

## The Sycamore School in Malibu, Opening September 2015

### Description



### THE SYCAMORE SCHOOL SET TO OPEN SEPTEMBER 2015 IN MALIBU

#### *Revolutionary Independent Elementary School Starts with 20 Students Ages 6-8*

The Sycamore School, an independent elementary school featuring a curriculum rooted in collaboration, innovation, and learning through play and creativity, opens in Malibu on September 1, 2015 for 20 children ages 6-8. Sycamore is the realization of Los Angeles-based Catalyst Education's™ vision and philosophy. Catalyst was formed with the belief that education can look different and a desire to change the discussion about what learning can be. Its three founders, Tedd Wakeman, AJ Webster and Christy Durham, comprise the leadership team at Sycamore and bring their distinctive approach to learning and their extensive experience to their roles as its founding teachers and administrators.

“We are very excited to bring an alternative option for elementary education to Malibu families,” said Tedd Wakeman, Sycamore School. “The world we live in now demands a different approach to education. Students need a learning experience that is continuous, future-focused and engagement based. We're giving them just that on this beautiful campus.” Sycamore is located on 3504 Las Flores Canyon Road, in the area formerly occupied by New Roads Middle School. Two school buildings, filled with natural light, are surrounded by trees, grass and green flora, which also serve as learning spaces. On campus, there's an idea lab, maker space, adventure room (with a soaring ceiling and mobile furniture so kids can create their own learning environment), tinker zone, greenhouse, kitchen, reading nook/game room, sports court and the school office. Beginning mid-April, the campus is undergoing renovations to prepare for opening in September.

## Student Experience

The student experience at Sycamore features 10 tenets: reading and writing, social emotional learning, enriched learning, technology, field trips, play, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math), unique learning spaces, making, and environmental stewardship. At a family open house held at Sycamore on March 21, the dynamic leadership team led prospective students in fun games demonstrating these tenets in action. A fast-paced game called “Haystacks” in the adventure room encouraged mathematical thinking, developing numeracy, social dynamics, systems thinking and problem solving. A second game outdoors demonstrated how Sycamore utilizes its outside spaces for learning “in this game, to build literacy, pre-literacy and teamwork. A third project-based maker activity had the kids building a theme park without even realizing they were developing skills in creative thinking, design, physics, problem solving, materials science, mathematical thinking, individualized student instruction or failure redesigned as iteration.

## Sycamore School’s Leadership Team

Research shows that schools do better when educators are collaborative. To that end, Sycamore does not have a principal, *per se*. Instead, the three-member leadership team shares teaching and decision-making responsibilities and each governs a particular sphere of influence. AJ Webster oversees curriculum; Christy Durham, logistics and operations; Tedd Wakeman, community and outreach.

- **AJ Webster** has more than 15 years of classroom experience teaching science, Latin, language arts, math and social science at schools including Buckley in Sherman Oaks and the PlayMaker program at New Roads in Santa Monica. He holds a Master’s in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. He embraces the Maker Movement, in which students design, construct and “think with their hands.” Webster has conducted workshops for the national Game Learning Society and was the keynote speaker for the 2014 Milken Playful Learning Summit. His work with PlayMaker was featured on PBS *NewsHour*.
- **Christy Durham** has more than 15 years of elementary and middle school teaching experience. She holds a Master’s in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and was a sixth grade teacher at Buckley, where she orchestrated an outdoor educational program and created a diversity initiative round table for the faculty. In 2011 she was awarded the Buckley School’s Parents’ Association Award, which allowed her to study in Peru. She received the National Junior Honor Society Teacher of the Year Award in 2012. Durham left Buckley in 2012 to teach fourth and fifth grade at Los Encinos School in Encino, which embraces integrated, project-based learning. She has presented at the Archer School for Girls STEM conference and the Milken Community School Playful Learning Summit.
- **Tedd Wakeman** has been working with children in education, recreation, and research for 20 years. For 13 of those, he taught inner-city youth in LAUSD at the elementary level, concurrently traveling the country teaching and developing STEM curriculum for Nike/Eco Educators. He has taught extensively across the globe, working in the Republic of the Maldives teaching English to groups of adults from more than 25 different nations while diving the local coral reefs as a dive master. In Bali, he lived and worked with Indonesian rice farmers and taught local teenagers. He taught fourth and fifth grade for two years in Costa Rica, while exploring the local rainforest

ecosystems. Wakeman then joined the GameDesk team in Los Angeles to found the revolutionary PlayMaker School, which has gained notoriety for its unique approach to 21st Century learning and game-based curriculum.

A Sycamore School advisory board is being assembled and will include local and national leaders in education, business and development.

### **Funding and How to Apply**

Funding for the Sycamore School is provided by a generous private grant. Tuition is relatively low due to this funding. Financial assistance is available. Applications are due May 15 and admission is determined on the basis of applications and family interviews. Interviews for qualified applicants will be conducted starting April 13. **Please see note below.**

For more details about Sycamore's mission and educational philosophy, and to download an application packet, please visit [www.sycamore-school.org](http://www.sycamore-school.org).

Contact Heather Boylston at [heather@h-rpr.com](mailto:heather@h-rpr.com) to set up interviews or a campus tour.

**Note:** Information provided by Sycamore School's press release. The school's first class is full, but there is a wait-list so if you're interested, go ahead and contact the school! –Christina

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