

## **FAQ: THE DOWNTOWN SCHOOL – STARTING A NEW SCHOOL**

### **Q. Why are you starting a new high school in Seattle?**

We believe there is high demand for an academically challenging high-school education in the greater Seattle area. Lakeside School currently has a 16 percent admit rate and does not have the space to admit all the talented students who could thrive at the school. The region's projected growth promises to continue to fuel demand for academically challenging high schools.

### **Q. Given Lakeside School's success, why embark on this different model?**

The idea for a new school emerged from Lakeside School's mission to serve as many qualified students in the metro area as it can. In 2014, Lakeside's Board of Trustees asked Lakeside's Head of School Bernie Noe to explore possible avenues for expansion. Bernie proposed a micro-school that would be separate from Lakeside, with the same emphasis on academic excellence but with a different educational model, student-life program, and cost. Cost was a factor because the expense of running traditional independent schools has put them out of reach to too many families, even with financial aid.

### **Q: What is a micro-school?**

The micro-school is a new model of schooling that is sparking interest around the world. While micro-schools vary in their approaches, they are generally smaller, lower-cost, and more flexible than traditional schools.

In the spring 2017 issue of Independent School magazine, educational thought-leader Michael Horn, cofounder of the Clayton Christensen Institute which focuses on "disruptive innovation," discussed changes and challenges to the independent-school model. Describing the micro-school as a "stripped-down, no-frills model" of education, Horn noted that while the model could be seen as a threat to existing independent schools, it also provides an opportunity for innovation to any school that launches one.

### **Q: Why do you think this model will work here in Seattle?**

Once Lakeside's Board of Trustees approved the idea of exploring the opening of a micro-school, Sue Belcher — former director of Lakeside's Summer School Programs and now head of The Downtown School — began to research the model more deeply. She met with innovative education leaders around the country, and her findings confirmed the viability of creating a micro-school. In summer 2017, as Sue met with leaders from independent middle schools around the Seattle metro region, they expressed enthusiasm about the new school. We've also received preliminary expressions of interest from families with students entering high school. We believe that Seattle — a city and region that embraces innovation — is a great place for this new model.

### **Q: Do you think micro-schools will replace schools like Lakeside?**

We believe there will be a continuing demand for schools like Lakeside, and we expect Lakeside will continue to thrive because of its ability to innovate and evolve.

While Clayton Christensen Institute cofounder Michael Horn presented micro-schools as a "disruptive innovation" in education, he suggests that sustaining innovation, or innovation within the more traditional school concept, is critical to

organizational growth. While The Downtown School fits the definition of disruptive innovation, Lakeside School — with its constant drive to improve the quality of students' education — is a model of sustaining innovation.

**Q: Once the new school opens, what will be the relationship between Lakeside School and The Downtown School?**

The Downtown School: A Lakeside School is a program of Lakeside School, which is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. While affiliated with Lakeside School, The Downtown School will function separately from it and will be financially self-sustaining. During the first few years of operation The Downtown School will have contractual arrangements for support from Lakeside's business, communications, development, and human resources offices. The admissions operations at each school is completely separate.

**Q: What makes The Downtown School unique?**

The academic program of The Downtown School has several unique features we believe will resonate strongly with students:

- Courses pursue an **interdisciplinary approach**, through which students examine how multiple disciplines approach questions, investigate problems, and follow themes and topics.
- Interdisciplinary learning is at the core of the **three-week intensive courses** that start and end each school year. Course content will be heavily influenced by students' own interests and passions, by the questions students ask and the problems they wish to solve. Students will work collaboratively in grade-level groups on projects that take them throughout the city. Teachers will emphasize learning processes for inquiry, problem-solving, and design thinking.
- Students will use the **city as a lab**, as context for their learning. Teachers and students will regularly engage with community partners, including local nonprofits and businesses, to create real-world applications for topics in the curriculum.
- All juniors will have an **internship** in an area of their interest. Placement will be student driven, with the support of a faculty advisor.

**Q: I have more questions. Whom should I contact?**

Please feel free to contact us at [admissions@downtownschoolseattle.org](mailto:admissions@downtownschoolseattle.org). This FAQ is an evolving document and we will be adding to it frequently.

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