



**MONTENESSORI SCHOOL**  
**OF FORT MYERS**  
A PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

# ANNUAL REPORT

2016 – 2017 SCHOOL YEAR

Our Mission Statement: Montessori School of Fort Myers follows PEACEFUL principles to provide an individualized approach to nurture each child's natural love of learning. We shape independent, confident, out-of-the-box thinkers by teaching life skills through hands-on experiences and peaceful conflict resolution.

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# 2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT

## To Our Community Members

For the past three years, I have taken the early part of the summer to reflect on the past school year and write an annual report for our community members to review. Writing this report has given me a sense of closure on the previous school year and a warm feeling of satisfaction for what we achieved. While we have a beautiful campus, it's the people inside that make our school such a wonderful place. I want to thank all the members of our "village" who help to educate and raise our young students: parents, grandparents, extended families, neighbors, family friends, nannies, baby sitters, staff and administration, administrative advisory board, volunteers, our awesome librarian Dee, enrichment program instructors, our Pizza Fusion delivery guys, our UPS delivery guy Marco, and anyone else who I might have missed. We are blessed with a wonderfully diverse group of folks helping to raise our students.

I will remember this past school year primarily for the time we spent in the Fall making the school shine (both literally and metaphorically) for the accreditation committees who visited our school from the American Montessori Society (AMS), Association of Independent Schools of Florida (AISF), and National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA). I have never seen our staff work more cooperatively or with more pride. True to the intent of accreditation, we went through a transformative process and came out the other end as a better school. We spent a lot of time this past school year discussing how to improve our school; our facility, our curriculum, our processes and procedures, and most importantly ourselves.

Throughout this summer, as we prepare for the coming 2017-2018 school year, our staff has turned our focus inward. Just like our students, we like to ask questions. What can we do to better prepare our environments for our students? What can we do to prepare ourselves to serve each other? What can we do to create a community where our staff, students, and families feel welcome and wanted? Much like the fate of our students, we remember that *the future belongs to the curious*.



James M. Farwell  
Head of School

June 29, 2017

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## Looking Back: Accomplishments from the 2016 – 2017 School Year

After endless planning, we are proud of some significant accomplishments from this past school year.



**We achieved full accreditation with the following groups: American Montessori Society (AMS), National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPA), and Association of Independent Schools of Florida (AISF).**



While our early October 2016 site visit for accreditation was re-scheduled due to Hurricane Matthew, we rescheduled several weeks later (even at the cost of cancelling Joyce and my first vacation in about 2.5 years and not getting a trip refund), and we were recommended for accreditation! The AISF and NCPA boards voted in approval at their November 2016 board meetings and AMS voted in approval at their January 2017 board meeting. As of June 2017, there are only nine AMS-accredited Montessori schools in Florida (with 16 campus locations) out of approximately 250 Florida Montessori schools. There are only approximately 193 AMS-accredited school nationwide, out of approximately 5,000 U.S. Montessori schools. Going through the accreditation process was an intense review of our operations and we found countless ways to improve throughout the process.



**We added three new enrichment programs: piano, violin, and yoga**

After receiving parent survey results in early June 2016 showing high parent interest, we rolled out several new enrichment programs including piano, violin, and yoga. While violin enrollment was lower than expected, piano and yoga were successful. After our first fall 2016 semester, the instructors and our staff met in mid December 2016 to discuss the roll out. We decided to tinker with the format of the program for the Spring 2017 semester and got the classes to run a little smoother. Since the last semester ended, we have had several discussions about these programs and we will be further improving the class formats for the coming school year. For all our enrichment programs, we plan to increase the amount of parent communication regarding what the children are doing. We also plan to make more “semesters” which are shorter in length. Instead of two 18 week semesters, there will be four 8 week long “sessions” so



that if a child loses interest in the activity and wants to quit, the family doesn't lose as much money. For yoga, we plan to make the class a little shorter to keep students engaged for the duration of the class. For piano, we plan to make the class sizes smaller. More details will be announced near the end of July 2017.



### **We offered a catered lunch program**

We offered a catered lunch program throughout the school year with mixed success. While enrollment started off strong for the first month (~15 families), it tapered off throughout the year and we decided to shutter the program after May 2017. The good feedback we received is that the food was fresh and healthy, there was good variety with 10 different meals, and it was convenient for busy families. We heard feedback from families who decided not to enroll that they were concerned about food allergies/preferences (gluten free, vegetarian, no soy, organic only, etc.) and so it was difficult to find a menu that pleased all. The primary reason that families dropped out of the program is that their children simply were not interested in eating the healthy foods that we chose. Since we promote healthy living habits to our students, our staff was not comfortable offering a "chicken nuggets and tater tots" type of menu that children are likely to eat and so we decided that it is better to offer nothing at all and let our parents decide what to send for lunch.

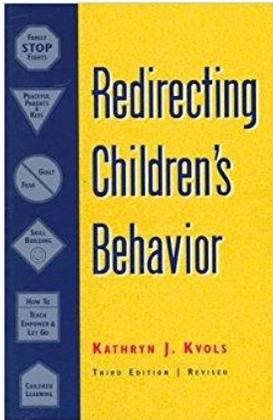


### **Our strategic planning now involves all stakeholders and is continuous**

We implemented our first whole year of continuous strategic planning involving input from our various constituent groups and from outsiders. We involved parents (two parent advisory board meetings), staff (two lead teacher and administration planning meetings), school administrators from outside our school (two all-day administrative advisory board meetings), and the rest of our staff (12 monthly staff meetings and six teacher workshops). Sounds boring, right? Nope, it's not. Anytime a parent or staff member says "why don't we..." or "why are we still..." or "what are we going to do about..." these comments for improvement get brought up throughout the year on these occasions. Meetings were well planned with agendas sent out in advance (apart from the parent advisory board meetings which are open format), were professional, minutes were taken, data was available for discussions, accountability was held, and written goals were set in place. We now have a permanent mechanism in place for the continuous improvement of our school.

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Now that's exciting news for ensuring the long-term health of our learning community!



## **We offered a 15 hour parent development course: Redirecting Children's Behavior**

With a significant investment from the school of \$2,500, in June 2016, five of our staff (Sarah Bruhn, Karen Cichy, Rachel Roberts, Karen Cichy, and James Farwell) trained to become instructors for the 15-hour course, Redirecting Children's Behavior. We gave this successful course to staff in August 2016 and May 2017. In October 2016, we offered the course to our families and sold out all 20 spaces! This popular course will continue to be offered in October and March each year.



## **We Opened a third toddler environment: Toddler Far West in January 2017**

Our toddler Far West lead teacher, Ms. Bridget Beaulieu, has done a fantastic job creating such a beautiful new toddler environment and filling it with joyful learning. This toddler room is the "part time" toddler room for students with half day, 2 day, and 3 day schedules.

## 2016 – 2017 School Year Survey Results & Commentary

We heard back from 26 families from every single classroom and got some great feedback in the comments sections of our survey! Here are some of the highlights:

1. **School Events.** All of our school events and parent teacher conferences received high ratings – at least 80% of families rated the events as “Good” or “Excellent”. Our highest rated events were the Winter Holiday Program in December and Art Night in April. Our lowest rated event was the Graduation Ceremony in late May. This appears to be due to some parents thinking that all students (not just kindergartners) were going to graduate and receive a certificate. We will make sure that this is more clearly communicated in advance of next year’s ceremony. Regarding the number of school events per year, 0% of our families want to see “Less Events”, 88% of our families want to see “About the same amount”, and 12% wanted to see “More Events”. It’s great to hear that we are doing a lot of things right with our school events!
2. **Enrichment Programs – yoga, piano, violin.** We received a lot of compliments that I will pass along to our instructors. I do want to acknowledge a few comments regarding making the “semesters” a bit shorter – we have plans to do this for fall 2017.
3. **Possible New Initiatives.** We received largely positive feedback for the four mentioned possible new initiatives with the strongest interest shown in having a few parent date nights and in having a Spanish immersion program for one of our primary environments in the future.
4. **Quality of Program.** The ratings for the 11 different quality of program measures were strong and most went up from the previous year’s survey. A few measures went down a little which our staff will be discussing.
5. **Open Mic. (comments) Section.** Thank you for the massive amount of compliments to our staff who will get to read them! We also received some thought provoking suggestions that we are looking into.

## Facility Improvements



1. We replaced the roof on the east portion of building.
2. Loft – we put in an interior window wall to close off the open space between the loft for the Red Door classroom. The loft is now a separate private area that our staff use for conferences, lunch breaks, piano lessons, and more.
3. Toddler Far West - We put in a movable wall in Red Door which allowed us to create Toddler Far West as enrollment trends changed.
4. Laundry room. We added a laundry room to Toddler Far West and our staff are happy that we no longer have to take home laundry! Fun fact, our school does about 10 loads of laundry per week so it's getting heavy use.
5. Toddler playground
  - a. Planted a Barbados Cherry tree near the sand box with fruit at toddler height for picking.
  - b. Added a water spigot with a small hose for the garden and water tables.
  - c. Added water tables for sensorial exploration and for our toddlers to practice clothes washing.
  - d. Built a small garden which currently has herbs in it for the toddlers to pick and smell.
6. Primary Playground
  - a. Bought six new children's picnic tables. We can fit an entire primary class outside to eat at the same which we did throughout the year under our beautiful giant Cuban Laurel tree.
  - b. Replaced our swing set.
  - c. Added a kumquat and a banana tree.
  - d. Installed a rock climbing wall
  - e. Added two storage sheds for garden material storage and a sports equipment shed.
7. Grounds
  - a. Dug a swale on the northeast side of the parking lot to better drain our parking lot during summer rainy season. We also removed 27 cubic yards (two large dump truck loads) of dirt on the south side of parking lot which allows water to sheet flow into the county's swale on Crystal Drive. The water is still a problem while it is raining and for about 30 minutes after a heavy rain, but it does drain now. Previously we were waiting 6-8 hours for the parking lot to evaporate and drain.
  - b. We planted four Black Olive trees on the south side of the property to provide shade the coming infant and toddler outdoor environment (the south garden).
  - c. We planted a prickly pear cactus hedge outside of the infant windows which will start producing fruit in about a year. We also planted two Dragon Fruit cacti near the main entrance.

## Students & Staff



1. **Student Enrollment remained strong.** We ended the 2016-2017 school year with 72 students (we can handle up to 92) and enrollment for August 2017 is looking to be higher than last year. As our school's enrollment strengthens, we are able to offer more programs and initiatives to our learning community!
2. **Our staff grew by 21%.** From June 2016 to May 2016 we grew from 19 staff to 23 staff! We added several new teaching positions and found several wonderful substitutes which allows our staff to take time off as needed.

## Professional Development



1. **We invested heavily in our staff.** We invested \$16,597 (not including staff compensation during training or teacher workshops) in professional development. This is a significant budget line item for a school of our size.
2. **Redirecting Children's Behavior** – As mentioned earlier in this report, we sponsored 5 staff to become instructors and to give this course.
3. **In-Service hours remained high.** 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.
4. **Conferences.** All but one of our staff attended the Montessori Foundation's three day conference in Sarasota, FL in November 2016 and several of our staff attended the Andrew & Dora McGhee Montessori Foundation conference in North Miami, FL in April 2017.
5. Ms. Livia Adams (Toddler East) completed the Infant and Toddler teacher training program at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute (SMTTI) in Davie, FL and should receive the American Montessori Society (AMS) teaching credential imminently. Ms. Livia completed Montessori infant and toddler training in 2006 and chose to take this course as a refresher. Congratulations, Ms. Livia!
6. Ms. Erica Fontanetta (Toddler West lead), and Ms. Bridget Beaulieu (Toddler Far West lead) began the Infant and Toddler teacher training program at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute (SMTTI) in Davie, FL and should receive the American Montessori Society (AMS) Infant and Toddler teaching credential in June 2018.
7. Ms. Cindy Taveras (Red Door lead) began the Early Childhood (306 years old) teacher training program at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute (SMTTI) in Davie, FL and should receive the American Montessori Society (AMS) teaching credential in June 2018.
8. In July 2016, Head of School James Farwell completed the American Montessori Society administrator credential at Seton Montessori Institute

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in Clarendon Hills, IL. Mr. James completed 152 hours of professional development this school year, visited two other Montessori schools, and attended four education related conferences during the school year.

## Confident Children

Will a Montessori education at our school prepare your child academically? While we don't place much emphasis on testing, we are happy to share our latest results.

- **PreK4:** Our 2016 - 2017 PreK4 Assessment Scores are our highest ever and show that our students "exceeded expectations" in all four categories: print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language / vocabulary, and mathematics at the beginning and end of the school year.

### Montessori School of Fort Myers

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Assessment Scores  
2016 - 2017 School Year

Area	Assessment Measure	School Average	Florida VPK Rating Scale		
			Below Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
<b>Assessment Period - 1 (Fall)</b>					
Language	Print Knowledge	9.8	0 - 7	8 - 9	10 - 12
Language	Phonological Awareness	10.8	0 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 14
Language	Oral Language / Vocabulary	19.4	0 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 22
Math	Mathematics	14.6	0 - 11	12 - 14	15 - 18
<b>Assessment Period - 3 (Spring)</b>					
Language	Print Knowledge	11.5	0 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 12
Language	Phonological Awareness	12.2	0 - 7	8 - 11	12 - 14
Language	Oral Language / Vocabulary	22.3	0 - 15	16 - 19	20 - 23
Math	Mathematics	16.4	0 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 18

#### Notes:

1. Averages shown were taken from all 14 students in the 2016-2017 VPK class.
2. School average scores for each assessment measure were rounded up or down to the nearest number in order to determine which category (e.g. "Exceeding Expectations") that our students fell in.
3. This data was compiled and published on 6/5/2017.

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