



Observations

2016 - 2017

On Belonging. *And Socks.*

This summer, I attended the Montessori Administrators of America conference in Breckenridge, Colorado. Held at the end of July, we spent two intensive days in workshop sessions addressing leadership and culture. One of the recurring themes was that authentic leaders have the courage to be vulnerable. I always considered myself to be a heart-on-my-sleeve type of person—transparent and authentic. Wasn't that what it meant to be vulnerable? I thought I had a fairly good handle to get the most out of the sessions. In most areas of my life, I like to be able to anticipate and be prepared. Little did I know that these sessions would change my life as an administrator—I went in expecting to learn something, but I had no idea it would be to the depth that it turned out to be. We were told to bring a pair of extra socks for one of the full day sessions we had... That's it. It bugged me. So, with my extra socks, I entered the conference room to join the other 60 Heads of School where badges were passed out to us. Each badge had a specific designation, or title, that immediately categorized each person to a specific work level assignment—(Huh? Corporate stuff??)—everything from the very top, the “CEOs”, to the lowest-level line worker. There were customers, too. We were told we would be embarking on a simulated work week; without any advance preparation. We had to take information, make sense of it and do our jobs, all while cultivating a positive, productive work environment that supported the company's mission, and, lest we forget, focus on serving the customer while also providing clarity to workers (some of whom decided to foment a “strike” during the exercise—much to the dismay of their middle managers). I was one of six CEOs—a problem right there. In a snapshot, for each work day of the week, we were given

**The truth is:
Belonging
starts with self-
acceptance.
Your level of
belonging, in
fact, can never
be greater
than your
level of self-
acceptance,
because
believing
that you're
enough is what
gives you the
courage to
be authentic,
vulnerable and
imperfect.**

—Brene Brown

chunks of time that were closely monitored by the workshop facilitator and a pile of dollar bills for payroll to distribute to the workers. We had to make meaning as we went along—including our personal place in our assigned role strata, as well as an awareness of our company/culture and daily objectives. This simulation was frustrating and relentless—no breaks, no rewinds, just onward. The extra socks, by the way, were being used by the designated production line workers. Unlike production line workers, the rest of us were allowed to keep our shoes on. The workers, though, had to turn in their shoes and don the extra socks they had brought. The shoes were held by administration and were given back as “bonuses” for exemplary work. Get the drift? This social-psyche exercise was a sledgehammer-over-the-head about the importance of culture—how tone is set, why relationships are essential, why shared vision and purpose is critical, and why being valued as human beings is paramount to everyone. The activity was uncomfortable, frustrating, and a fascinating window into human behavior. And boy, were we vulnerable! We were instructed that, no matter what our assigned roles, we should be ourselves. Wow-ee!! Those of us who became fully engaged agreed that we learned much we can transfer into actions for support of our staff, students, families, and communities. So, I invite you to observe my engagement this year and join me in a dialogue about ideas for our growth and community. This is our year of belonging. We are the composite of our community. I ask for your ideas and loving help as we nurture this sacred school of ours. I am deeply honored to lead. You have my on-going commitment as we support and extend our belonging for all. No need for extra socks, by the way.

—Sarah Walker, Head of School

BELONGING: A Leap of Faith

A number of years ago,

I was alone in the Parent Room noodling over a description for the auction catalog when another parent walked in. Barbara was a seasoned mom of three older Montessori kids in various stages of the program, and I knew her casually through our work together on the Development Committee, but since my son was younger, our paths didn't cross much outside of our monthly meetings. After a few minutes of idle chit chat, Barbara asked whether I'd consider serving on the Board of Trustees.

Barbara's question that day took me by complete surprise. Sure I had been a Class Parent, co-chaired the Cocktail Party, and dove in to help with the Village on the Hill musical extravaganza. I was on the Development Committee and had been part of the Auction Leadership team for a number of years, yet didn't see myself as "Board material". I had a vague idea about what it meant to join the Board, but quite frankly I was sure that I wouldn't fit in and had no prior Board experience. Now after five years on the Board, I certainly have a clearer idea of what it means to be a Trustee at a small independent school. But perhaps more importantly, I understand that there never was an expectation that I would "fit in" to the group, but rather a sense that I was someone who would belong.

The Oxford dictionary defines belonging as being in the right place, or to feel happy or comfortable in a situation. Psychologists define "belongingness" as a feeling of being taken in and accepted as part of a group, thus, fostering a sense of belonging. While I freely admit that choosing a Montessori education for our son at age 3 was done without much thought, the truth is that all the anxiety caused by our initial leap of faith was gradually replaced by a calm sense that we'd made the right choice—that he (and we) BELONGED. Which is not to say that we haven't had doubts or questions along the way over the years. Part of the joy of being a parent in this community is the deep connections we make with other parents as we all muddle through parenthood together. Parent to parent relationships widen and grow to encompass the larger school community with each passing year as our children grow and we follow their progression.

At the Board level, we value these same personal connections and rely on them to sustain us at times when we face new



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challenges or tackle a long term project. Though we are a diverse group of people with unique experiences and talents, we share a commitment to supporting and sustaining The Montessori School and holding it in trust for future generations of students and parents. We belong to a continuum of Trustees who have come before us and who will come after us, upholding the school's mission and values.

As I write this, I am faced again with that anxious feeling, having taken a new leap of faith. Last spring (again, during a "chance" conversation in the midst of auction madness,) I was asked whether I would lead the Board as its next President. It immediately brought to mind that day Barbara sat down to chat. It was 2011, and the auction theme that year was The Time of Your Life. Back then, I had no idea how much my service on the Board would enrich my life and how much it would deepen my commitment to The Montessori School. I can't think of a better place to belong.

—Gwenna Williamson, Board President

My Internship Brought Me Back To My Roots

I went to the Montessori School from when I was a really little girl until I graduated from the Middle School. I am really lucky. I just loved my teachers so much. Everyone was so friendly and wanted the best for me.

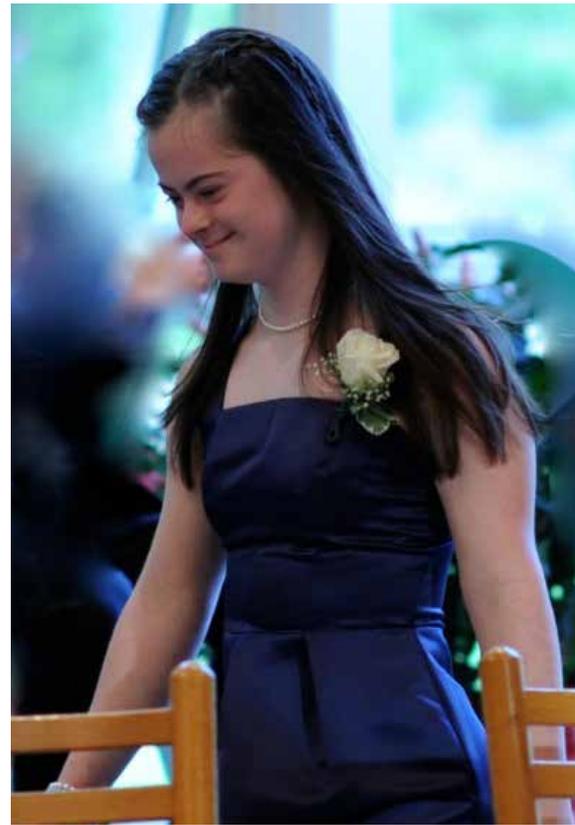
My Mama picked the right school for me and for my brothers Peter and Thomas because we all learned so much and pushed ourselves to do our best efforts. We were inspired, and we had adventures and we were so happy.

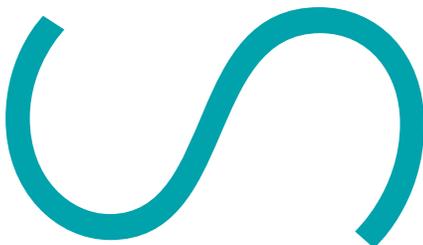
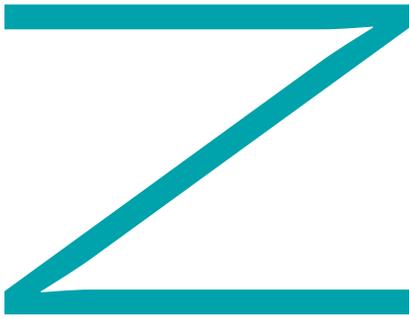
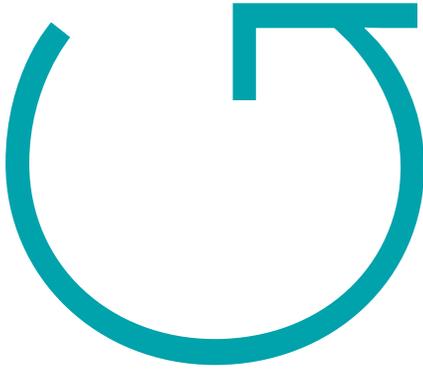
The next step in my life was Weston High School. I loved it. At Weston High School, all the seniors can do an internship for five or six weeks before graduation. My internship was to help students and teachers at The Montessori School where I belonged. My work was to observe all of the levels, help organize materials, and collaborate as a part of a team.

I loved pushing the Toddlers on the swings, sitting on the floor with them for circle time, and I really liked cleaning up to help Veronica. In Primary, I loved reading to the kids. I helped Mark keep the Art Studio orderly. Walking in a line to gym the kids mess around but Jason and I would help them go back and do it again.

I am really grateful that I could be back in my old school. It is a special place to be. The teachers and the kids reminded me about the Montessori materials, and they were all working on patience, respect, compassion and Civitas. I loved seeing all the kids in Elementary working so hard and being happy. I remember feeling like that—so busy and so happy. It makes me cry because it is a huge happy memory for me.

A big thank you to Sarah for inviting me to come and to Heather for being my Internship mentor. Thank you to everybody for welcoming me back in my old school again where it all began for me. Thank you for bringing me back to my roots. — Margaret Rosiello, MS 2012





When my son was five, he fractured his arm. His little arm was set in a little sling. When he went to school the next day, I was glad to see that he seemed interested in the sling, and not particularly concerned with the injury to his dominant arm. Then at the front entrance of school, he told me he did not want to go to school. I assured him it would be fine; he was not so certain. And so we followed the path of many a parent and Montessori child when the morning routine takes an unexpected turn. We were now walking down the front hall of The Montessori School, not sure of exactly what was going to happen when we arrived at the classroom door, and yet sure that arrive we must. And we did arrive at the door to what was then known as Ashley and Fabiana's classroom.

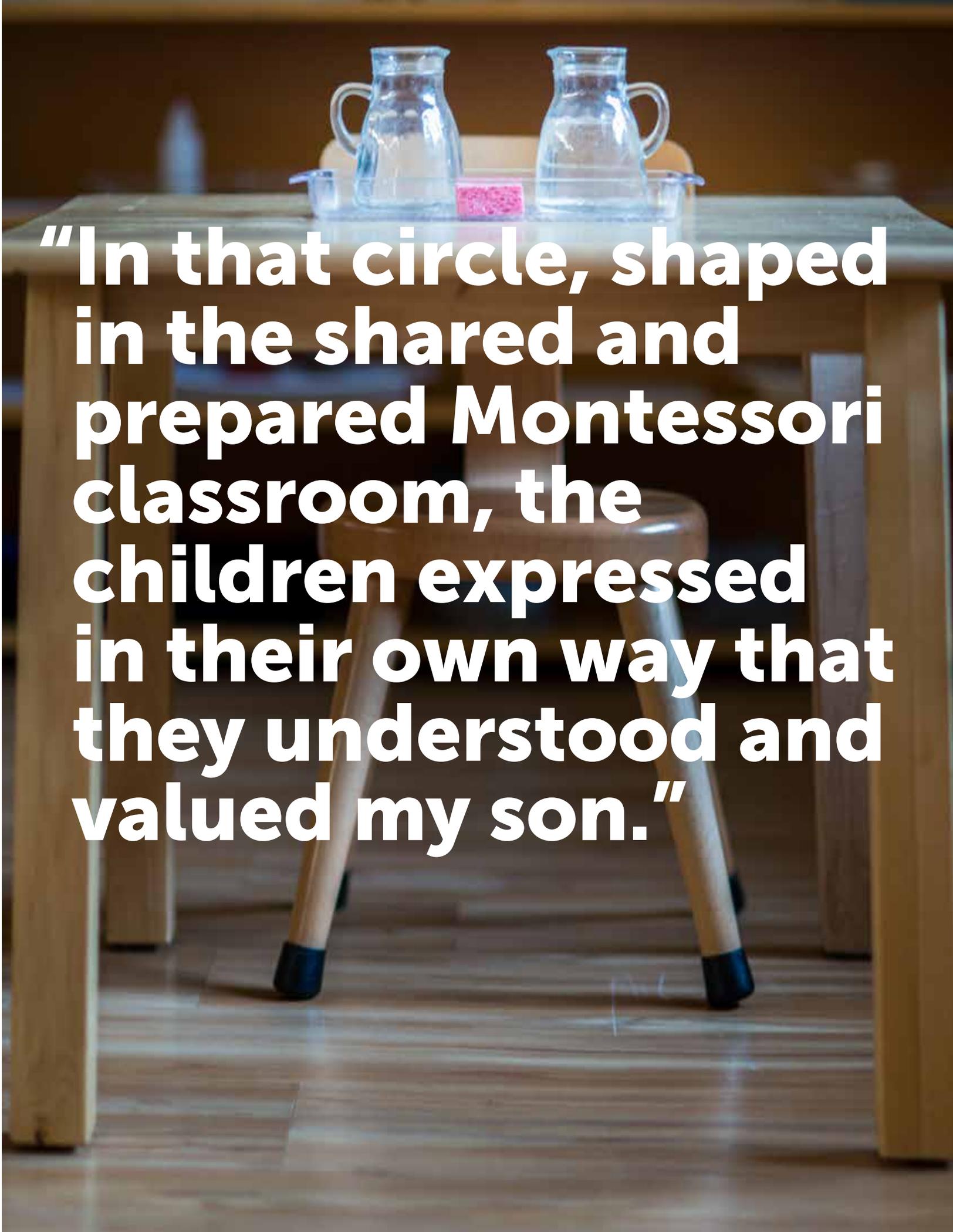
Greeting my son, Ashley gently asked him about his arm. We came to the fact of the matter which was that he was worried that he could not do his work with his injured arm in a sling. How would he carry his work, much less do his work? Ashley sympathized and encouraged him to come in, which he did, but hesitatingly. I did my part and said a quick good bye; holding my breath as I walked away and waiting for a call to pick my son up early. That call never came.

At pick-up that afternoon my son had his groove back. No doubt seeing my surprised relief, Ashley shared with me that, in the class circle, my son had offered up his worry, explaining his predicament. His classmates chimed in suggesting the many ways that each could help. One child offered to carry James' chosen work, another would roll out the mat, and another would help him with his snack. As Ashley shared with me later, it was not long into the morning work period that my son was managing his own work, sling and all.

I have many times since imagined my son sitting in that circle unsure and a little sad at first, his spirits and confidence growing with each enthusiastic promise to help. In that circle, shaped in the shared and prepared Montessori classroom, the children expressed in their own way that they understood and valued my son. And so it was that he turned to his work with his fractured arm and cast off the metaphorical sling that was actually holding him back.

—Sharon Grace



A wooden table with a glass pitcher and a glass on it, with a pink object in the center. The background is blurred, showing a wooden chair and a wooden floor.

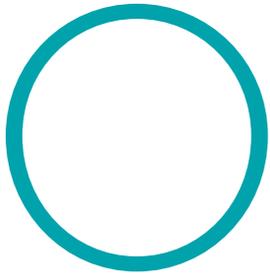
“In that circle, shaped in the shared and prepared Montessori classroom, the children expressed in their own way that they understood and valued my son.”

Community.



This is what
it's all about at
The Montessori School.





ur school is a small one and there are many benefits to our size—staff from every level, every department, know each other; students are tended individually, each an integral part of the classroom and the social dynamic. Parents and extended families share

not only playdates but family events and vacations (and far, far beyond their years in our halls). Another benefit is that we, as staff, do not work in isolation, but as part of a greater whole. At any given time, when a need arises we step in whenever, and however, needed. Ted runs Admissions—but has subbed for recess duty (not to mention covering on the Upper El camping trip!). Elizabeth directs Upper El—and last year brought the bagels every week to our staff meeting. Wanda balances the budget—but also, in a pinch, has directed traffic in the parking lot. Jason is our Director of Athletics—but has set up the tables and chairs for an event, on more than one occasion. Mark D. directs our Middle School but has also done duty as bus driver to take the Third Years to Camp Sloane. The list goes on.

One such opportunity arose for me very early on a Friday morning in May. Rain was coming down in buckets, but it was quiet in our halls. I was sitting at my desk and doing my thing, paperwork at that hour; gift receipts for donors, thank you notes, reports, strategizing over who would be great at what for the auction, and so on. Then the phone rang. Our Early Morning Directress, Kim, was having car trouble. What a day, cold and pelting rain, to be stranded on the side of the road! How could I help? She said that there was no way she would make it to school in time to open up the Early Morning Program and the students would start arriving soon. The Early Morning Program opens at 7:45, and offers childcare for our Montessori students whose parents need to drop them off, well... early! Not only is it an important tradition for our school, but the original charter establishing the school prioritized being available to support two-income families in particular.

I said, no worries—I could tend the Early Morning students until she arrives. I would be happy to. I had that nice warm feeling of doing a good deed, of being useful. What I

originally thought was a favor for Kim ended up being a great pleasure for me.

At just before the allotted time, I walked down the hall to the Early Morning Room and turned on the lights. Frankly, I was not sure what to do beyond that. I figured being a responsible adult presence was a baseline need, and I could certainly do that. Parents and students started to arrive, I greeted them, knowing many of them of course, but now having a different role. I explained what happened and that Kim was coming soon and I would be with the children until she arrived.

What happened next still brings a smile to my face. As the children came in, they immediately stepped up. One Elementary girl began taking attendance, going right to the chart, pencil in hand. The others, mostly Primary students, began taking down the chairs from the tables. One girl accidentally knocked over something, spilling a bunch of cards of some sort. I was busy with the parents, but watching out of the corner of my eye. There was barely a moment of pause before another student immediately came over to help her clean it up. Two Elementary boys began preparing to play a game together...another sat on a sofa with a book. The room and everyone in it just hummed.

One Primary aged boy stayed at the door with me, making sure I knew everyone's name—I might hire him in Development! A mom arrived with her very little daughter, but the girl would not come in the room. Where is Kim? She wanted to wait for Kim and yet, I could see the mom needed to leave...such a tender time, to make that separation. I remember it well myself. I introduced myself to the little girl, crouched down low and offered my hand; but I was not Kim! The boy who was helping me at the door said to me, don't worry, this is her first week in Early Morning, she's still adjusting, she'll come in soon. And so, after some encouragement from her classmates, she did.

Here was Community. This is what it's all about at The Montessori School, and the reason I am proud to ask for support for this special place. Kim, I'm sorry about the car, but thanks for the chance reminder of why we're all here.

—Lisa Potter, Director of Development

Our Graduates



Michael Dubisette, Madison Tomas, Abigail O'Meara, Joaquin Brasher

A Commencement Welcome

For our graduating 8th Years from Sarah Walker, Head of School

“The unknown energy that can help humanity is that which lies hidden in the child.”

—*Maria Montessori*

In *The Absorbent Mind*, Dr. Montessori reminds us: “We then become witnesses to the development of the human soul; the emergence of the New Man, who will no longer be the victim of events but, thanks to his clarity of vision, will become able to direct and to mould the future of mankind.” (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 8).

Welcome to our Commencement Ceremony for our graduating 8th year students. I am Sarah Walker, Head of School, and it is my great privilege to open our ceremony this evening. We gather in celebration of Joaquin Brasher, Michael Dubisette, Abigail O’Meara, and Madison Tomas. We honor you for all you have been, all you are, and all you will become...we are filled with hope for the bright futures for each of you, and, as in Dr. Montessori’s words, we are filled with that hope for the energy that lies within you that can help humanity.

Tonight, we celebrate you and extend gratitude to each of you for being the four school leaders that you are. You have led us this year on our Lois Street Campus—a small but mighty, capable, intelligent, talented, compassionate group—and you also embody these qualities individually in your own unique and wonderful ways. Tonight we will have occasion to celebrate each of you, and also hear from you as you culminate your Montessori journey as guides for all of us here tonight—family, friends, teachers, staff, board members, and alumni—a community of people who love and support you in a place that will forever hold dear the mark you leave with us. I extend on-going gratitude to Middle School Director Mark Dansereau as he completes his first year with us, and for the leadership and care he has brought forth. Thanks also to our Middle School staff, all of whom have demonstrated daily their dedication to and support of each of you, culminating in the composite of what has been the rich year that has come to pass.

Our Year of Being and Becoming opened with this quote attributed to Martin Luther:

“This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road.”

Your road ahead is full of great light and opportunity. The first steps forward begin this evening as we celebrate you. Joaquin, Michael, Abigail, and Madison...we extend our love and our gratitude to you,... now, and always.



Through my eight years at this school I have learned countless things from teachers, parents, and friends. Almost everything that I have learned is embedded somewhere in my brain, but there is one phrase that has stuck with me. It is also one of my favorite things to remember when I am having trouble with something. This phrase is "heels down, head up". Following these directions in horseback riding is very important, because if your heels go up and head is down, you will most likely fall off, which is dangerous and not very fun. This quote not only applies to horseback riding but to life as well. Putting your heels down keeps you grounded, and putting your head up helps you look for what is to come. Both of these things are important to me in everyday life as well as when on the back of a horse.

I used to never be able to follow these directions while I was riding a horse, but in the last two years, my riding instructor started screaming it much less, which means I must have been applying it! I also feel that I have been better about keeping myself on the right track with my schoolwork. Maybe, after years and years of hearing the phrase "heels down, head up" I am finally putting it into practice... Sometimes your friends can make you annoyed (I know I annoy my friends too sometimes), but if you put your heels down, you can make it through the rough patch, to the brighter time in the future. On the other hand, if your head is up you will be able to prepare for the rough patch. All of my friends have stuck with me through many different rough patches, and I am immensely grateful to them. Abbey, thank you for putting your heels down, and helping me get through eight days with the boys in Nicaragua, I could have never done it without you!

A big thank you goes out to my family too. For putting your heels down through all of the times that I would not stop complaining about one project after another. And for putting your heads up and helping me with assignments that simply didn't make that much sense. Without my family and friends putting their heels down and heads up, I wouldn't be in the same place I am in today.



HEELS DOWN, HEAD UP

I would like to thank all of the teachers that I have had at this school. From the first day all the way up until right now you have all supported my personal and academic growth. Thank you to all of my friends past and present. You have each taught me a unique lesson that has helped me grow as a person. And last, but definitely not least, thank you to my parents and sister who have supported me throughout all my years at The Montessori School. There is no way I could have done it without you.

I still can't believe that these are some of my last words as a student here. This school has been a huge part of my life for such a long time. I have learned so many lessons here and they will never be forgotten. My final piece of advice as I leave is: "Heels Down, Head Up"

—Madison Tomas

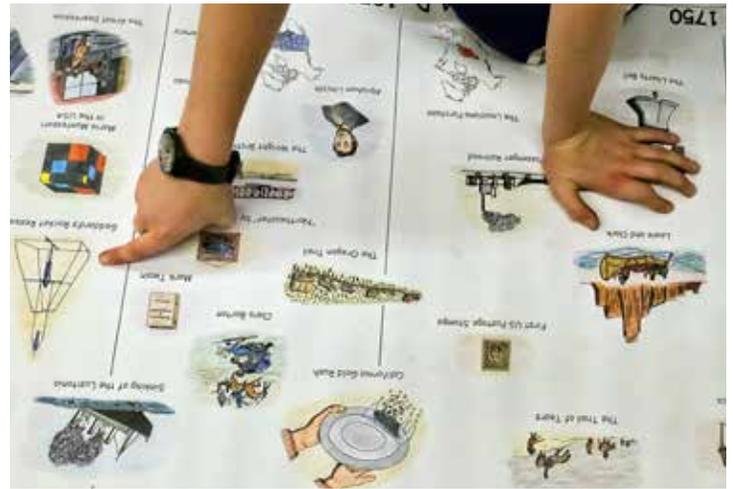
Looking Back

I have heard Civitas again and again over the past 11 years, but what does it actually mean? We tried looking Civitas up online and in the dictionary but the word is not to be found! So, here's my idea of Civitas. It is doing something that someone does not ask you to do, but doing it anyway to make them feel good. Every day since the beginning of school, Maddie has helped me carry my pencil case, my water bottle, and a stack of books to my locker. Looking back, in my 7th Year Amelia was a 6th Year at the Middle School. We instantly became friends on the first day of school. On our beginning of the year trip to Delaware, I got sick the first night. I was lying in my sleeping bag trying to fall asleep. Amelia, who was one of my tent mates, asked if I was okay. It was kind of her to ask and care without anyone saying anything. Looking further back, I think about the time when I was a 6th Year and my grandmother had died over the weekend. I had missed a few days of school and came back a wreck. I was crying and so sad. My friends Sarina, Maggie, Mary Alice, Natalia, Marie, Jade and Amanda all surrounded me in a hug, showing me others cared. They did not even ask if I wanted a hug; they just gave me one. It was nice to know that my friends cared as well as my family.... I have grown up in this school and had my group of friends throughout all my years. I have trusted them

with many things but not as much as I would have liked to. This winter all the girls at the Middle School went over to Clara's house for a sleepover for her birthday. We sat around the dinner table eating Chinese food and telling secrets for over two hours! I was the only one that did not say much. I wish that I would have told my friends about so much more than just listening, but I was not experienced. They had so much to say and all I did was listen. Yes I did tell some things but not as much as I would have wished. I want all of you to know that you can trust your amazing friends and that they will keep your secrets. That time at Clara's house I learned so much and will never forget how important friendships are and to trust them. In geometry class this year I was one of two students. Tim was the other student in the class. I trusted him with the equations to math solutions and so much more. He was a great friend who trusted me and I trusted him. We told stories together and talked about school and things going on at home. I think that everyone needs a friend like Tim, who can listen to your stories and you can listen to his.

This is the last part of my graduation speech and I am looking at all these smiling faces and thinking that I will always "make new friends but keep the old". Thank you so much everyone for making my experience so meaningful and never-ending.

— *Abbey O'Meara*



Dear Graduates, Practice random acts of kindness.

This sounds like a trite call for you to be selfless, but I'd like to explore why this is a science-based recommendation to help you be a happier person.

I've been interested in the idea of happiness for years, most particularly whether or not we have a choice being happy or if we are at the whims of our circumstances. It turns out there are branches of psychology devoted to the study of happiness and people's sense of well-being, and one school of thought offers that our happiness is 50% attributable to our wiring, 10% attributable to our life circumstances and 40% attributable to how we think about our lives and what we choose to do both in the moment and as a matter of practice.

40% of the happiness within our control makes a critical difference in whether we consider ourselves happy or sad in our lives.

But only 10% due to our life circumstances? Only 10% having to do with how much money or how many toys we have, who our friends are, whether we have too much homework or feel sick? Yes. A famous 1978 study established through interviews a large group of people's sense of happiness. Then the study tracked over 20 of these people who won the lottery and a little over twenty more who suffered an accident that left them paralyzed. The study found that within a year of the windfall or tragic event in the lives of the subjects that their sense of happiness returned to their original levels.



Another example...think of our recent trip to Nicaragua and the poorest village in the poor town of Nagarote. Our host and guide Miguel told us, as we were walking on the dirt roads, that in the Norwalk-Nagarote Sister City Project he had interviewed the residents in this village and asked them what they were unhappy with, what they would change in their village and their lives. Remember what the survey found? Nothing. The people in this poor village with uncertain access to their most basic needs were unfettered by such life circumstances. Their happiness was rooted in something deeper, not the 10% we can get caught up in.

I know I can get caught up complaining about the external, 10% circumstances of my life, feeling too busy to read a novel I bought, worried I have not seen my parents often enough, concerned about paying bills or annoyed I have to wait in a line at the grocery store after a long day. All external circumstances not truly critical to my happiness.

**Somehow
40% of my
happiness
is in my
hands—how
I think about
my life;
what I did in
response to
my external
situations.
What could
I do to be
happier?**

Well, another study, this one from 2004, asserted people who performed acts of kindness reported an enhanced life satisfaction. In other words, people who thought of the needs of others, interrupting their self-talk about their needs and wants and worries about their life circumstances, found they were happier than those who did not perform acts of kindness. Furthermore, this study established a second factor in people's Enhanced Life Satisfaction, and that was introducing novelty into one's life. Encountering or inviting novelty into your life is another way to interrupt negative self-talk and routinized life patterns. Our minds and spirits thrive on discovery, forming new connections in our brains... novelty. We wake up when we break unthinking patterns. So brush your teeth with your other hand. Try a new food. Read a book from a genre you usually avoid. Practice a random act of kindness. You'll be much happier giving yourself a break from your own, often stale, self-talk.

I said earlier that 50% of your happiness is attributed to your wiring according to one theory. Well, here's something for you to consider: I suggest that your wiring won't be set for another 10 years, that as your brain matures and as you build your adult personality that your basic disposition and temperament is not completely formed. It matters now how you think about your life and how you think about others. You are making choices now to set your wiring for life. I wish you the best health and happiness. Good luck.

—Mark Dansereau,
Middle School Director

Sam Slaughter

After Montessori graduation in 1999, I transitioned to Greens Farms Academy with my best friend and Montessori classmate, Matt Alkaitis. I spent two years there acclimating to life-after-Montessori before moving on to Wilton High School, which I attended along with another Montessori classmate, Bigi Sann. After high school I went to Harvard along with yet another Montessori classmate (we're everywhere!), David Andersson. I studied engineering, played lacrosse, and met a whole lot of interesting people.

I was stumbling down a path into finance while in college but at some point during my senior year I decided to decline a job offer at an investment bank to pursue a fellowship in Africa in 2009. I spent six months in Sierra Leone and another six months in Kenya where I pretty quickly became (a) very excited about the long-term potential for Africa and (b) resolved that for-profit business was the best way to drive improvements in developing markets.

I spent the next few years working various jobs and internships in the US, doing everything from house construction to private equity, traveling back to Kenya every six months or so in order to try to start a business there whenever I had saved enough money to afford it. This back-and-forth continued for about three years until our company, PowerGen, had gained enough traction so we could start paying ourselves a bit in 2013.

The initial thesis for PowerGen was terribly ill-defined. My co-founders (a roommate from college and a Kenyan friend) and I believed in the future of

East Africa and believed in the future of renewable energy globally, so we set out to build a company at the nexus of those two broad themes. We didn't know much of anything about the region, renewable energy, or how to run a business—so the learning curve was painfully steep and there were many twists and turns, and several big pivots.

More through stubbornness than skill, we eventually gained our footing and are now one of the leading renewable energy companies in the region. We employ 60 people full-time and have installed power systems throughout seven countries. But probably our most exciting work is in pioneering a new electric utility model for Africa to address the 500+ million people who lack energy access on the continent.

In this model, we build solar-powered “micro-grids” in communities which retail energy services to customers through distribution grids (which we build) and smart metering systems which allow people to pay and interface with their accounts through their mobile phones (which are ubiquitous). We finance the micro-grids to remove the up-front burden of energy access from our customers, and allow them to pay for it as a service (like we all do at home in Connecticut). This private micro-utility model is very interesting and potentially a very scalable approach for addressing the massive energy deficit in the region.

I credit and/or blame (depending on how things are going!) my Montessori experience for this path I have ended up on. My Montessori experience gave me the courage and love of exploration that

caused me to take it, and also armed me with the foundation to have a chance of succeeding on it. When I reflect on how I ended up where I am, the answers are almost all rooted in my Montessori experiences beginning at the age of two:

1 Community, togetherness, empathy

Intrinsic to the Montessori experience is a sense of community and togetherness. Class meetings, Gatherings, and the smallness of the community were some of the elements that created this environment—but ultimately it was about great teachers. Bobby, Susan Clark, Gerry Leonard, and Kathy Allen were second only to my parents as positive, shaping influences on my childhood, and they created classrooms where collaboration and cohesion were paramount. (I suspect Bobby has a last name, but in true Montessori fashion I was never aware of it in my Primary school days and now she lives in my memory as a single-name legend like Pele or probably more appropriately, Raffi).

Growing up in such an environment instilled in me a sense of community that I have applied—usually subconsciously—to many areas of my life. I feel that we, as a country, as a world, as family, or whatever group you choose, are in this together, and the highest purpose is to serve the good of that team. For my years in school this conviction typically manifested through my commitment to whatever sports teams I was on, and now it's expressed through my desire to try to fix this big problem of electricity in Africa.

2 Seeing the world as an array of infinite possible choices is scary, but rewarding

Walking into a Montessori classroom as a student can be terrifyingly open-ended. Where do I sit? Who do I work with? What do I do? These are fears of ambiguity that we all have - children and adults alike. Growing up in this unconstrained environment forced me and my classmates to develop confidence, conviction, and accountability for choices from a young age. For me I think it also nurtured a piece of me thrilled by exploration.

The comfort—and even excitement—with facing underdefined sets of opportunities that I built at Montessori was directly related to my 22-year-old self choosing the unknown in Africa over a clear path at a bank in New York.

3 The value of the journey

In Montessori symbology, the Labyrinth is our beacon which breathes life and meaning into the stale—yet important—cliche that life is about the journey and not the destination. The value of the Labyrinth is rooted not in its architecture or its bricks, but in the fact that it is a physical manifestation of a philosophy that is deeply ingrained in the Montessori experience. The Montessori ethos is one that emphasizes how you get there as more important than where you arrive. No matter what your skill level or experience with a given undertaking, you were expected to approach it with integrity, effort, and openness.



In a world fixated on metrics and results, the value of a childhood education which instilled the value of the journey cannot be overstated. It has provided me with an anchor when the objectives seemed murky. As my dad, a former Montessori teacher himself, taught me: when complexity obscures the destination, just focus on doing the next right thing.

I don't think I could have asked for a better childhood education experience than the one I had at Montessori. A lot of that is about the philosophy of the institution, but ultimately it came down to the people. In particular the teachers mentioned above and my classmates and remarkable friends. Friends like Matt Alkaitis and Scott Arcenas pushed me in ways that only competitive childhood friends can. The fact that Scott could read 1,000 page books and Matt could do cube roots in his head at age 10 was pretty motivating. *Montessori gave us a*

unique environment in which to challenge each other and learn how to make tough choices in a setting saturated with love and support. The more I see of the world, the more I realize what a special thing this was and is.

My journey in East Africa will probably continue for a couple more years as we look to scale the micro-grid model we have developed. We are transitioning from being a “business” (fixated on profitability) to a “venture” (obsessed with growth.. and then someday maybe profitability), which means we are raising capital to grow fast and aggressively, with a higher risk of catastrophic failure. It's a new chapter and a new opportunity, to learn for which I am excited.

At some point I will be returning home to pursue a new path, yet to be determined. Whatever it is, I know it will be a fascinating derivative of the formative experiences I had on Whipple Road two decades ago.

AlumNOTES



Stefan Bolea (UE 2000) lived and worked in Shanghai for 4 years and will complete his MBA from IESE in Barcelona, Spain in May. He was doing a marketing course in Nairobi in January when he met up with **Sam Slaughter (UE 1999)**. Sam is co-founder of an environmental energy company in Kenya, PowerGen Renewal Energy.

Nora Dominick (UE 2007) is an editorial intern at BroadwayWorld.com, a writer for Fangirlish.com and co-executive stage editor for Emerson College's leading entertainment website, Entertainment Monthly. Nora directed four of Emerson's studio TV productions and associate directed the EVVY



Awards, the largest student-run, multi-camera award show in the nation. In the summer of 2016, Nora attended San Diego Comic Con, as a member of the press. She will graduate from Emerson in 2017 with a degree in VMA: Writing for Film/TV and Journalism.



Rachel (Fischer-Tripodi) Montgomery and her husband Greg are expecting a baby! Rachel, Greg and former French teacher/Development Director/Admissions Director/Assistant Head of School **Dana Brunell Eisenberg** enjoyed a lovely evening together this summer.

Samyukt Kumar's (MS 2012) article "Avoiding Mistakes in Syria" was published in News-Decoder in December. Samyukt was also valedictorian of his 2016 graduating class at Greens Farms Academy.

We welcomed many alums to our 2016 Middle School Commencement in June, including: **Matias Martinez**



(MS 2015), Thomas Mazzarulli (MS 2015), Niall Sheridan (MS 2015), Michelle Menard (MS 2015), Elizabeth Byer (MS 2015), Saira Munshani (MS 2015) Front row: **Ingrid Crumpton (UE 2010), Max Von Bartheld (MS 2015), Sara Kranzlin (MS 2015), Adlai Brandt-Ogman (MS 2013)**.

Also in May, another Montessori reunion happened—at Carnegie Hall! Montessori alums and current students, all Suzuki music students, played their hearts out on stage! Performers included alums **Shriya Chelluboina (LE 2013), Adeeva Ghuman (Primary 2014), Saira Munshani (MS 2015), Cyrus Pearson (Primary 2011)** and **Chloe Smith (LE 2013)**, as well as current Montessori students Anthony Low, Alexander Saleeb, Annaliese Saleeb and Henry Smith. Montessori Curriculum Coordinator (and alum mom), Heather Maccabe, was thrilled to be in the audience.

Linda Paseltiner writes: We did have a lovely visit with [former

Upper Elementary teacher and Montessori Alum Dad] Gerry [Leonard]—**Daniel Paseltiner (UE 2006)** even came home from Bates for the week-end! Shannon Helfrich snapped this photo of **Matthew Paseltiner (UE 2010)** at Margot Waltuch's memorial in 2003, and it has been on our refrigerator ever since.



A senior at Millbrook School, a boarding school in Millbrook, NY, **Gaby Pisano (MS 2013)** is a dorm leader, member of the Environmental Council, and a strong, steady presence on the girls' hockey team. Says her coach, "she understands the game, makes great plays, and is a key player. Gaby is also a team player—she makes great passes, communicates well, and looks out for the other girls. Her positive attitude and work ethic are constant...and she has established herself as not only a key contributor, but also as a leader of the program." Gaby also plays Lacrosse and is the Captain of varsity soccer at Millbrook.

Shauna Pickering shared: We are settled in Marin County, CA. Our year was packed with transitions. We welcomed a puppy named Zander into our family. The children spend a lot of time visiting their grandparents on an almond farm an hour and half away. Having family so close has been priceless. **Cooper (UE 2015), McCain (LE 2015) and Calder's (LE 2015)** love for soccer has continued. **Reese (Primary 2015)** has become an intense gymnast- she can't seem to get enough of it. Calder still has his love of math and misses Trista very much. McCain had an incredible year where he studied about rubies and volcanoes, Albert Einstein, atoms, electromagnetic fields. Cooper is entering middle school this year. He has made wonderful friends. Everyone misses their friends tremendously and TMS, the only school they have ever known. We are so grateful for the incredible 21 years our children had there.

Harrison Potter (MS 2010) transferred in January from George Washington University to Hamilton College, and loves the rural lifestyle and his new community. He has begun rowing again, competing on Hamilton's Varsity team; his boat took home the bronze medal at the National Invitational Rowing Championships in May, and the team is looking forward to a great fall season. Harrison spent the summer interning for a commercial real estate brokerage in Westport.

Karl Rempe (UE 2004) recently won the National Championship

for Club Rugby with his team, The Fairfield Yankees.



Thomas Rosiello (MS 2011) at his summer job at Brooks Brothers sold his first suit to fellow Montessori alum **Henry Fay (MS 2010)**! Both gents attended Hopkins after Montessori, and currently Henry is at SMU and Thomas is a freshman at Bowdoin College.

Ingrid Crumpton (UE 2010), Kelly McKenna (MS 2013) and Joaquin Brasher (MS 2016) served as counsellors this June at our Labyrinth Athletics Multi Sport Camp, run by Athletic Director Jason Brasher.



Adelaide Richards (UE 1997) and Andrew Spollett were married on Nantucket in September 2015. Many Montessori friends were in attendance, including sisters **Isabel (UE 2001)**, Cressida

and Caroline Richards, former Toddler Directress and alum mom Mary Reinhardt, **Dagan Reinhardt (UE 1997)**, and **Sarah Slaughter (UE 1997)**. The bride is a librarian at the Nantucket Atheneum and a writer; the couple make their home on Nantucket.

Matthew Weber (UE 2004) spent two years working for a start-up cell phone company for Veterans called Defense Mobile. He is now working for one of the venture capital investors in that company and living in Manhattan. **Julia Weber (UE 2006)** graduated from Tulane and spent the summer backpacking around Europe. In August, she moved to Washington D.C. and working for a real estate development company called Streetsense.

Sam Hough (UE 1999) was invited to play in a kickball league in Stamford where he met his teammate, Kate Pigué—they were married in October 2015. **Grace Hough (UE 2001)** was in the wedding party. Sam and Kate recently bought a house in Norwalk and welcomed a Vizsla puppy, Walter, in May.



Lucia Wiggers (MS 2014) is having a stellar time at St. Luke's in New Canaan. This past March, she joined some classmates on a trip to Sicily. Over the summer Lucia worked her dream job as an instructor at the Norwalk Sailing School at Calf Pasture Beach. This fall, Lucia continues to participate in her school's debate team, cross country team, and the Blues Band. Lucia became a member of her school's Social Justice Leadership Committee along with **Kelly McKenna (MS 2013)** and will attend a national conference in December.



The following members of the Montessori Class of 2012 have graduated from high school and, as of press time, we have learned they will begin their college careers as follows: **Samyukt Kumar**, Georgetown... **Alyssa Malner**, St. Andrew's University, Scotland... **Chris Martensson**, Lehigh... **Alex McCall**, Bucknell **Chelsea Miller**, George Washington University.... Congratulations, all!

Staff Notes



Departures

We offer heartfelt gratitude for those who have made a positive and lasting impact on our school and the children they served.

Annie Armugum helped in many capacities over **3 years** on the Whipple Road campus including as a Primary Classroom Assistant. **Nicole Barba** was the Toddler Assistant for **4 years** before completion of her Assistants to Infancy training and became the Directress of her own Toddler class last year.

Betsy Benham Fruda

was a Primary Directress for **14 years**, lending her beautiful spirit and love of music to her classroom and its children. **Lily Burns** joined the staff last year as Fabiana's Primary Assistant and gave birth to her first child in May! **Patricia Clahar** was been a multi-disciplinary Middle School teacher for the last **3 years**. **Susan Clark** returned as one of our Upper Elementary Directresses for the last **4 years** and was an Assistant Trainer for the AMI Elementary course. **Deb Conry** helped to pilot the Culinary Arts program at the Middle School and remains as a parent of both a Primary and Elementary Student, and a committed volunteer.

Liz Keefe joined the staff this year as a Spanish Teacher and Administrative Assistant to the MS Staff and will be pursuing further studies. We thank **Linda Krulwich** for **12 years** of service to the adolescents at the Middle School. Her work to help others appreciate mathematics, logic, and problem solving will be long remembered. **Leila Shields** has been the 8th Year Language Arts teacher for the last **6 years** and helped to create the literary magazine.

These individuals have all dedicated themselves in the service of our children and worked hard to shape our culture and the betterment of our school and its mission. We wish them success in their future endeavors and thank them for their contributions.



Learning

As a community of lifelong learners, we encourage our staff to seek opportunities to deepen their knowledge. This summer, **Mark Dansereau** attended the AMI Adolescent Orientation in Cleveland, Ohio; **Colleen Stobely** finished her second session of the AMI Primary training at the MTCNE in Hartford; **Stella Caicedo** attended the Introduction to the Montessori Approach at the MTCNE in Hartford; **Trista Gamble** attended the MTIPS Summer Institute for the Elementary Track; **Ruth Hurwitz** continues her course work at NYU School of Professional Studies in Executive Coaching and Organizational Development.

Celebrating



Thanks to **Mary Nastasi** for **20 years** of service to The Montessori School. She was honored at the 2015 Fall Cocktail Party Hoe Down! We are also grateful to **Ruth Hurwitz** and **Cindy Dineen** for their **10 years** at The Montessori School. They were honored at this year's Cocktail Party Garden Party!

Greetings

We are delighted to welcome the following new staff members: **Jen Rodriguez** joined Fabi's as her classroom assistant. **Hans Bulteryst** now directs the Culinary Arts program at the Middle School and manages the administrative duties at the Lois Street office. Finally, **Susana Weyer** joined the Middle School Language program to instruct Spanish.

Goodbye &



To all the staff at The Montessori School,

With a heavy heart we are writing this letter to say **good-bye, and thank you.**

We are so **thankful for people like you** on the earth, people like you who follow a bigger purpose in life. What is a better labor than educating human beings to be kind, respectful to their peers and their environment, **open minded to a better future** for more people, and with **bigger moral values?**

You are all committed to an educational pedagogy like no other. The Montessori education model with its **deep respect and encouragement** for the inner growth of children initiated in them the desire of **seeking what makes living beings similar**, instead of looking for what makes us different and separates us. Your work for this purpose is relentless and offers more and more children the opportunity to be in this beautiful school.

During our time at the Montessori School our daughter has developed an **authentic joy** that comes from herself and from the satisfaction of accomplishment that we believe few education methods offer children. She has flourished in this **wonderful, healthy and nurturing** environment. She has become a **resourceful, persistent and responsible** child.

For us it is a blessing that our daughter had an amazing beginning to her education. And we, as a family, have also learned so much during her time here. We were **all so very happy** at The Montessori School.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We will always be deeply grateful to all of you. Muchas gracias! **With gratitude and with love,**

—Luisa and German Ramirez



Thank You

Who We Are

Vital Statistics

The Montessori School

34 Whipple Road

Wilton, CT 06897

203-834-0440

24 Lois Street

Norwalk, CT 06851

203-840-1850

email:

info@themontessorischool.com

web:

www.themontessorischool.com

Accreditation

CAIS Connecticut Association
of Independent Schools

AMI Association Montessori
Internationale



THE MONTESSORI SCHOOL is a non-profit Montessori school committed to the healthy development of children from infancy through eighth grade. Accredited by both Association Montessori Internationale and The Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, our School offers nationally and internationally acclaimed Montessori education to 170 children and their families from many area towns. We have served families in the greater Fairfield County area since 1964.

Our School's culture is devoted to helping each child grow toward independence by building confidence, competence, self-esteem and respect for others. More than an approach to education, Montessori becomes a way of life. Our program, both in philosophy and pedagogy, is based on the scientific research of Dr. Maria Montessori and on AMI Montessori training.

Montessori classrooms are designed for a multi-age mix which allows for both individual and social development. The classrooms are beautiful by design and are set up in an open style, with work areas throughout the room and materials available on accessible shelving. Most lessons are given to small groups or individual children while others work independently. The School uses stories, Montessori materials, charts, timelines, objects of nature, treasures from the wealth of world cultures and sometimes conventional tools to teach the children. Guided by the teacher, Montessori students actively participate in planning their time and taking responsibility for their work.

Our relationship to the outdoors is an integral part of our educational approach, and is based on Dr. Montessori's vision for the extended classroom and the respect and responsibility inherent in meaningful encounters with the land. Gardening, composting and other elements of care of the outdoors are introduced at the earliest stages of the program. At the Elementary and Middle School levels, the children's experience with the outdoors grows through the added dimension of outdoor expeditions such as camping trips, rites of passage, and adventures further afield.

Our School's Specialist Program is a complement and support to the essential Montessori curriculum and approach. Led by experts in their fields, our Specialists, like the Montessori classroom teachers, are committed to the highest tenets of Montessori and to the importance of learning as a lifetime habit of curiosity, observation and thought. We offer art, chorus, physical education, and foreign language as well as intramural sports and After School Programs. Two Learning Specialists are on-site to support students with learning differences.

We believe in sharing what we have with those in need and encouraging children to learn to live responsibly in the world, so outreach and community service are part of our way of life.



The
Montessori
School

Mission Statement

To respect children as self-directed individuals and foster their growth toward independence and social responsibility.

To adhere to the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori and maintain the standard of The Association Montessori Internationale.

To create a joyful, diverse, and family-oriented community which provides an atmosphere that supports the growth of the child.

To inspire the child to live both passionately and compassionately in a global community.



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