



MONTESSORI SCHOOL
OF FORT MYERS
A PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

ANNUAL REPORT

2014 – 2015 SCHOOL YEAR

Our Mission: The faculty, students, and families of Montessori School of Fort Myers are committed to following the educational philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori in order to create a community that promotes the highest fulfillment of each child's intellectual, social, emotional, and aesthetic growth.

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To Our Community Members

This summer, I spent four weeks at a training program for Montessori administrators seeking to earn the American Montessori Society administrator credential at Seton Montessori Institute in Clarendon Hills, IL where my cohort was asked to present on what each of our schools had accomplished during the past school year. After proudly presenting, I realized that this information would be valuable for our entire learning community. So, I decided to turn that presentation into an annual report to share. This is the first of many annual reports to come in which we seek to highlight the hard work of our cheerful staff, generous parent volunteers, curious students, and other members of our learning community.

Taking a pause for reflection, we remember the meaning of our work. We remember that when our students first enter our doors in the infant or toddler room, they are just beginning to show hints of who they will emerge as over the coming years. By the time they leave our school for kindergarten or first grade, their personalities are in full bloom. We hear stories about their weekends, what their favorite movies are, what foods they do and don't like, and their favorite animals. We watch in awe as they leave us self-assured, building healthy social relationships with both adults and other children, and instilled with a strong love for learning. We marvel at that quiet confidence that Montessori children have. We acknowledge the privilege that we have of playing such an important role during such a formative time in our children's lives.

Much like our students, I thrive on having a daily routine. Each morning after the morning drop off rush, I settle into my office and ask myself: what can our school do to better serve our students? This report is a summary of some of the ways that we have gone about answering that question.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead -

James M. Farwell
Head of School
August 6, 2015

New Programs & Enrichment Activities



1. **Infant Environment.** We built an infant environment from scratch taking into account best practices for Montessori infant environments. Freedom of movement and the fostering of independence is evident by the use of low beds (instead of cribs) where mobile infants can get in and out of bed as they please, an infant-height dining table with chairs (rather than high chairs) where the children learn to come to the table when hungry, a floor diaper mat (rather than an adult-height changing table) where mobile infants can get in and out of the diapering area by themselves. Six south and east facing giant windows flood the room with sunlight and five north and west facing floor to ceiling windows allow our infants to observe and imitate their older friends in the Toddler East environment. At 57 ft² per child with six infants, our children have significantly more space to explore than the minimum state standard of 35ft² per child. ½” thick hardwood print foam floors offer a safe space to learn to walk under the guidance of a lead teacher who has a bachelor degree and an American Montessori Society infant/toddler teaching credential.



2. **Music Together.** We formed a partnership with LouAnne Dunfee at Family Music Time to offer the nationally-acclaimed *Music Together* program school-wide on Wednesdays. This music program brought music and movement into our classrooms, our students' homes, and the CDs can be heard playing in many cars during morning drop off. The partnership began in the fall of 2014 and we look forward to beginning our third semester in fall 2015 at no additional cost to our families.



3. **Family Art Friday.** We started Family Art Fridays to provide a fun and creative time for our families to meet, have fun together, and make new friends during this afterschool program. Indeed, this was a big year for building a stronger sense of community at our school. Many friendships have formed and blossomed between families during this regular event which comes at no additional cost to our families.



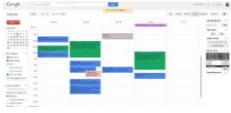
4. **Compliant Classrooms.** We finished a materials audit to make sure that all classrooms are fully equipped with the materials suggested by the American Montessori Society here: <https://amshq.org/School-Resources/Starting-a-School/Classroom-Materials>



5. **Parent Development.** We held our first parent development workshop to teach more about the Montessori method of education. The event was well attended and parent feedback was positive.

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Communication & Transparency



Website Updated with Useful information. We began publishing numerous important documents on our website which allows parents to conveniently find information on our enrichment programs, curriculum, snack calendars, and even a version of our school calendar which is now downloadable to Apple devices, Google devices, and Microsoft Outlook.



Facebook Friday. These weekly postings have provided a great way for our families to see what their children do throughout the week, to learn the names of the lessons, and they have proved to be a great way to share these photos with extended family and friends. This initiative has proved to be very popular with our families.



Month	Theme	Activities	Resources
September	Autumn	Apple & Pumpkin	Apple & Pumpkin
October	Halloween	Halloween	Halloween
November	Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving
December	Winter	Winter	Winter
January	Winter	Winter	Winter
February	Winter	Winter	Winter
March	Spring	Spring	Spring
April	Spring	Spring	Spring
May	Spring	Spring	Spring
June	Summer	Summer	Summer
July	Summer	Summer	Summer
August	Summer	Summer	Summer

Monthly Theme Guide. We implemented a monthly theme guide and published it on our website. Our staff rotate various items into the classroom each month - typically in the language area, practical life, science (primary only), and geography (primary only). We also spend more time during morning line time discussing the monthly theme and how it relates to our lives. This ensures that classrooms are filled with new interesting things to learn about each month and helps our families to follow along at home.

Facility Improvements



We organized a fundraising campaign for exterior renovations and raised over \$5,000 in cash and donated materials. During several volunteer work weekends, we had a strong showing of parents helping to make our school a better place. As of August 2015, we are about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way through the exterior renovations and so far have leveled and mulched our playgrounds, painted our metal playground equipment, installed a new floor where the primary outdoor classroom environment will be soon, and planted and irrigated nine fruit trees that we are now enjoying delicious fruit from. We also re-sealed and painted our parking lot and hired a weekly cleaning service (much to the pleasure of our staff).

Students & Staff



We Grew 40%. From August 2014 to June 2015 we grew to over 50 students and 14 staff members. We added several new teaching positions as our community has grown and we hired an office manager who makes it all happen. Having another administrator in the office has allowed our Head of School to focus on higher value adding activities that are taking our school from good to great.

Low Staff turnover. We maintained a staff turnover rate of only 18% while the early childhood education industry average is approximately 30%. Simply said, our staff members are valued and enjoy being a part of our school.



Professional Development

1. All staff members (that weren't hired during the year) completed an internally-required minimum of 24 hours of professional development when the State of Florida only requires 10.
2. Our entire staff attended the Andrew & Dora McGhee Montessori Foundation conference in Miami, FL in January 2015.
3. 11 staff members completed the 15 hour Redirecting Children's Behavior Course to make sure that everyone is on the same page for discipline.
4. Joyce Mendonca Dos Santos (Infant Lead Teacher) and Kennise Adams (Toddler West Lead Teacher) graduated from the infant and toddler Montessori teacher training program at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute (SMTTI) in Davie, FL and should receive their American Montessori Society (AMS) teaching credentials in fall 2015.
5. In November 2014, Sarah Bruhn (Red Door Lead Teacher) began early childhood training (3-6 years old) at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute (SMTTI) in Davie, FL and is anticipated to complete the coursework in December 2015 to earn her American Montessori Society (AMS) teaching credential.
6. In June 2015, Head of School James Farwell began the American Montessori Society administrator credential at Seton Montessori Institute in Clarendon Hills, IL which he is anticipated to graduate from in summer 2016. He also completed 74 hours of professional development, visited five other Montessori schools, and attended four education related conferences during the school year.
7. In addition to hundreds of cumulative hours of meetings and initiatives, we invested over \$18,000 in the professional development of our staff which is a significant investment for a school of our size.

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Plans for 2015 – 2016 School Year

Our staff has outlined the following new initiatives and goals for the 2015 – 2016 school year. Some of these initiatives are already well underway while others have no progress made at this time. The future is difficult to predict and unanticipated new challenges are all but guaranteed to pop up throughout the school year which will take time and energy away from these projects. Bandwidth, financial cost, energy levels, and tough prioritization decisions will ultimately influence what gets done. Thus, we make no promises for completion time frames but rather provide this list to keep all of the members of our learning community informed of these exciting goals for the coming school year.



Improve record keeping in the primary environments.

In June 2015, the school purchased subscriptions to Montessori Records Xpress (MRX) for the primary environments. During summer 2015, we are working through teacher training, transferring information from the legacy paper record keeping system, and learning how to use MRX for both historical record keeping and weekly lesson planning. Ideally, we would like to share this information with our parents at the first academic conference in January 2016.

A small, partially visible table with multiple columns and rows, likely a curriculum mapping or standards alignment table. The table is mostly obscured by the text on the right.

Provide additional evidence that the Montessori curriculum, including our scope and sequence, meets or exceeds Florida early learning standards and common core standards.

Our school adopted the Montessori Foundation's scope and sequence (take a look here: <http://store.montessori.org/Montessori-Curriculum-Scope-and-Sequence-MF3SSS.htm>) in Spring 2015. This scope and sequence has been mapped to Florida Early Learning Standards for 0 – 5 year olds (take a look here: <http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/>) and to common core standards for kindergarten – 6th grade (take a look here: <http://montessoricompass.com/common-core>). We seek to provide a detailed mapping via our record keeping software showing which activities satisfy which learning standards. This will provide strong evidence of the value of our curriculum. We also plan to post a summary of the scope and sequence on our website.

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Begin writing the self study for American Montessori Society (AMS) school accreditation.

This is a goal that we have been working towards since late 2013. AMS accreditation standards are rigorous (take a look here: <http://amshq.org/School-Resources/AMS-School-Accreditation>) such that approximately only 170 Montessori schools currently hold AMS accreditation out of an estimated 5,000 U.S. Montessori schools. We have been methodically making changes in the pursuit of compliance with AMS standards. With just a handful of major requirements left to address, we will begin the self study writing process at some point this school year. Our goal is to have earned AMS accreditation by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

¡Hola!

Implement a school-wide Spanish program.

This is an issue that we have been working on for over a year and keep running into unexpected difficulties with. The general goal is to have dedicated Spanish time in every classroom several times per week with the primary environments possibly having a separate shelf dedicated entirely to Spanish language. The shelf would teach Spanish via the same Montessori method for teaching English language acquisition. Depending on how well the program goes, and if parent interest is high enough, we may look into offering a half day Spanish emersion program for one of the primary environments in the coming school years.



Implement a gardening and fruit tree orchard care program.

We planted a fruit tree orchard in spring 2015 as a part of phase one of the exterior renovations plans which call for a large garden in the primary playground to be built. Once built, we plan to have a more structured gardening program where there is a dedicated weekly time to spend in the garden and orchard learning to cultivate edible foods. Currently, we are picking fruit as it ripens during aftercare and we have planted various things throughout the school year.



Hold three parent education nights

We held one parent education night in spring 2015 which was well attended and received great feedback. We plan to hold three parent education nights this school that will be packed with immediately useful information.

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Finish exterior renovations phase 1 during winter 2015.

Phase one of the exterior renovations plan published in spring 2015 are about 1/3 complete. Unfortunately, various unexpected issues popped up which took up a significant amount of our time and renovations were significantly slowed down. Once the summer heat and rains arrived, exterior renovations slowed to a stop. Our goal is to resume activity around November 2015 when it stops raining and cools down and to finish phase one before the weather heats up and the rains return in late spring 2016.

Finish various minor interior renovation projects.

This includes renovating a kitchenette area in the staff lounge to provide a more comfortable area for staff to enjoy their lunch breaks.

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