Character Matters:
How to Recruit and Retain Families in a Saturated Market

BY LAURA S. TROTT, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSION, LAUSANNE COLLEGIATE SCHOOL (TN)

Lausanne has long had counselors dedicated to each division that help support faculty and staff in focusing on the whole child’s growth and development, in addition to their academics. More than a decade ago, the Middle School counselor and administration, with the support and assistance of the faculty, created a platform that could engage this age group through regular self-reflection and community-building exercises.

Parents were stressed and looking for ways to help give their children tools to become self-advocates and boost independence through their educational journey. The Middle School’s goal was to help students build communication and social skills and focus on self-management as a part of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. With an outline provided by the counseling office, the faculty began the implementation of mindfulness activities held at the beginning of each class session.

“Mindfulness helps you focus on the present moment to help clear distractions,” Madison ’27 shared. “When we first get to our class, we just breathe so that we can focus and get ourselves and our mind together to really do our best. It teaches us that if we’re stressed, we just need to breathe and get that moment of silence to control ourselves. It lets us control our emotions and thoughts so we can hone in on what we’re trying to do.”

The breathing exercises we do during the Mindful Moment before each class help you become mentally aware,” Naji ’25 shared. “It makes you feel grounded in the present moment and clears distractions.”

In 2019, the “Daily Focus” was developed at Lausanne to expand the social and emotional skills even further. Students begin each day by meeting for ten minutes in their advisories for activities that foster self-reflection and vital self-management skills. Each morning, students spend 10 minutes before class starts to do mindful activities and learn more about how their minds process information.

“During the Daily Focus, we learn about life and how we can be better individuals—for example, we focus on a specific topic for the week like empathy and sympathy,” Reese ’27 shared. “I have learned how to react to the situation while being mindful of other people and how they feel.”

Learning to control her breathing has also been a benefit to Reese.

“One exercise is to breathe in for 5 seconds, hold for 1 second, and breathe out for 7 seconds,” she continues. “I use it in volleyball to focus on my serve rather than the crowd or looking at my coach.”

Laura S. Trott joined the Lausanne Collegiate School (TN) staff in 2010 as the Director of Marketing & Communications, working closely with the admission and advancement offices. After several years of sharing Lausanne’s story through the website, school publications, and media contributions, Laura transitioned to the admission office in 2013 as the Director of Admission, providing her the opportunity to play a more active role in sharing Lausanne with prospective families. Before joining the Lausanne team, Laura served for over a decade as a communications and marketing specialist for non-profits in the Memphis area after graduating with a BA in political science from Rhodes College and the McIntire Business Institute at the University of Virginia. Laura and her husband, Andrew, are the proud parents of Lausanne students Abby ’24 and William ’27.
The successful establishment of a Social-Emotional Learning Program in the Middle School led to its expansion schoolwide and includes five main focuses as identified by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

- **Self-Awareness**—Understanding our strengths and limitations helps us develop a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism. If students develop the ability to understand their emotions, they can begin to see how emotions impact thoughts, and influence behavior.

- **Self-Management**—Students need to learn how to regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. Students at Lausanne learn to manage stress and control impulses, including setting and working toward personal and academic goals.

- **Social Awareness**—Lausanne’s student body represents over 75 different countries. As a global community, students develop the ability to understand and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

- **Relationship Skills**—Learning how to have positive, social relationships and work with others is essential to developing into a healthy adult. Students are encouraged to practice communicating clearly and listening actively. They learn to cooperate, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- **Responsible Decision-Making**—Helping students develop the ability to make positive choices at school builds their ability to make responsible decisions on their own. To do this, they need to have realistic evaluations of the consequences of their actions and be mindful of the well-being of themselves and others as they make decisions.

As in the Middle School practice, teachers in Lausanne’s Lower School introduce SEL to students throughout the day. Students can participate in Mindful Moments as they make transitions in classroom activities and rotate through co-curricular classes such as art, dance, music, language studies of Mandarin and Spanish, physical education, or A.N.T.S. (Acquiring New Technology Skills).

“It’s precious to see two-year-olds doing their breathing exercises and yoga during their Music and Movement classes,” shares Kara Barbour, Lausanne’s Head of Lower School. “The addition of mindfulness activities gives these young children powerful self-management tools as they develop their language skills and social interaction with others.”

The Lower School counselor leads and creates guidance lessons shared with class groups and individual sessions. Community Time activities bring the entire division together in reflections, such as the Thanksgiving Post-It Note activity, which covers the Lower School’s walls with a wide variety of thanks by Lower School students each November.

In Lausanne’s Upper School, social-emotional learning activities weave the student body together by providing continual opportunities for self-reflection. Along with daily group advisory discussions, students have various other SEL opportunities, including journaling activities, mental performance training sessions for varsity sports teams, and student groups and clubs focused on mindfulness. As part of the I.B. Diploma Programme, students also complete specific Creativity, Activity and Service (C.A.S.) projects that align with Upper School’s SEL efforts.

An advisory committee of field experts works with Lausanne’s Director of Social-Emotional Learning, Greg Graber, to continuously review and expand the SEL program. These social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and pediatricians have also participated in a virtual Social-Emotional Learning Speakers Series that is available online with additional SEL resources at lausannelearning.com/sel.

Graber joined Lausanne’s faculty in 2004 and was the Head of Middle School for 12 years. During that time, he oversaw the development of the Mindfulness and Daily Focus activities. With his extensive knowledge on the subject of mindfulness, his work has been featured in the New York Times and on ESPN, and he has presented at Harvard University Graduate School of Education. He also consults with other schools like Deerfield Academy and Episcopal High School on developing similar mindfulness programs.

“It is our goal for these programs to add value to the lives of every constituent of our Lausanne community,” said Graber. “SEL is relatively new in this region, and some have misconceptions about what it is and isn’t. We are fortunate to have such a strong and dedicated group of experts on our Social and Emotional Learning Advisory Council to give us feedback on what current trends we need to address within these programs.”

The establishment of this program was highly instrumental in the school’s initial response to COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. In addition to safety measures taken to protect the community, Lausanne Headmaster Stuart McCathie’s top priority was to utilize Lausanne’s advisory and SEL programs to ensure students felt emotionally and socially supported.

Understanding that children can develop anxiety when dealing with situations out of their control, Lausanne’s Communications department regularly shared CDC updates and advice from the school’s COVID-19 Task Force physicians. Families were additionally encouraged to support their children by helping them process their feelings and sharing ways their family and school were prepared to respond to the pandemic.

In response to Lausanne’s ongoing social-emotional support and continuation of classes during that time, Lausanne parent Amy Dorsey wrote, “The fact that the school community can keep in touch is amazing. The contact with those you are accustomed to seeing every day has truly been a blessing for us. It brings some sense of normalcy to the lives of these students even though they may not realize it.”

The combination of Lausanne’s continuous academic platform and firmly established Social-Emotional Learning Program during the time of COVID led to an increase in the school’s enrollment, including a multi-tiered waitlist.

“I am thrilled that Lausanne is forward-thinking enough to understand the benefits of a robust, comprehensive K–12 SEL program,” shared Graber. “We are teaching our students competencies of SEL: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship building, decision making, and self-management. These skills will enable our students to succeed in school and life in general.”

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