

# Transforming K-12 Education Through Leadership Development



**CLIENT** Ravenscroft School

**LOCATION** Raleigh, NC

**SIZE** 270 employees, serving 1,200 students

**INDUSTRY** K-12 Education

## CLIENT PROFILE AND CHALLENGE

What potential can be realized when a school develops all students as leaders? What impact would holistically integrating leadership development into the K-12 experience have on students, teachers, staff, and the overall school community?

One school, with whom we at CCL have maintained a unique “research incubator” partnership for the past 14 years, is continuing to explore these questions through our joint efforts.

Ravenscroft is an independent college preparatory school founded in 1862 in Raleigh, NC. It offers comprehensive education to students from the greater Raleigh area, starting with pre-K and going through 12th grade. The school has a long tradition of shepherding the development of the “whole child,” focusing not just on academic excellence, but on the social development of children. A critical component of this focus is how students mature into citizens and leaders.

In 2010, Ravenscroft was starting to plan for its 150th anniversary, and school leaders were updating the strategic plan. In considering the school’s mission to prepare students to be successful in a dynamic, complex world, Ravenscroft’s leaders realized they had an opportunity to strengthen their approach to holistic student development by deliberately focusing on citizenship and leadership development.

That ultimately led to Ravenscroft connecting with our Societal Impact group, an innovative team working to extend

our mission and impact by providing world-class, research-based leadership development to groups that have not traditionally received it, such as K-12 students, principals, and public school administrators.

We believe leadership development occurs within multiple contexts and systems. It’s carried out through the interpersonal relationships we develop. And it can empower youth by giving them — and the adults who support them — tools to increase self-awareness, improve connections with others, and ultimately change their communities.

The collaboration between Ravenscroft and us has resulted in a major investment in a systemic education initiative — perhaps the first of its kind — that is transforming the entire Ravenscroft community: from school leadership to students, faculty, staff, and even parents. This groundbreaking approach to teaching, learning, and leadership at Ravenscroft is called Lead From Here (LFH).

The lessons we’ve learned in developing and implementing the LFH education initiative hold promise for other schools that wish to transform their curriculum, teaching, and culture to empower students to thrive. Ravenscroft’s experience highlights the importance of involving the entire school community in a systemic change initiative. It also demonstrates the powerful impact of leadership development on student experiences.

## SOLUTION AND RESULTS

Five years into Lead From Here, Ravenscroft's transformation into a more intentional learning community of citizen leaders has progressed with some significant insights and changes. Each year, we conduct evaluations with multiple stakeholders to measure progress and learn how effective LFH implementation has been. That feedback helps drive ongoing improvements in the program.

Here are some of the key lessons we have learned together through this education partnership:

- **Leadership development can occur with students as young as 4.** Developmentally appropriate experiences can begin to introduce students to key values, mindsets, and skills that will make them more successful during and after their school years;
- **Leadership is a muscle.** It must be exercised to get stronger, and those exercises are different at different stages of development;
- **Leadership development enhances student academic development.** Leader attributes such as resilience and resourcefulness, as well as a growth mindset, contribute to academic, athletic, and artistic successes;
- **Academic learning relationships are transformed by the infusion of leadership.** LFH positively affects the ongoing development of meaningful, consistent learning relationships between faculty and students that directly support students' growth, their development, and the educational community's wellbeing. Strengthening these relationships supports Ravenscroft's entire academic environment and culture of learning;
- **Organizational change supports individual change.** LFH has been successful in part because it is not purely about the students. Rather, it seeks to change how administrators, faculty, staff, and even parents go about their work, and how they interact with students;
- **Developing leadership skills requires a diverse group of participants.** Everyone benefits and develops stronger leadership competencies when they're able to work with a diverse set of peers and teachers. The process of working with people from different personal, cultural, social, and professional backgrounds — as well as different ages — is an example of leadership in action that students will need to be successful;
- **Everyone learns at a different pace.** Students, teachers, administrators, staff, and parents absorb and model leadership competencies at different rates. Some of those differences are developmental — younger students learn differently from older students, for example. Some of those differences relate to the wide-ranging experiences, expectations, personalities, and professional roles in the diverse Ravenscroft community; and
- **Everyone can Lead From Here.** Every individual, regardless of their position or grade in the school, can lead because everyone has leadership potential. LFH helps all members of the Ravenscroft community see themselves as leaders, discover their potential, and make choices about how they can lead with others to create positive change.

The LFH transformation has begun, and the early results are highly promising. The charge to help all youth become ready to “thrive in a complex and interdependent world” is a systemic, school-wide challenge requiring everyone in the system to continue to learn and grow as leaders. Seeing all students as leaders, and creating the school environments that foster leader development for all, will transform the shape of education.

There is little doubt that lessons learned here could be applied to many other educational institutions, both public and private. As we are learning with Ravenscroft, infusing leadership development (models, mindsets, tools, and leader attributes) throughout an educational institution enables the school to deepen its capacity to be a cutting-edge learning institution and unleashes the potential of leaders at all levels. What if every school could make this leap?

## PARTICIPANTS SAY

“I love that there are so many opportunities for people to lead, both formal and informal. I like that while I may be leading a meeting with one set of objectives, those same people can be sitting in a room about a different subject and leadership has been explicitly given to someone else. And that all of us feel our voices are heard and shared. It's a special institution in that regard.”

— Ravenscroft faculty member

“[Lead From Here] has had a major impact on all 3 of my children, but watching my senior embrace it and use it is amazing. He is now willing to take ownership of mistakes, take risks so he doesn't stay in his comfort zone, learn from mistakes, and be FAR more collaborative. I believe LFH helped him differentiate himself from other kids during the college application process as well.”

— Ravenscroft parent

