,

I hope you are well and keeping safe.

Spring 2020 was history in the making at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Lab School. For the first time in 95 years, the Lab School doors were closed during the school year, beginning March 23, 2020. At JICS, our primary concern is for the health and wellbeing of our students, faculty and staff, our families, and the communities in which we live. Following the direction of the Ontario Ministry of Education, JICS remained closed through the remainder of the school year and students were provided with online distance education.

When we learned that we were not coming back into the building in March, teachers and staff agreed to take their March Break vacation time to be ready for the first day of distance education. The JICS teachers addressed the transition to distance education with incredible thoughtfulness. We are fortunate to have a shared philosophy, understanding of child-development research, and

a principle-based approach that informs our teaching. It was extremely challenging for us to translate into distance education what we know works so well when we are physically together. JICS teachers love coming to work, so it was devastating and frustrating not to work directly with the children. Many described the new teaching as "riding a bike while building it." Computers were lent to families in need. We learned new technology to use with young children at home with their parents. At the same time, we were forced to reconcile this need for technology with the knowledge we have from research that too much screen time can be harmful. It was incredibly challenging for teachers and parents. Teachers worked four times as hard to produce experiences that felt less satisfying because they were robbed of the immediate connection with their students. What was produced represented a small fraction of the amount of thought that teachers placed in each design. The children's emotional and academic wellbeing was at the centre of each lesson. Lessons needed to have multiple entry points for the range of academic abilities in a cohort and have high ceilings to allow

Principal's Message

children to challenge themselves and build their potential. It is important to remember that all this was done while some teachers were also taking care of their own children and/or were concerned about elderly parents or other vulnerable loved ones.

What we produced while in "survival mode" last Spring was remarkable. The JICS parents were patient, understanding, and appreciative as the distance education evolved. JICS Social Worker, Ellie Lathrop, provided parent education workshops on "Responsive Parenting in Stormy Times" and worked with individual students. While no one in the JICS family, teachers or parents, felt that online learning was developmentally appropriate, we continued to learn more about this unique online environment and about our students' needs. By keeping our philosophy and the research at the forefront, our confidence and knowledge continued to grow as we created the best possible experiences for the wellbeing of the children. Our unique approach came to the attention of local and international researchers who were studying and recording our methods and ideology in order to share them in publications and with public school educators. JICS was featured in Toronto Life Magazine's August 2020 feature "Class Dismissed" and included in the book *Reopening Better Schools: Unexpected Ways COVID-19 Can Improve Education* by Dr. Aki Murata, Stanford University.

Although cherished events like "Hot Dog Night" and the Grade 6 year-end trip were unfortunately cancelled in 2020, we thought creatively about how to adapt some of the year-end traditions. Music teachers Suzanne and Russell transformed "Music Night" to "Family Zoom-bilee," a joyful community live-stream music celebration full of singing, dancing, and special guest appearances. Grade 6 students were surprised on a Saturday to have their teacher Ben, Vice Principal, Chriss, and me hand-deliver their diplomas. Drama teacher Sarah Murray worked with Ben and Technology teacher Nick Song to create a "Zoom Grad Play" graduation movie that was nothing short of spectacular. As is the case every year, the JICS (live-streamed) graduation ceremony, complete with live valedictorian speech and poet laureates, was meaningful, poignant, and full of humour and some tears.



This issue of the JICS Alumni Echo is dedicated to the Lab School's response to the historical challenge of COVID-19. We will describe what has remained the same and what has changed to ensure safety for all. During the Spring and Summer of 2020, I met weekly with heads of independent schools across Canada, as well as some in the U.S. and from the international community of Laboratory Schools. It became so clear to me what set JICS apart. As a community, we deeply understand our three-part philosophy (belief in the importance of child security, child development, and inquiry-based learning) and we know why JICS exists (to provide exemplary education to children based on the understanding of how children learn best so we can share this knowledge with public education). When other schools seemed to regress to an outdated 1950s style of conventional teaching (children sitting in separate desks, facing the board, separated from each other), we at JICS maintained our approach to child-centered progressive teaching. I hope you enjoy learning what we have in place for 2020-2021 and taking an exclusive peek into the school.

All the best,
Richard Messina

VIDEO MESSAGE from Richard to Parent Community – March 31, 2020

Dear Parents,

I hope you are well. We miss your family. We miss being together.

I want to begin by reciting the JICS Land Acknowledgement created by our 2019 graduates:

We begin with Acknowledgement of the Land because we will be using the land and need to respect this place where Indigenous people have lived and continue to live. We wrote this to share some of our learning, and to teach others. We thought about who would be hearing it, and we didn't want to make it too complicated, or too simple.

We would like to thank the First Peoples of this land and all of Creation, including the animals, plants, land, water, air, rocks, trees and all that exists on this beautiful Earth.

We honour the Indigenous people whose traditional territories include the land on which we gather today: the Petun, the Wendat, the Anishinaabe, including the Mississauga of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, and other Nations, whose names we no longer remember because of the impact of colonialism.

We want to honour the Treaties that were made with the Land and between First Nations and the Crown. Treaties should be honoured no matter what political party is in power.

The story of Canada that most of us know is not the whole story. We have been learning from



Indigenous sources about losing language and culture through residential schools, and also about ceremony, celebration and strength of community.

When we are thinking about doing something to the land, like dams or pipelines, we should ask Indigenous people first, because they lived in balance with nature for thousands of years. We have lost our relationship to the Earth by doing things like polluting and taking too much.

We need to ask ourselves: what is more important - what I get out of this, or what happens to the land? We need to think seven generations ahead: what we do today - how will that affect tomorrow?

We invite you to do the same.

I am speaking to you from my home, and although there is nothing I dislike more than to be video recorded, I am inspired by the courage of my JICS colleagues.

My wife Cathy, who is a public-school teacher, is connecting online with her students, and my youngest daughter, Katia, is completing a Grade 10 science assignment in her room. My two eldest daughters, Simona and Thea, are finally back from their studies abroad and are in quarantine.

We find ourselves in one of the strangest, and as we watch the news, the scariest times in our lives. We are all in this together. The virus has reminded us how our behaviour and choices impact other people. The JICS community has always shown empathy, compassion, and support for one another.

VIDEO MESSAGE from Richard to Parent Community – March 31, 2020

COVID-19 reminds us that we need to look out for each other. It reminds us of the importance of our friends and our family and how much we need them. It has taught me that when this is all over, I need to make the most of every single day. We are apart right now, but that hasn't stopped us from finding ways to join together and we will continue to find new ways.

Last week was the most challenging week in memory at JICS. The teachers and staff literally worked around the clock to learn new technology while still connecting with the students, beginning immediately after the March Break. They converted their planning to an unfamiliar online format (a format that is contrary to our values of face-to-face community, social constructivism, and hands-on/minds-on/hearts-on learning). They did this without meeting in person. We did not benefit from days of professional development. Rather, the teachers plunged right in for the sake of the

children, taking huge risks, innovating, learning by doing and learning from each other as the week progressed. Your emails of appreciation provide the encouragement to continue learning, creating, and exploring what is possible. We know we cannot reproduce the magic of JICS during the school closure, but we are constantly learning and looking at ways the technology will offer us new affordances and opportunities.

I have a number of thank yous to express. In particular, I want to thank Nick Song, our Special Ed Teacher and Technology Integrator, for not only supporting every teacher, but also trouble-shooting with each family who required support with their specific way of connecting. Soon he and his wife, Becky, will have their first child, and we look forward to that exciting birth announcement and baby photos. When the baby arrives, we want Nick to savour the time with his newly expanded family.

I want to thank, Chriss, Krista (our teacher librarian and tech integrator) and our admin assistant, Tory, for providing 24 hour/day support to the teachers and to me.

I also want to thank the Parents' Association Executive for your help as well as the Class Reps. I know you have been offering much guidance to families behind the scenes. We will hear soon from the P.A. about ways that the parents can be more connected with each other.

I want to thank the children—I am so impressed with them. We are hearing from many parents how their child is getting up and getting ready for learning with an increased vigour and independence each morning. The children are learning to interact and respond to the new e-learning very quickly. Of course, they miss their friends, and it is particularly challenging for our youngest children to understand why they cannot return to school to play together.

Now we know that the ministerial school closure will go beyond two weeks, and we are ready to continue our online learning for as long as necessary. Our primary goals in designing learning experiences are "student engagement," "child security," and providing students a "feeling of connectedness to their teachers, to their peers, and to their friends." We aim to be a source of support for students, not an additional burden, during these challenging times. We appreciate and understand the diversity of situations families are facing at home and do not want to



add to your stress. We recognize that some children are able to have support and supervision with the assigned work from parents, and we are researching ways to ensure that children who need more support from us will be able to receive it.

As we move into our second week of online learning, I wanted to provide you with more information as to what our weeks will look like:

Many teachers have provided a daily and weekly schedule. This schedule reflects some of the activities, including specialties, that would typically be happening in the children's day if we were at school. Please remember that you can adjust the schedule to meet your needs and routines. The aim of providing this structure is not to overwhelm, but rather to provide some predictability and comfort in routine. The health and wellness of your family comes first.

Teachers are providing videos with recordings of stories, lessons, and instructions. When appropriate, we are trying to address the children directly. Almost each class has used Zoom to communicate as a whole class. Teachers are now scheduling small-group synchronous meetings and learning opportunities using Zoom as well.

We are living through a very prodigious time in Earth's history. Chriss shared the following with me, and I think it's worth passing on. It's from a school principal, and she says:

"This thing we are all a part of, it's living history. Our children are all a part of this, and it will be talked about for generations to come. Schools are closed, sports are cancelled, people are quarantined...on a global level. The best thing for your child to do is to keep a journal over the next

weeks. Handwritten, typed, in photography or drawings....record events, day to day activities, fears and feelings. Let them make a video journal if that's the media they prefer. As parents, let them interview you, be a part of it. When it's over, save it/store it in a safe place for them. They will share this with their children and grandchildren. Help them create a tangible, primary source of their own history."

The coming weeks will bring further challenges, calling on all of us to be patient and understanding. I am confident that JICS will emerge a stronger, kinder, and more resilient community.

I wish good health to you and to your loved ones as we move forward.

All the best.





Tuition Support Fund

Jackman ICS is committed to needs-based financial support that will both enable increased diversity and retain current Laboratory School families. We are also committed to maintaining the lowest possible tuition fee increases. We are happy to report that the 2021–2022 tuition represents the usual 3 per cent increase despite the significant new costs that are necessary for the health and safety of all during the pandemic.

We rely on the generosity of donors like you to help us achieve our goals of economic diversity. Since 2008, donations to the JICS Diana Rankin/ Muncaster Family Tuition Support Fund has provided the following five forms of financial support:

- Support to Retain Current Families with children entering Grades 3 to 6 who could not otherwise consider staying at JICS.
- Indigenous Peoples Support for current Indigenous JICS children (anonymous donor).
- Support for Changed Financial Circumstances offering one-time support for current families whose changed financial circumstances may jeopardize, in the short term, their ability to keep their children enrolled at JICS.
- Additional Financial Support to provide needs-based financial assistance for school trips and extra expenses, educational assessments, tutoring, and unforeseen costs
- Support for Economic Diversity to new families to enrol at JICS in Grades 4 to 6.

Each year, the JICS Tuition Support Committee awards approximately \$100,000 in financial support.

Please contact Richard Messina 416-934-4509 or donate online here: <https://donate.utoronto.ca/give/show/40>

Planning for the 2020-2021 School Year

At JICS, we believe that in-person school attendance, connection with classmates, and strong relationships with teachers support the wellbeing of all students.

The administrative team, teachers and staff worked all summer to be able to reopen onsite in September 2020 with protocols and policies in place to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our students, faculty, staff, and families.

We created plans that remain flexible, and we are ready to pivot in anticipation of new developments in the COVID-19 pandemic, including the possibility of easing or tightening safety restrictions throughout the school year. We are delighted to report that JICS students are back to school five days a week.



COHORTING

Our planning included drawing on the key idea from the Ministry of Education: cohorting. Cohorting means that the children in each grade have been divided into two separate half groups. Cohorting minimizes the number of students and teachers that any individual comes into contact with and maintains consistency in those contacts as much as possible.

One cohort group is physically separated from the other cohort group as much as possible when indoors. The students remain in one space per day, with limited movement of staff between

cohorts. Some grades alternate classrooms, every other day, after the rooms have been disinfected. With the recent renovations and addition of the McCain Pavilion in 2018, we are fortunate that each grade has its own dedicated gender-neutral washroom. Teachers recognize that community building and connection between cohorts is an important component of the school day, and they use technology to connect the two grade cohorts when necessary.

The specialty subjects (French, Music, Art, Phys Ed, Drama, Library)

are taught using a combination of in-person and in-school synchronous (live screen-based) delivery to minimize interactions with numerous teachers. Each grade half-cohort has regular physical education classes in the gym.

Any toys, equipment, and learning materials that are shared are cleaned and disinfected after use. Students are provided with their own personal work materials that can be brought home in the event of distance education.

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COHORTING (CONT'D)

Frequent handwashing is part of the daily routine, including prior to snack and lunch time. Lunch and snack are eaten in the classroom or outdoors. All students are required to bring their own drink bottles that are labeled and kept with them during the day.

Teachers facilitate learning outdoors as often as possible. The two half-group grade cohorts join together for outdoor recess. Two grades are in the yard for recess at a time, one in yard west and the other in yard east, with physical distancing maintained between the two grades. The

Ministry of Education guidelines recommend that physical distancing within a cohort is not required during outdoor activities such as recess.

Faculty: Homeroom Teacher and Team Teacher

Nursery East – Tara & Kenisha
Nursery West – Norah & Krista
JK – Marcia & Charlotte
SK – Carol & Evan
Grade 1 – Raadiyah & Jessika
Grade 2 – David & Rosie
Grade 3 – Michael & Shanese
Grade 4 – Robin & Walker
Grade 5 – Zoe & Meaghan
Grade 6 – Ben & Rabia

The teaching teams collaborate to provide the learning experiences for the two half-group cohorts. Each half-group grade cohort of children have equal time with the JICS grade homeroom teacher, who is responsible for the instruction of core subjects, and the team teacher, who will teach Art, Physical Education, Health, Library, and other parts of the curriculum. The Nursery cohorts remain in their dedicated spaces.

Special Education: Judith & Nick
French: Tania & Christel
Drama: Sarah
Music: Suzanne & Russell

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

A staggered arrival/dismissal time and multiple entries/exits (including Spadina Road) help to prevent traffic congestion.

There is no visitor access, including all parents. Essential visitors are required to undergo screening before entry.

Parents are required to use the JICS online Daily COVID-19 Screening Form each morning to determine whether their child can come to school. The screening tool is based on the information from Toronto Public Health.

SANITIZATION AND PPE

Students are asked to routinely clean their hands by washing or sanitizing throughout the day, especially when entering the classroom, and before and after eating, recess, and using the washroom.

Students in Grades 1 - 6 are required to wear non-medical or cloth masks while in school and during recess, with exception for those with a medical condition. Students in Kindergarten are strongly encouraged to wear masks in indoor spaces. "Mask breaks" are provided throughout the day.

Teachers and staff wear medical masks. When mask wearing impedes student learning (e.g. teaching reading in Special Education) a plexiglass desk guard is used.

Hand sanitizer stations are installed in each classroom and throughout the school. Routine sanitizing of facilities and high touch surfaces takes place throughout the day. Daily professional deep cleaning takes place at the end of day.

MOVING FROM "SURVIVE MODE" TO "THRIVE MODE"

We gained valuable information from our remote learning experiences in the Spring, and this information, along with recommendations from Sick Kids, helped encourage us to continue with our approach to education.

Despite all the new safety protocols we put into place for the 2020-2021 school year, the children have adapted beautifully and much of their learning experiences remain unchanged from previous years. There is still collaborative knowledge building, rich play, and joyous fun inside the classroom and on the playground. While we knew that what we would produce would be different from what we were all accustomed to due to COVID-19, we didn't realize how different it would be compared to other elementary schools. We have heard that some other independent and public schools have transitioned to more conventional teaching approaches. Children are sitting in rows, surrounded in plexiglass shields, facing the "front" of the classroom where the teacher "transmits" the learning to the children. JICS believes learning is an active and social experience, and we have not compromised on what is best for children's learning and wellbeing. An official visit in December 2020 from Toronto Public Health to assess the Lab School informed us we are a gold standard in terms of the measures we have in place. JICS has been fortunate to be COVID free up to the writing of this article. The dissemination work of JICS has never been more important. It is vital that we continue to share with public schools how important inquiry, a sense of security, and a developmental approach are to children's learning and positive sense of self. We are currently exploring the ways we can fulfill our public purpose by sharing what we have learned when moving from "survive to thrive" mode during this historic time.

Reflecting Back on the Highlights of the 2019-2020 School Year at JICS

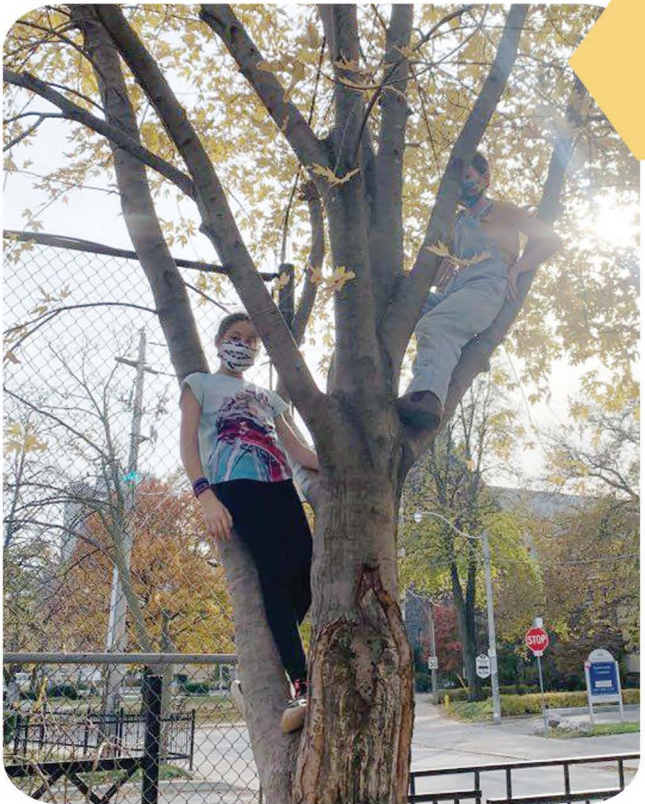
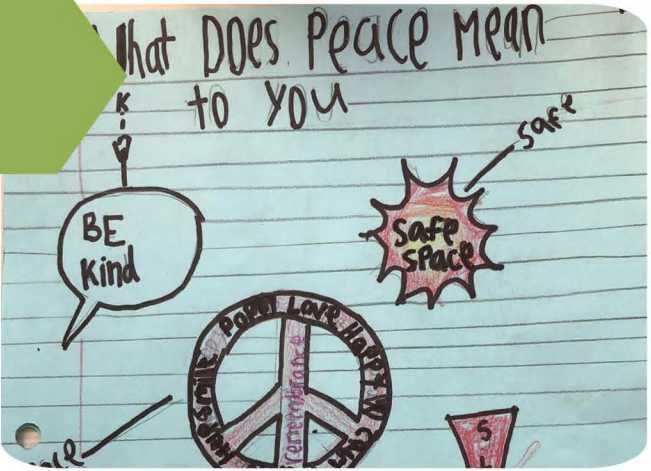
While the JICS Lab School faced unprecedented challenges during these extraordinary times, we also accomplished a tremendous amount as a community. Here is a list of the incredible highlights:

SHOWING WE CARE

We improved our recognition of **Orange Shirt Day** with the help of many thoughtful staff and members of our community.

We participated in our own **Climate Strike March**.

The Parents' Association helped fund a **social worker** to join the JICS staff.



PROGRAMS AND PLAY

We simplified our playground philosophy by asking three questions: Is it safe? Is it kind? Is it inclusive? We added new **loose parts** to make the play more engaging and played outdoors in **all weather** conditions, including climbing the trees on the yard!

Our **courtyard** was transformed in the Fall using native plants and structural features to attract wildlife and engage children in deep outdoor learning and multisensory experiences. We **tapped sugar maple trees** in the school yard in the Spring!

We got our **pottery kiln** working again!

Our **Phys Ed** program was enriched with Variety Village wheel-chair basketball, curling, kickboxing, etc.

We launched a new **lunch** program that actually had children eating.

SCHOOL EVENTS

We had to cancel many cherished events, such as the Grade 5 and Grade 6 Ottawa trip and Hot Dog Night but, with determination, skill, and great leadership we had the Grade 6 **Social Justice Club** meetings, an amazing **Zoom-bilee**, a fun **"Games Day"** and an unforgettable **Graduation ceremony and play/movie!**

We celebrated **PRIDE** with guest Robin Stevenson and **Black History Month** with storyteller Sandra Whiting. Giant Black History portraits made by the Grade 6 students, and displayed throughout the school, educated and inspired.

Grandparents sang-along with us at the **Festivals of Light**.

We celebrated **Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, and Lunar New Year** with the help of parents

The school transformed into Hogwarts on **Harry Potter Day**.

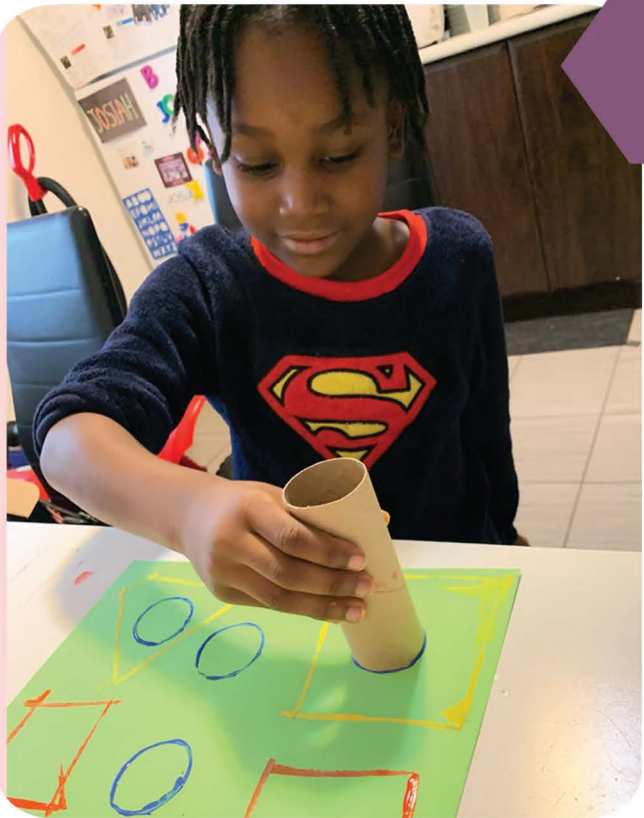


DISTANCE EDUCATION

We maintained communication through **weekly JICSfamily.com website posts**, emails, video-taped messages, a **Parent Information Night**, and Coffee and Conversation mornings.

We faced the challenge of **school closure** with incredible commitment, collaboration, and parental support, and successfully produced engaging lessons with hundreds of videos and countless Zoom meetings.

During distance-education, we **loaned technology** to students and supplied them with **skipping ropes and paint sets**.



Recess and Outdoor Play

At the Lab School, we value outdoor playtime as a vital part of the school day. When children play freely during recess, they develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. We view recess as a time for children to be as autonomous as possible. Our goal is to provide developmentally appropriate parameters that allow for independence, choice, physical challenge, solitude, exertion, and social connection.

Children are encouraged to make decisions about their play, using three questions to guide their choices:

- Is it safe? (for me, for others, for the equipment, for nature)
- Is it kind?
- Is it inclusive?

There is an expectation of fair play, consideration of others, and inclusion of all. JICS follows a "You can't say you can't play" policy for inclusion.

Children play outside in all weather at JICS (including light rain, heavy snow, and freezing conditions). "There is no inappropriate weather, only inappropriate clothing!"



The JICS Play Policy

- Outdoor play is a right of childhood.
- Outdoor play establishes the children's understanding of place and our essential connection to the Earth.
- Play deserves time.
- Self-directed play is fundamental to children's physical, emotional, and social growth, and sense of well-being.
- Kindness and respect are the basis of play within a community.
- Play embeds opportunities to manage risk and safety, and to practice judgement and the consideration and care of others.
- We strive to create equitable opportunities where all children can engage in diverse types of play, and where a range of interesting, aesthetically inspiring, and open-ended materials are made available.
- Risky play is a natural mode of testing abilities and challenging physical limits. It fosters feelings of efficacy, bravery, resilience, and competence.
- The role of the teacher is to value children's choices, help refine and support children's sense of agency, and provide a safe space to play, explore, negotiate, and be. Though adults will intervene when a perceived hazard arises, they are primarily attentive observers rather than active supervisors.
- *Play is many things: joyful, intense, quiet, rambunctious, intrinsically motivating, and deeply satisfying.*

Endowment Fund

The generosity of our JICS community is nothing short of remarkable. We wish to thank the Sweeney Tiplady Family for donating \$50,000 toward the JICS Endowment Fund. We also wish to thank JICS grandparents Mrs. Mary Davie and the late Mr. James Davie for their donation of \$200,000. These gifts will generate enormous benefits for the Lab School, allowing JICS to expand its reach and deepen its impact to make a difference in the lives of children, families, and communities.



The newly established JICS Endowment fund will allow us to take a long-term view in strengthening the school and supporting our mission. The purpose of the JICS Endowment Fund is to increase our:

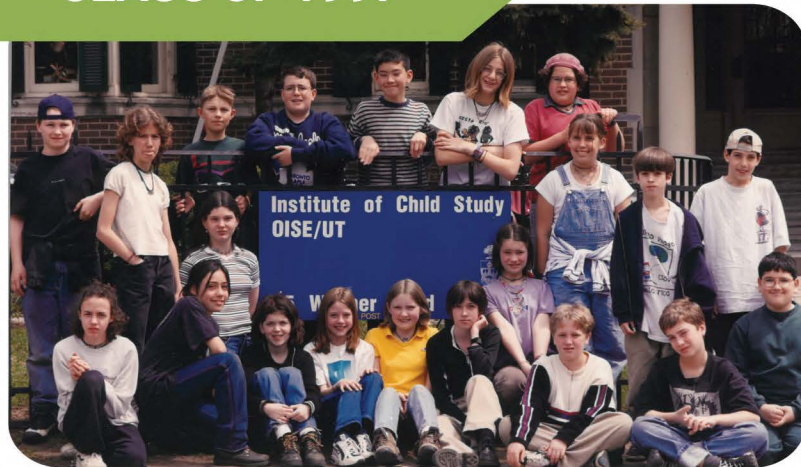


- economic diversity by offering support in the early and primary years
- work in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Report
- research and understanding of student mental health
- understanding and dissemination of the benefits of environmental education.

Please contact richard.messina@utoronto.ca if you are interested in making a donation. Donations can be made online <https://donate.utoronto.ca/give/show/40>

Where Are They Now 1997-2001

CLASS OF 1997



Rachel Lipton
Class of 1997

Rachel is a registered acupuncturist and wellness enthusiast. Dedicated to providing affordable care, she owns a sliding-scale acupuncture studio in downtown Ottawa.

Alex Morley
Class of 1997

Alex is a kindergarten teacher at the Mabin School. He has 3 kids and lives in Toronto. He continues to love learning and has many hobbies, including BBQing, sewing, and unicycling!

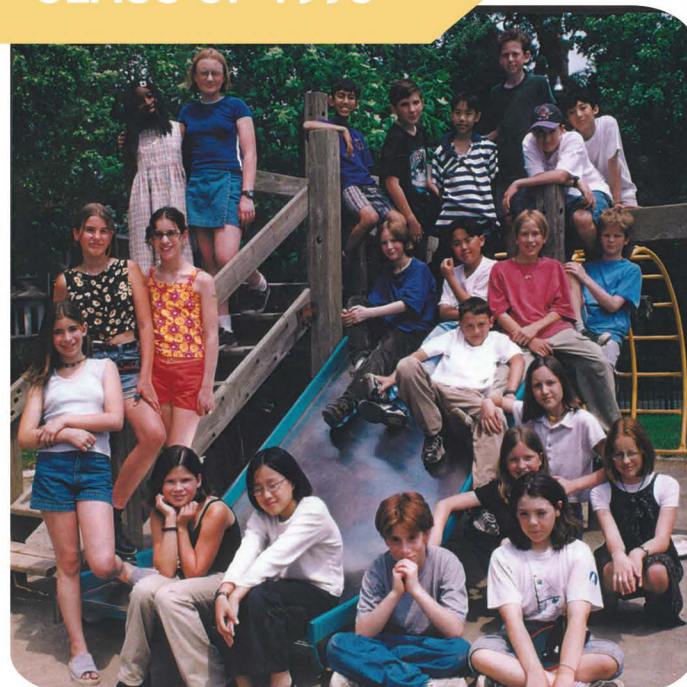
Tessa Pauly
Class of 1997

After graduating from Branksome Hall and then McGill, Tessa began a career in advertising in New York City. She currently lives in Larchmont, NY and works at American Express where she is part of the Global Brand strategy team. Tessa is married and has two children, Barrett Rose (2.5 years) and Oscar Clark (4 months).

Colm Schlosser
Class of 1997

For over 10 years, Colm has been working as a business consultant for Action Consulting, which specializes in body language. He also co-founded a wholesale merchandise and apparel company called Keco.

CLASS OF 1998



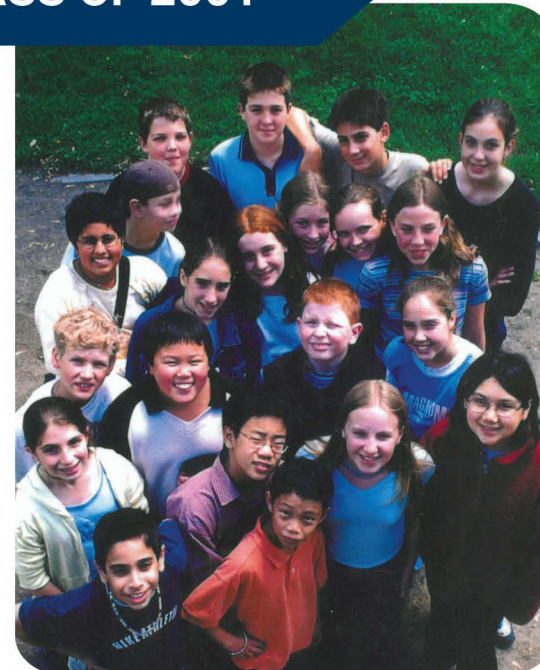
CLASS OF 1999



Reid Pauly
Class of 2000

Reid lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where he is a professor of nuclear security and policy at Brown University. He and his wife, Natalie Harrington, are expecting their first child in April 2021.

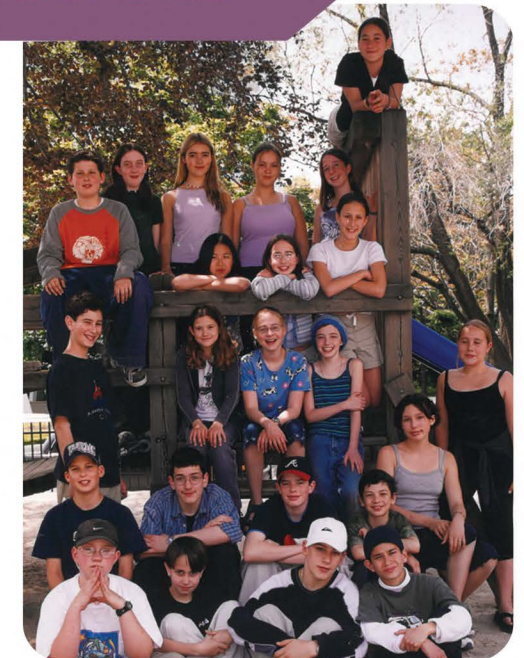
CLASS OF 2001



Morag Scanlon
Class of 2000

Morag now lives in London (England) with her husband and dog. She studied International Relations at the University of St Andrews, followed by law, before starting to work for a small private bank. Years on, she's still there, having been given the opportunity to work in a range of areas as she grows in her career.

CLASS OF 2000



Walker Kitchens
Class of 2001

After a decade of teaching and working for a number of non-profits both home and abroad, Walker has returned to teach at JICS. When not teaching, you can find him running and biking around.

Members of the class of 2002 can contact tara.rousseau@utoronto.ca to be featured in the Where Are They Now section of our next issue.

The School of Possibility: Honouring the Needs of Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic

“What if” is a phrase you often hear from our Lab School teachers. What if there was a better way to teach a certain subject? What if we tried engaging with a topic differently? Sometimes researchers bring these questions to us to investigate together, and sometimes it is the teachers’ own inquiries that are explored, using their deep knowledge of educational literature and years of experience and intuition to guide them.

At the Lab School, our mission is to provide excellence in elementary education, teacher education, and research in an intentionally diverse environment. It is our mandate to explore what is possible in education. At no time in our history has this question been more critical or more challenging for educators than the past year.

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought emergency school closures and remote learning in the Spring of 2020 and then the re-opening of schools with strict health and safety protocols in September. This was followed by a second wave and closure in January 2021, and a return to in-person learning in February.

In each scenario, what was being asked of educators seemed to be at direct odds with what we know to be best practice for fostering children’s well-being and engagement with learning. Initially both the remote learning and the reopening appeared to be daunting and almost futile tasks. Yet somehow, we have been able to stay true to our values and continue to provide learning experiences that put children’s needs at the centre. We accomplished this by challenging ourselves with questions that reimagine what is possible:

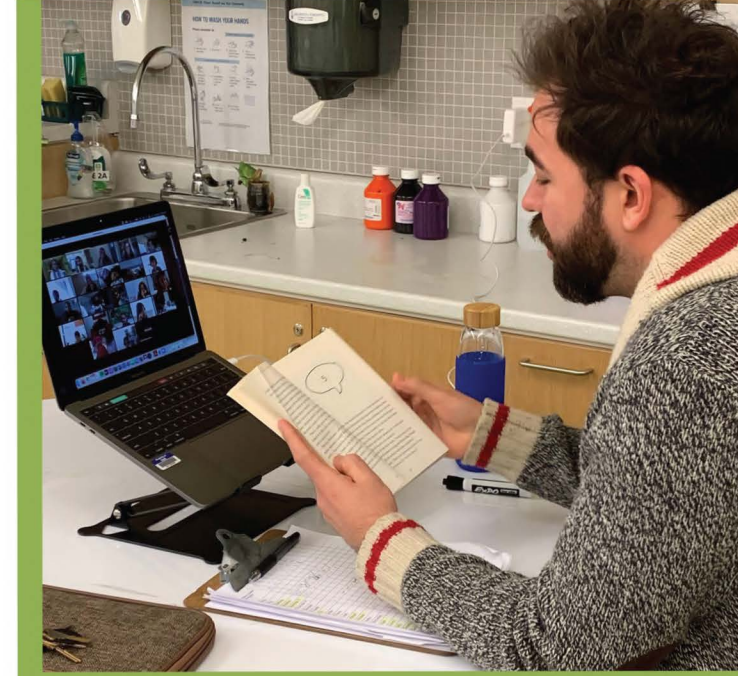
- What if we can teach during the pandemic without sacrificing what we know about what children need and how children learn best?
- What if we are able to maintain a sense of community and belonging from a distance?

- What if we can open the school and run our classes safely without compromising our values as educators to put children’s development and engagement first?

- What if we can help children to thrive despite COVID-19?

The Lab School has a 90-year history of honouring the child, and intentionally placing the wellbeing of children at the centre of each decision. That we continue to do so even during these most trying times is a testament to the creativity and commitment of the Lab School teachers and staff, along with the support of the parents. It would have been easiest to revert to an older approach to teaching, using a “transmission of information” style to deliver content, working through textbooks to guide progress through curriculum, and sitting in desks in individual bubbles without any opportunity for collaboration. By staying true to our commitment to uphold our core philosophical principles of security, development, and inquiry, we were able to stay open and curious about what could be possible, despite the COVID-imposed barriers. In some ways, we were even able to use these restrictions to our advantage.

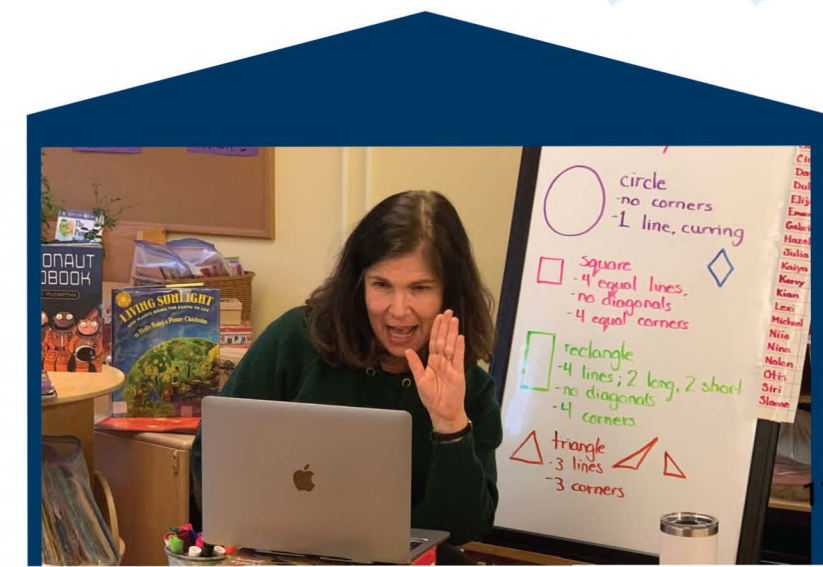
Our teachers were asked to reflect on how the Lab School’s philosophy, values and/or principles helped shape a response to the challenge of teaching during the pandemic, and what was learned about supporting children’s wellbeing or engagement with learning during a pandemic. Here are some of the things they shared:



In a way, I think the JICS philosophy and values made teaching through the pandemic more difficult. Our values and philosophy meant that there were some aspects of our teaching that we simply could not imagine compromising, even when these very same aspects of our practice were rendered extremely difficult to accomplish by the restrictions of the pandemic. For example, our philosophy of security, inquiry and development means that a close relationship between teacher and student is indispensable. Providing a safe and secure, child-focused and developmentally informed learning environment means that we must have the time to get to know children deeply, to listen to their thinking, to observe them carefully, and to take every moment necessary to surround them with positive and supportive interactions. Zoom is not the right tool to accomplish any of this. Online teaching does not encourage deep developmental relationships. And yet, these are goals that we as a staff cannot simply abandon or put off. They are core to our teaching and pedagogy, and so we found ourselves in the difficult position of trying to maintain the core of what we do when circumstances made it nearly impossible. In a sense, I think the pandemic has truly tested our philosophy and values as a school. And I think the fact that we have so far generally refused to compromise on those values, even when doing so would have made our lives immeasurably easier, is something in which we can take some pride.

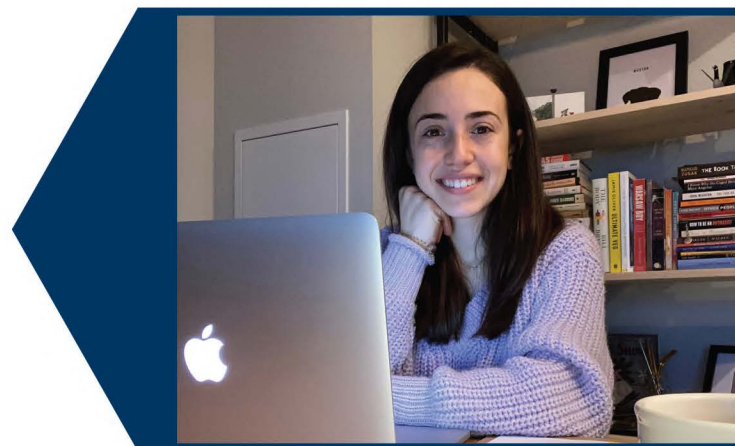
We need to inject moments in the day where we can feel connected with the students and when they can feel connected to us. In a time when we are so disconnected physically, emotionally and mentally, it is so important to still build strong relationships whenever we can. Things like curriculum, learning goals, safety, and protocols are always on our minds, but we need to ensure we find time for joyous things as well (dancing, singing, laughter), and to be flexible in order to meet the needs of the students in the moments they are happening.

As much as I wanted (and hoped and intended) to ensure that deep learning continued to happen for my students while online, my very first priority was to support the sense of connection—the sense of being heard, seen, and known by peers and teachers alike—that every child needs and deserves. It is that sense of being a known and valued member that underpins our work together as a learning community, and allows each child to listen and share, take risks and chances, offer theories and ideas, and ask questions and give answers, without reserve. To a large extent, that happened for us online. However, despite all our efforts, maintaining that sense of connection amongst 22 distanced individuals wasn’t always possible. For some children the sense of disconnect was more intransigent. We then needed to draw deeply on our knowledge of those individuals and find other means of connecting—through emails, communications with parents, and found opportunities to work one on one—until that sense of connection, of being seen, heard, known and valued, was reformed.



Supporting children's wellbeing and engagement in a pandemic means having the ability to choose what is important, right now, for them and for us. We must keep in mind that this difficult time will pass. How we take care of each other in this moment will affect us post pandemic. Our state of mind as teachers, parents, and friends might be the most important factor. In a nutshell, deliberately slowing down is very important.

During a time of incredible change and uncertainty, the JICS philosophy/values/principles proved to be a foundation upon which to base our planning for the children. Be it in person or online, the principles have provided security by keeping our goals clearly stated from day one. Each decision which is made in class, and online, has these principles and values at heart. In reminding myself that JICS is a place which values security, collaboration, and joy in learning, I was better able to distill what the essential role of the "classroom" should be for the child. Of course, we need and want to get to the curriculum, however, of utmost importance for the children during these trying times was to help students to stay connected, keep them interested, and motivate them to want to come back each day with a smile on their face. One thing I have learned about supporting children's wellbeing or engagement with learning during a pandemic is how important connection is. We were able to connect in groups through platforms such as Zoom, but the one-to-one personal dialogue which is so important to our connection with individual students was incredibly hard to engage in while online. Any moment, however brief, where it could feel as though children were getting focussed attention went a very long way. Children need this feedback, and need to feel as though they are seen and heard for who they are. Each week, we made sure to have a time where students could sign up for a share time. Although "show and tell" may seem like a time reserved for younger years, this time was a highlight for the class. It was a moment where they could be seen. It was a few minutes where children had the chance to bring themselves completely into the online space and make it their own. We try to foster this comfort and safety in the classroom as well, but this time was needed more than ever when online.



The pandemic was about working together as a community and learning that came from it was a result of coming together to experience and overcome something so stressful and unpredictable. Knowing we had the security of our classroom was motivating. What I learned:

- It's okay to pause, reflect, and start again in a completely different direction.
- As long as the children felt heard and included, it didn't matter what curricular area we covered.
- The children were invested, as long as I was invested.
- Outdoor play and engagement opened many new avenues for exploration and to bring the outdoors, inside.
- Slow and steady was the pace for planning and curriculum delivery.
- Mental health of students and teachers is so important.
- Take a break, even when you don't think you need one. A mental health day is much more useful before you breakdown.
- Focussing on a child's engagement and participation, and providing activities that helped children feel secure at school was much more important than the most brilliant math, science or writing lesson.



COVID has forced us to be willing to change and rethink everything that we do. It is exhausting, and frustrating when sometimes you can't do what you believe would be best, but we proceed and keep developing new ways to build relationships, to create spaces for courageous conversations, and to ensure that learning is happening in as supportive an environment as possible, whether in person or online.

Flexibility and adaptability have been crucial, whether teaching music outside or inside the school, or teaching on Zoom to children at home or in their classroom. Some modes of teaching have allowed for singing, but most have not, which has been very hard. Singing is such an important way for children to express emotion. However, across all four modes of teaching this year, the most important goal for me has been to make the learning fun and to have the children feel that they are helping to create something together in the moment. I have not worried so much about specific learning outcomes for each grade or age group. Rather, I have focussed on engagement and the joy of making music together to support the children's emotional wellbeing during the pandemic. A delightful surprise for me has been the fun of dancing, moving, chanting and playing instruments outside all year round and in all types of weather. This has been a huge gift to the children and to me!



The role of the Lab School is positioned between our mandate to explore what's possible in education and our dedication to supporting public education and the field of education as a whole. In mentoring student teachers and offering our experience of what best practice is, we need to understand how to share our work in ways that can be translated into many different contexts. I think this is why sharing the principles and philosophy of what we do is so important (rather than a "program" of some kind). That being said, it is our duty to constantly re-envision what education can be, involving ourselves in research and paying attention to a changing world, always aiming for the deepest understanding and highest standards of practice. Lab Schools live in this tension between exploring the ideal and supporting what's real. I think this makes our role unique.

We've now arrived at one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the vaccine roll-out is finally bringing the finish line into view. New questions are emerging that will guide our work in the years to come. How has the pandemic affected the development and education of the children we teach? What will they need from their school and teachers in the years ahead? What will we change or adapt to meet the children where they are now, to strengthen their wellbeing and further their academic growth?

What if we could use the experiences of the past year to build life-long buoyancy and resiliency? As we are released from the COVID-19 restrictions, we look forward to continuing to fulfill the Lab School's role to explore what's possible in our post-pandemic world.

JICS Commitment to Anti-Black Racism

Statement
June 2, 2020

Dear JICS Community,

We are aware that racism in all forms is deeply rooted in our history and exists in our own community. These past weeks remind us of the ongoing impact of anti-Black racism on individuals and communities. Through the media, we have witnessed violence and harassment against members of the Black community. We are very aware of the devastating impacts of anti-Black racism in our world and at JICS.

These events are felt personally, and in different ways by our students, staff, and parent community at JICS. We recognize that there are a myriad of feelings being experienced by Black staff and students in the JICS Lab School. There is an increased sense of vulnerability and reactions of sadness, insecurity, anger, and grief. It is our responsibility to stand up and do whatever it takes to end racism, hate, and oppression of all kinds. Silence is not acceptable. As stated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu: If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. The profound harm it causes to individuals, families and communities can no longer be debated or tolerated and must be stopped.

The JICS Lab School is committed to equity and inclusion, and we acknowledge the



importance of addressing anti-Black racism in developmentally appropriate ways with the children throughout the year. As we continue to serve our students, these acts of violence are critical reminders of the urgency to remain focused and committed to the changes that need to happen for our students and families. We strive to continuously examine our commitment on how we make our school a safe place for all students, staff, parents, and community members.

At JICS, we do not always get things right, but we will maintain an unwavering focus on ending anti-Black racism and all forms of oppression. We know we need to hear and deeply listen to the voices of our students, parent community and staff, and make sure our diversity and equity efforts are informed by these voices. We invite you to reach

out and inform us about your experiences, thoughts, concerns, suggestions.

We strive to create brave spaces for the courageous conversations that need to happen, and to welcome input from all of our community members on how we can best meet everyone's needs to continue this critical work.

In our sadness and anger, let us work towards change and hold each other accountable for taking a stand against individual and systemic acts of anti-Black racism. Let us work together to make a difference and fight against all forms of racism and hate as we strive to change the future in the lives of our community and beyond.

Sincerely,

Richard Messina, Principal
Chriss Bogert, Vice Principal

To read the school's March 2021 statement on Anti-Asian Racism, please visit our JICS Family website:
<https://www.jicsfamily.com/anti-asian-racism>