

# A Message from the Principal

Laurel Academy

I am often asked what inspired me to open Laurel Academy, back in 1995. The answer begins with my father, Sidney Ledson, who undertook to teach my sister and me to read when we were just two and three years old. He outlined his trials and successes in a bestselling book, *Teach Your Child to Read in 60 Days*. Thereafter, disenchanted with our local public school, he homeschooled us for a year, which led to our acceptance into a full-time gifted program and the publication of his second book, *Raising Brighter Children*.

My early education, and the variety of school environments I experienced, which included various public schools, a publicly-funded gifted program, and a private girls' school, have been one of the sources of my own passion for education. For, in experiencing such diversity, one has the opportunity to see how different approaches felt and worked — from the student's point of view -- and to see how much one's experiences affect one's personal, academic, and emotional development.

Some years later, when I was a teenager, my father opened a school in order to offer other children the same early education with which he had provided my sister and me. My experience working at his school, where I began as an assistant and working my way up until I eventually became the principal, allowed me to experience just how rewarding working with children can be.

I learned there that children are excited and primed for learning — about almost anything and from an early age — when high but attainable goals are set by enthusiastic, skilled and inspired teachers, using appropriate and abundant materials, in an environment of respect and encouragement.

Our success in using a systematic phonics approach to quickly teach young children to read, and witnessing the children's wonder at their new skill, was the starting point in my decision to expand the program so that it would not only accelerate the acquisition of language and math skills but would also place appropriate emphasis on social development, physical health, the arts, science, history and literature, and a full range of academic subjects for children from pre-kindergarten to Grade 8.

From the beginning, it was my intention to offer an enriched program across the whole curriculum, with individualization in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics, in the firm belief that all of our students could benefit from such programs, and progress further and faster than is often expected by educators.

Laurel Academy was founded on that belief. Its success in achieving its goals may be the main reason the school has almost tripled in size since its inception.

I believe that a small school can best support and nurture its students, and I work consistently with the teachers to determine ways in which this ideal can be realised. I am the author of the school's reading program and the key instigator of each of the school's other principal programs. I monitor all areas of the curriculum, and I value the opportunity to know each and every one of our students--and, of course, the opportunity to witness them mature and develop into thinking, responsible and creative young adults.

I have worked, first-hand, with a wide range of students, from those identified as "gifted" to those with autism, Down's syndrome, and other learning disabilities, and I have seen how much an individualized, systematic approach to teaching can benefit them all. I have studied child psychology and development at University of Toronto. Early in my career, I completed the Kindermusik® teacher training for teaching music to young children and taught music, using this method, to children from two to six years old; I trained in the Kumon® method of teaching mathematics and used it as a supplementary math program in school for a number of years; I have attended various teaching seminars and workshops, including training in using the highly-successful Handwriting Without Tears® program; I have served on the Board of Directors of a private high school for gifted students, and I am a certified academic therapist with the Canadian Academy of Therapeutic Tutors (Orton-Gillingham).

Vee Ledson