

EDUCATION

Oak Hill Academy to Open Innovative Socrates High School in Fall

By Eileen Moon



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Joseph Lipp, Ph.D. director and lead educator for Oak Hill Academy's new Socrates High School, will supervise a curriculum designed to help students develop as thinkers, citizens and communicators in a complex world.



COURTESY OAK HILL ACADEMY

Oak Hill Academy headmaster Joseph A. Pacelli founded the kindergarten through eighth-grade school in 1981 as a junior high school. Now the school is growing again, adding Socrates High School which will open in the September.

MIDDLETOWN – When Joseph Lipp, Ph.D., was a sophomore attending public high school in Columbus, Ohio, he was selected to participate in an innovative educational program that changed his life.

Today, as director and lead educator for Oak Hill Academy's new Socrates High School, Lipp is working to bring the same level of life-changing education to students who enroll in Socrates for its inaugural academic year this September.

The Socrates program offers students a personalized approach to learning with a high degree of flexibility

and an equally high degree of academic opportunities. It has many similarities to Mosaic, the experiential learning program Lipp attended as a high school junior and senior in Ohio.

"It was an integrated humanities curriculum," said Lipp. "Plus, truly independent, project-based learning that aimed to create well-rounded, critical thinkers."

Following his graduation from college, Lipp taught Latin, critical reading and humanities at Columbus School for Girls in Columbus.

It was then that he real-

ized two things about teaching, Lipp said: "One, that I was really good at it, and two, that I really loved it."

He enrolled in the doctorate program at Ohio State University, attending tuition-free in exchange for teaching. It was there that he began to think deeply about some big questions. "Why am I here? What's my mission in life? What is worth doing?" Lipp recalled.

By the time he earned his doctorate in ancient religions of the Mediterranean world, the answer was clear.

"I nurture thinkers. That's why I'm here," Lipp said. "That mission really

determines everything I do."

Lipp, his wife Shanna, and their three sons moved to the Jersey Shore after Shanna accepted a year-round position here. Her family has lived in Ocean Grove for several generations.

"We had been looking for an opportunity to move here since I earned my Ph.D.," Lipp said.

When the chance arose to lead Socrates in its inaugural year, Lipp thought it was almost too good to be true.

"I was sure they'd already hired someone," he said. Fortunately, the position was still open.

"The more I looked into it, the more I reflected on my own high school experience, Lipp said. Implicitly and explicitly, (Mosaic) really empowered me to do the things I did. I learned how to learn."

The Socrates High School curriculum encompasses five learning blocks including the Socrates block, which incorporates social studies, philosophy, literature, language arts and history; the academic block, which include science, mathematics and foreign language; the elective block, which is open to student interests ranging

from cybersecurity to world religions; the exploration block, which allows students to investigate topics of their own choosing and expand their ability to think critically and analyze; and the flex block, which opens the door for students to participate in community service, pursue a sport or take part in other extracurricular activities.

In the Socrates block, students build their contextual understanding of western civilization through the classics, reading from Plato, Cicero, Polybius up to the founding fathers of the United States and the authors who influenced them. The Socrates curriculum utilizes the Gates Foundation's Big History Project and the Great Books Program.

Tuition for the four-year high school is \$25,600 a year which includes online course fees, technology, books, trips, activities and more.

While the school has no sports teams, all students at Socrates will take weight training classes and enjoy access to the school's indoor swimming pool. "Exercise will be built into the day," Lipp said. "How can I say exercise is important and not build it into the curriculum?"

Students also have the opportunity to explore careers through apprenticeships and internships in the wider community.

When students enter their junior year, Lipp said, they will be prepared to develop their own mission and to contemplate their own role and purpose in the world.

"The purpose of Socrates High School is to nurture young adults to be thriving human beings, engaged U.S. citizens and mission-driven contributors to society," Lipp said.

Students need to feel heard, he stressed. They need to understand that their presence in the world has meaning and importance and to develop the confidence they need to move in the direction they choose.

"You are a citizen, we are in this together," he said about his future students. "There's a lot at stake here. You are creating the future for my children. You're becoming you. That's why we're here. Let's make it worth it. I'm going to make your tuition worth it."

To learn more about Socrates Academy, visit the school website at oakhillacademy.com.