

ATLANTA'S CIVICALLY ENGAGED, DESIGN-MINDED SEMESTER SCHOOL

LAB ATLANTA

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SCHOOL
Lab Atlanta
Atlanta, GA

GRADE LEVELS
Grade 10

PRESENTERS
Laura Deisley
Founder and Executive Director

HISTORY

LAB ATLANTA, founded by The Lovett School (GA), is a civically engaged, design-minded semester school for gifted 10th-graders in the Atlanta area. In 2014, Lovett was awarded an Edward E. Ford Foundation Leadership Grant to develop its vision for a disruptive high school model that would connect public and private school students for a city-based, immersive school experience akin to a Leadership Atlanta program for high school students.

Lab Atlanta's first semester pilot—with 10 students from five schools, 70 percent on full needs-based scholarships—started in January 2017. In the fall of last year, a second pilot—with single gender students from five public and private high schools—was tested. The final pilot before full-scale enrollment of 24 students per semester in 2018–2019 launched in January 2018. This pilot of public school students includes 11 students from six diverse public schools representing eight zip codes from around the city.

In the fall of 2017, Lab Atlanta established a partnership with Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and the Georgia High School Athletic Association (GHSA). Students can be nominated to apply on a needs-blind basis from each of APS's public and charter high schools and will be dually enrolled at their home school and at Lab. They'll be able to return to their home school and participate in extracurricular activities outside the school day, including athletics. The opportunity to be jointly enrolled has now been extended for the 2018–19 school year to area independent schools whose students wish to apply.

"I applaud Lab Atlanta's ability to create a learning space that is so very student-centered. Student collaboration and creativity is clearly emphasized as the program asks students to learn from each other—and from the city in which they live."

AMY JARICH, ASSISTANT VICE CHANCELLOR AND DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

"Before Lab, I wasn't happy with my school. I wasn't happy with myself. I didn't know that 'one thing' I could do for the rest of my life. Now, I believe I know. Meeting new people, interfacing with kids from other schools, and just looking around has opened up my eyes to the opportunities around me."

PHYDIA, 2017 FOUNDING CLASS STUDENT

"Lab Atlanta more than delivered on its promise to immerse the students in an inspired, civically engaged high school semester. The city was truly their school room... Our daughter walked away with more perspective, more confidence, and more capabilities to lead and chart her own path as she heads out of high school and into the real world."

MEG CHURCH, 2017 FOUNDING CLASS PARENT

IDEAS

- ▶ Our partnership with APS and GHSA, which led to the innovative dual enrollment model, was finalized in November 2017. The purpose is to streamline our recruitment effort across the public schools and expand eligibility for all area students (particularly those who are athletes and highly engaged in their home school). Our initial results show more gender balance in our spring cohort, and strong interest ("this is game-changing") from parents and students at all schools.
- ▶ Prototypes and ideas generated from student capstones are being curated for ongoing work by alumni and current students. For example, we are exploring partnerships to develop an app on affordable housing that emerged from a founding student's passion around low- and middle-income housing access in the city limits.
- ▶ Other cities and schools are approaching us to learn about our model and explore opportunities to replicate it in their own cities. The City of Atlanta's chief operating officer, who is on our advisory board, thinks this model should be replicated in cities nationwide.

IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶ Minimize the "cooks in the kitchen." You need to be able to move flexibly and adaptively.
- ▶ Work early and closely with academic deans/counselors to identify schedule and course requirements.
- ▶ Expect to raise significant capital to cover faculty and lease costs during a two-year build-out.
- ▶ If equity and diversity are important to you, think about how to sustain the needs-blind admission policy and correlated financial needs.

IMPERATIVE

The Lovett School has a long history of service-learning and civic engagement, but Headmaster Billy Peebles and Director of Strategic Innovation Laura Deisley wondered about how they might move students outside of the classroom to learn about the city, tackle issues, and design potential solutions—and do so alongside students they were unlikely to come across in the "Buckhead bubble." Lab Atlanta is a bold initiative to bring honors-level students together in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment that is intentionally immersive, at times uncomfortable, and specifically focused on building knowledgeable, connected, empathetic, engaged young leaders.

RESOURCES

WEBSITE
www.labatlanta.org
FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/LabAtlanta
TWITTER
twitter.com/LabAtlanta
INSTAGRAM
www.instagram.com/labatlanta

