

The Future of School Snaps Up Key Talent with Eyes for 100K Students

Sora Schools, one of the most innovative schools in the nation, announced plans to open 100,000 more seats in their program over the next three years.

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-- [Sora Schools](#), considered one of the most innovative schools in the nation, announced plans to open 100,000

more seats in their ground-breaking program over the coming three years. To date, the organization has been rather secretive, only working with approximately 200 students over its 4-year history.



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Building a school like this has been hard but we're excited to open our doors to the world. We've created a program that's changing kids' lives and now can share it with as many families as possible.”

Garrett Smiley, CEO of Sora Schools

“Building a school like this is really hard; we didn't want to rush anything,” says Garrett Smiley, the CEO who co-founded Sora Schools with Wesley Samples and Indra Sofian before notching \$21M in investment from top firms General Catalyst and Union Square Ventures, the funds behind culture-changing organizations like AirBnb, Snap, Etsy, Twitter, and many more. “But now, we're opening our doors to the world. We've created a program that's changing kids' lives so we consider it a moral imperative to give this gift to as many families as possible.”

The team assembling around this problem is once in a generation; Sora has recently announced two new executives to round out its leadership team: Risto Lahdesmaki and Sarah Baskin. Risto comes on as Chief Product Officer, previously having spent 20 years as the founder and CEO of Idean, a leading Silicon-Valley-based design agency that worked with iconic brands such as IBM, Amazon, GoPro, Airbus, Pfizer, 23andme, LG, HP, Volkswagen, Samsung, Sony, and many more. Idean set industry records when it was purchased by Capgemini, one of the the largest consulting agency in the world, and eventually grew to be a team of 800 spread over a dozen countries.

Sarah Baskin joins as Head of Marketing, previously serving as a marketing leader at renowned consumer product companies like Hasbro, LeapFrog, Shutterfly, and Far Out Toys. She's keen to take the lessons learned from decades of consumer marketing experience to identify Sora's next generation of changemakers. "Finally, school has the potential to be relevant and fun for today's generation," remarked Baskin. "At Sora, learning starts with play and exploration, personalizing learning to their interests, whether that's video games, climate change, or fashion." Both leaders have wasted no time building their teams with top talent from leading companies such as Amazon and Intuit.



Sora's model is so unique, it raised more than a few eyebrows when it debuted in 2019. Not only is it proudly an online program, but it has also flipped the script on how school should be structured. Every class is interdisciplinary, mastery-based, and designed with student choice in mind. That means Sora students are choosing from a buffet of class options where all of the subjects are mashed together, like The Science of Marvel, Biodiversity in 2100, or the Philosophy of Anime. Then, they're not cramming for tests to get an A or B, they're creating lengthy, challenging projects to demonstrate their mastery; and, if they don't get the scores they wanted the first time, they can just keep trying again. No grades are final at Sora until you graduate.

"We are bringing a transformative education to the whole world, not just the top 0.01% that can afford it today," says Smiley, "First off, our children simply deserve a more fulfilling environment that respects their individual needs and interests. But perhaps even more importantly, our society faces global challenges, such as the climate crisis, nuclear proliferation, and the rise of misinformation; responding to them will require creative and collaborative leadership from the next generation of students. An education system built for the Industrial Revolution is not going to get it done and has frankly outstayed its welcome."

[Sora has just opened applications for their August 2023 start date.](#)

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