

## **Character Assessment in Admissions**

### **Structured interviews**

In the fall of 2017, Lakeside hosted a seminar led by Jinghua Liu, Chief Testing Officer of the Enrollment Management Association, and Nathan Kuncel, PhD, professor at the University of Minnesota. The purpose of the seminar was to make a case for using structured interview principles when interviewing applicants to independent schools. 30 admissions staff from Seattle area schools participated, including Lakeside's Director and Associate Directors of Admissions.

We learned that by integrating some structured interview principles, we could 1) reduce bias in the interview process and 2) assess specific character traits. This information inspired the admissions team to devise new formats for both the middle and upper school interview processes.

At the middle school, we reduced bias by arranging for two adults to assess interview performance for each middle school candidate. We found that in most cases our interviewers agreed, but in cases where there was disagreement, our admissions committees were compelled to look deeper into applicant files in order to validate one or the other interview opinion. Overall, a positive result.

At the upper school we aimed to integrate 15 minutes of structured interview questions focused on any of four character areas: resilience, open-mindedness, intellectual engagement, and responsibility. Ten questions were devised for each area, and interviewers were asked to pose any of those ten questions during interviews. What we found was that our interviewees were most effective at addressing the questions related to resilience and open-mindedness. Having experienced this and after further consultation with Nathan Kuncel, our 2018-19 focus will be on questions of resilience and open-mindedness only. We know that this line of questioning is effective and we feel that these character skills are important ones for success at Lakeside. Dr. Kuncel confirms that focusing on two, rather than four areas will be more effective as well.

### **Character Skills Snapshot**

The Character Skills Snapshot is a new online assessment tool that provides schools with a more holistic view of each applicant. It measures essential character skills for admission: initiative, intellectual engagement, open-mindedness, resilience, self-control, social awareness, and teamwork. Meant to complement more traditional cognitive assessments such as the SSAT, The Snapshot gives admission teams richer information and illuminates areas where their schools can help children grow, thrive, and shine. Notably, the Snapshot is not designed for applicants to 5<sup>th</sup> grade as it is not considered developmentally appropriate for this aged student.

Lakeside participated in both the beta testing of this tool and the subsequent validity study. In the beta round, 100 current Lakeside students voluntarily took the assessment. During the validity study, extensive information was collected re. these student's experience and performance, ranging from GPA, to extracurricular participation, leadership roles at school, and classroom behaviors. These students' teachers and advisors were the primary sources of this information. Seven other schools participated in this validity study which again was led by Jinghua Liu and Nathan Kuncel.

Many correlations between the character skills and school performance and experience were identified, but the strongest and most reliable were:

1. **Intellectual engagement** correlates strongly to GPA and leadership
2. **Initiative** correlates strongly to GPA and leadership
3. **Teamwork** correlates well with citizenship, ability to make friends, and overall happiness

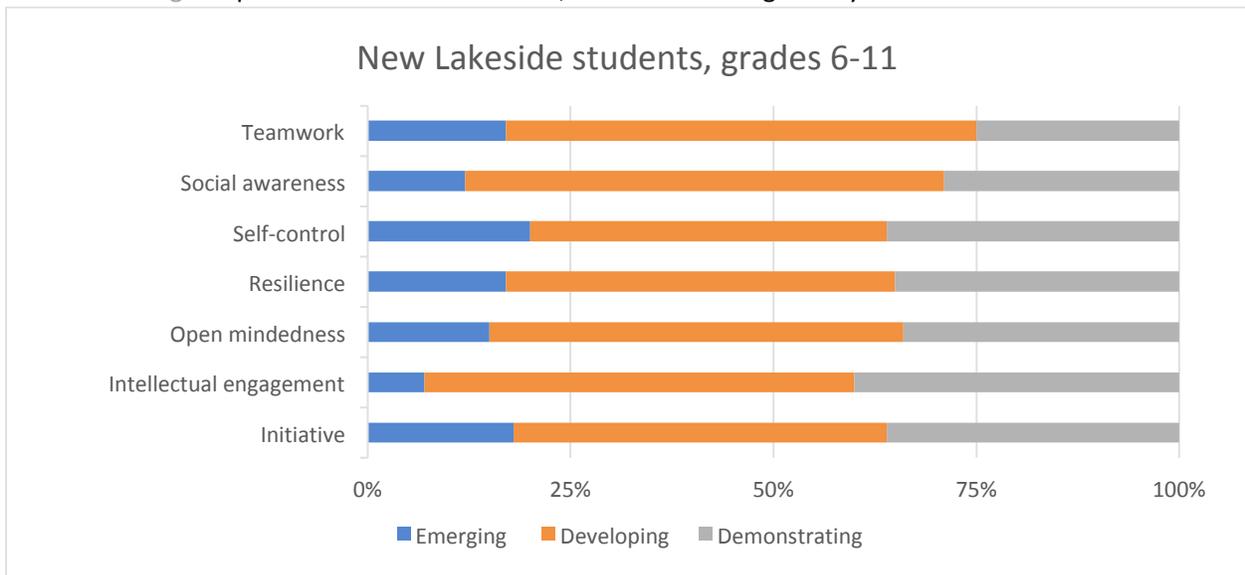
While our admissions committees had the benefit of this information, and each applicant’s Snapshot report in admissions files, it is not possible to state whether any student was admitted or not due to their Snapshot results. Our committees were encouraged to consider Snapshot results as yet another valuable piece of information when considering mission appropriateness, and consequently, when building our classes of incoming students. What has been valuable to the admissions office is how our new students, as a group, fared on this new assessment. The chart below details the results for our new students enrolled into the 6<sup>th</sup> thru 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

16,000 students took the Snapshot during admissions season 2017-18

**Emerging** = bottom 25% of students assessed, deemed showing “emerging” traits in this area

**Developing** = middle 50% of students assessed, deemed showing “some” traits in this area

**Demonstrating** = top 25% of students assessed, deemed showing “many” of the traits in this area



Notable group patterns:

New Lakeside students tested stronger than the national norms, with relatively low numbers in the lowest category, Emerging, and higher numbers in the highest category, Demonstrating, across all areas.

**Intellectual Engagement** is clearly the group’s strongest skill, with 40% testing in the top ¼ nationally, and only 7% testing in the Emerging category. This skill is strongly correlated to GPA and leadership.

**Initiative** is another good result for the group, with 36% of students testing in the highest category. This is another area that correlates strongly to GPA and leadership.

**Teamwork** was the area where the group had the lowest number in the highest category. Teamwork correlates to happiness, the ability to make friends, and overall school citizenship. This could be an area of growth for more of our new students, than **Initiative**, for example.

**Social awareness** was a good area, with 88% of new students testing in the top and middle categories.