



Follow the Child

THE MSGH COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2011

Ray Dalio, Founder of Bridgewater, the world's largest hedge fund, has been quoted as saying that, **“So many students who succeed in school fail in life.”** He goes on to say that, “Mistake-phobia is crippling our society. It is a problem that begins in most elementary schools, where children often learn to learn what they are taught, rather than to form their own goals and then figure out how to achieve them. They are fed



UNA'S CHAT

with facts then tested, and those who make the fewest mistakes are considered the ‘smart ones.’ From this, children learn that it is embarrassing not to know something and to make mistakes.”

Like Dalio, Montessori educators are also deeply concerned that the current conventional education system is not on track to prepare young people for real

life. It values the *right answer*, not the *process*, neglecting to recognize the value of trial-and-error—an essential component to nurture critical thinking and true learning.

Today’s children, particularly with their exposure to unfiltered information and messaging, will need to be able to think critically—not only to know how to care for themselves, but to know how to care for and contribute to the *balance* of the world around them. As evidenced by the recent documentaries *Race to Nowhere* and *Waiting for Superman*, we are observing the concern educators and parents have about this disconnect between what students are being prepared for and what will be required of them in life.

Montessori education can help inform this conversation, and there is much that can be learned from its approach. After all, it has been practiced and observed in classrooms for over 100 years and is tried, true and proven. Dr. Montessori wrote,

“Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words, but by experiences in the environment.”

In Montessori education, the process of trial-and-error reigns! It is a well-established and accepted truth that trial-and-error is our most effective learning tool, and it has served us well through our process of evolution. Through observation, Dr. Montessori recognized that in order to learn, students had to interact with the environment spontaneously and use feedback, i.e. consequences of their actions, to adjust and improve. In this way, the lessons become a part of the student, forever owned and internalized.

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Michelle Thomas' latest work of art from Pi.

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Mission:

The Montessori School of Greater Hartford fosters a strong foundation for confident, compassionate participation in the world by nurturing each child's unique gifts, passion for learning, and independence.

As a community, we enrich families, live our diversity, and embody the Association Montessori Internationale standards of excellence.

FOLLOW THE CHILD

EDITOR

Amanda Aronson

LAYOUT/PHOTOGRAPHER*

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To achieve this, 3 elements are essential. Authentic Montessori has these elements, among others, at its core:

A Prepared Environment (*a.k.a. the set-up of the room, everything in it, the guidelines for how it is run, the training of the teachers supporting it, and each and every rhythm of the child's day*). The prepared environment incorporates natural and inherent controls of error to provide feedback for the child. This can be everything from tiled floors, where things will break easily if dropped; thus, helping the child learn to handle things more carefully, to an activity that cannot be completed fully if there is an error. As the child grows, this prepared environment changes to adapt to the mode of that developmental stage.

Freedom with Responsibility This concept provides the child with opportunities to explore interests spontaneously, while also providing the guidance of boundaries. An example of this can be seen when children enjoy the freedom of movement and inquisition that comes with their indoor/outdoor classrooms. They may enjoy the freedom to go and work outside if they have demonstrated responsibility and self-discipline in keeping with the guidelines of the classroom community.

Uninterrupted Time This is translated most often through the three-hour work cycle, which allows the child to make many choices and spend as long as he or she requires to master a task. In young children, this is illustrated when they repeat something over and over, day after day. Their understanding is built through direct interaction—through trial-and-error.

Take any one of these elements: A Prepared Environment, Freedom with Responsibility or Uninterrupted Time, out of the mix, and the student's opportunity to experience learning naturally, fully and joyfully is compromised.

I intentionally use the word 'joyfully,' because for the child and anyone else who values the child's spirit, joyful learning is the most wonderful by-product of the Montessori approach. It allows the learning process to unfold naturally; after all, it is our job as educators and parents to nurture joyful children.



To all of you reading this who are watching our nation struggle with our system of education, encourage those who are looking to our children as the hope for the future, to learn about authentic (Association Montessori Internationale) Montessori education. Commit to learn more about it yourself so you can explain it clearly and answer questions. Observe our classrooms and then observe others. Appreciate the differences and honor the weight they carry for how significantly conditions affect learning. AMI education has been time tested for over 100 years, and it is true education for life.

In the meantime, feel good about the choice you have made to offer your child the gift of a Montessori education. As alumni parent, Catherine Bayer, attests in this issue's Alumni Feature, it truly is a gift for life.

BIG WORK!

By Amanda Aronson

As someone who regularly has to negotiate her way around the Elementary children to get to the water cooler each day, I am continually shocked by what I observe. The kids are everywhere—literally—and the work they are doing seems more in keeping with what I did as a middle school teacher than what I would have expected in an Elementary-level environment.

Just to name a few examples, I've seen Anthony dwarfed by a timeline three times the length of his body on more than one occasion, and last month I saw Mark unroll a long black thing that was supposed to represent a historical timeline that took up most of the main floor hallway. One week a few students were fishing out some of the salmon eggs that had died from their incubation tank, while others were working on a model of a city and studying mathematical area. And truthfully, I spent much too much time listening to a lesson on tectonic plates one afternoon when I should have been returning phone calls. What a good idea to have a block slowly floating in water to illustrate how land masses are always moving.

When did elementary school get so interesting?

The teachers are always shocking me with the little-known facts about why things are the way they are around here, and I continue to be impressed by how deeply each and every aspect of a classroom is consciously designed and rooted in child development.



When I sat down to present a couple of questions to Lisbeth Harrison, MSGH's Lower Elementary teacher, many of them had to do with the size of the work the kids were doing. It seemed to get physically larger as they got older. At least that was what I thought I was seeing.

As she explained, they were in fact doing big work, but in a different sort of way.

AA: What do you mean by Big Work then if it's not entirely physical?

LH: Big Work is an actual term in Montessori Elementary education, but it doesn't necessarily correspond to physical size.

As children move into their Elementary years, their need for order is not the same as it was when they were younger. They need to spread out and gather their knowledge from many different sources to inform their thinking. Parents often comment that their formerly neat kids are suddenly creating messes around the house. Well, that mess you see on the outside is there because they are so busy on the inside. That's where their focus is. Their imaginations are big; their thoughts are big, and we facilitate their classroom learning to nurture the expansive knowledge that's developing in them.

Big Work is a child's response to what has been presented. For example, in traditional education, teachers tell students what they need to learn. In Montessori, we present a lesson and then we watch as the children make it their own. What they do with the information is one way for us to determine what they have taken in and absorbed.

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For instance, the other day I presented a lesson to a small group on the classification of animals. Visually, we made a tree on the mat as we added different classes. The trunk of the tree was labeled as the animal kingdom. Then, the tree branched out and got taller as the phylums and sub-phylums got smaller in their classification groups. Some of the children then decided to draw the classifications on their own and actually string them up on our ficus tree in class. This exercise reinforced the information for them as they wrote it down, and they were able to absorb it as they placed the categories on the right level of our tree. The children then looked at the Timeline of Life and began noticing its detail. For example, some animals existed but then died off. Others continued to exist. That raised questions for them: Why did those animals die but not the others? What happened?

Their curiosity piqued, they then went off to find answers to their questions. What happens from there is their Big Work. They make the work their own. One child was so fascinated by the dinosaurs that he spent a great deal of time making a book about them. He researched their anatomy and painstakingly drew their bodies, labeled them, and wrote facts about their diets, their habitats, etc.

When we were studying botany, I had one student who drew a flower and another who grew a flower.

Big work is their practice. When they've produced big work, they have become holistically involved with that information, and it becomes very clear what they have learned. That knowledge, as well as the skills they used to attain it, are more likely to stay with them as they mature, as opposed to facts they were told they had to learn. My job is to keep track of the skills and knowledge they need to learn; yet, to do so in a way that helps inspire them to personalize their work, enjoy it and feel proud; more times than not the exercise of completing big work often results in them surpassing the basic benchmarks they needed to reach, and it better develops their *higher-level cognitive skills*.



AA: This may seem like a strange last question, but why do so many things roll and unroll in Elementary?

LH: In AMI Montessori education, we are encouraged to use paper rolls rather than bound booklets. Rolling out paper always allows the children to go further with their work; to make it bigger and take it deeper. We take away the boundaries that limit their inquisition, so to facilitate that, many things in the Elementary classroom unroll:

paper, timelines, math work, etc. The paper allows students to take their work to the next level, and many of the other materials that unroll offer a visual, concrete example of how long something took or how far something can go.

Think about unrolling a timeline; it keeps going and going and going. Students can see that the earth has been around for a long time, and that some things have been around longer than others. Their motivation to learn more also keeps going. That's why worksheets are a bit of a danger for students. They limit student learning. When the page ends, that subconsciously signals to the child that that's as far as the work goes. Without that concrete end, they are challenged to go further, and they have the room to do it.

AA: Thank you, Lis. This is all starting to make a lot more sense now!

LH: My pleasure.



“When they’ve produced big work, they have become holistically involved with that information, and it becomes very clear what they have learned.”

**MICHELLE THOMAS
CREATING AND INSPIRING AS
OUR ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE**



**SEÑORA RIVERA
NURTURING A SPANISH COMMUNITY
BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE
CLASSROOM**



Yummie and Jonathan:

Expanding and Supporting our Music Program

As many of you know, our beloved and (seemingly inexhaustible) music educators, Jonathan Reuning-Scherer and Yummie Oberstein, support the majority of the all-school musical endeavors here at MSGH, and they do a tremendous amount of work each year with our Elementary students. From the Winter Sing Along to the Elementary Performance, their talent and direction are the foundation of our music program.

We are pleased to announce that our program is now expanding.

“Miss Yummie,” has officially begun as the MSGH Music Director for the Primary classes. In addition to her work with Jonathan, Yummie will be deepening the musical experience of the primary children and bringing structure to our overall music program, designed to nurture the “Voice as One’s Instrument.”

Among the many hats she wears, Yummie is a professional musician and music educator who brings to the children not only her signature passion and energy, but years of professional musical and theatre experience. Though she tries to keep a low profile around here, it might be fun to know that she is a performance artist and classical pianist who has been showcased worldwide.

She holds a B.A. in Music from Brandeis University, a M.Ed. in Special Education from Columbia University, and a Master’s degree in Sacred Music from JTS. Her background includes extensive performance and teaching experience in dancing, singing and acting, as well as lighting and set design, playwriting, and musical composition.



We are lucky to have the continued support and talented involvement of both Jonathan and Yummie, and we eagerly await the continued growth of the MSGH Music Program through Yummie’s new position.

KATIE KENNEDY KEEPING HER STUDENTS IN TUNE WITH SUZUKI CELLO



Culturally-Conscience Parenting

By Amanda Aronson

Many families are drawn to MSGH for the diversity we enjoy as a community. In admission meetings, parents often articulate that exposing their children to diverse environments on a regular basis is one of their family values, so it's not surprising that examples of how this value influences children's experiences outside of school are often heard in common conversation.

The last issue of FTC began with an article from Una about Conscious Parenting and how we can be thoughtful about rearing our children. This piece serves as a follow up to that conversation and offers examples of three fascinating women in the MSGH community who are parenting consciously with culture in mind.

Meg Keough: Stretching Her Daughter's World View

As a young girl, Meg moved frequently with her family and spent much of her 'life before children' trekking around the globe. That early exposure to travel imbued her life with an excitement to enjoy the depth of experience our global community has to offer.



When we sat down together, it was initially to hear about her blog, *Backpack to Buggy. Travel with the kids, not for the kids*. Yet as we talked, it became clear to me that she is the perfect example of a parent who is consciously stretching her daughter's world view. This could be seen

even in quick, casual comments she made about their family's nightly dinners.

“Why give your kids chicken fingers every day when they can also have satays or kabobs?” she said. “If we give our children the same thing prepared the same way all of the time, they begin to assume that that is the only way something should look, the only way something should be. By varying things, we help our children focus on what things have in common.”

In the midst of packing for a month-long trip to India to expand her daughter, Mirielle's, world view literally, Meg's excitement was palpable. The trip was in part a long-time dream of Meg's as a way to celebrate her 40th birthday, but it also coincided with Mirielle's 4th and supported the goals she and her husband held for how they wanted to sculpt their earliest family years together.

For many, to travel for a month may seem impossible, but Meg saw it differently. “We planned for that trip for a long time, and we saved for it both in terms of money and in terms of time off;

it was something that we wanted to do as a family, so we made planning for it a priority and just worked toward our goal.”

Her approach to parenting, as she endeavors to stretch her daughter's world view, inspires one to think first about which values one wishes to instill in a child, then to get creative when considering the possibilities to nurture those values.

Bonnie Huang: Preserving Culture and Normalizing Diversity

Bonnie is another mother in our community who is clear about the values she wishes to instill in her children. She has much in common with Meg, in that they both enjoy tweaking every day experiences to expand their children's world view. Together they have even turned average playdates into sushi-rolling parties.



Yet, while she loves to explore cultures outside of her own, preserving hers maintains a high place on her family's priority list.

As the child of Chinese immigrants, Bonnie traveled back and forth from Taiwan throughout her childhood, and much of her extended family still lives there. “Preserving my Taiwanese language and heritage is important to me, and I want my children to identify with that part of their background.”

“In our home, we speak both English and Chinese to Max and Mila, and we have been creating time to travel to Tai-

pei to visit family. I want my children to feel that Taiwan is a second home for them, that it's a natural part of their lives and a place they can go back to comfortably. That's why it's so important for me to expose them to the rhythms of the average day while they are there."

To that end, "last summer Max and I stayed in a dorm for a month in a neighborhood near our relatives in Taipei, and we enrolled him in a preschool there, so he could spend his mornings with the local children. Mila came out with my husband Mark two weeks into our trip and joined Max at school. After school, we visited relatives, rode the subway, did errands and approached the day the same way we would have here."

Bonnie clearly appreciates how powerfully a child's perspective can be influenced just by observing someone else's average day.

"I love being in the city, and sometimes we'll go down to New York for the day and just walk around and ride the subway. It overwhelms me with happiness when I look around and I see so many different kinds of people all together in the same space. I want Max and Mila to take that kind of diversity for granted as they grow up, so that they see the world as a multi-cultural place with people of all races, countenances, tastes, and preferences naturally convening. I want them to feel THAT is normal. And that's also been part of the draw of MSGH versus other Montessori schools in the area. I love the diversity of this community."

As a parent in the MSGH community whose bucket list of dreams includes living abroad with my children in their youth, Bonnie and Meg's stories of family travel have recalibrated my thinking about traveling with children. They illustrate how a carefully-planned trip can support a family value and satiate the desire to live abroad without orchestrating a more permanent move across the ocean. Clearly that is also more realistic with creative planning and saving.

Jenn Van Scoter: Sharing a Love of Art and Local Culture

Like Meg and Bonnie, Jenn is a lover of travel, and many of her children's travel experiences during their youngest years have included international trips. However, to know Jenn is also to know her love of the arts, and I've been fortunate to hear over the years how thoughtfully she has tried to share this love with her children, Owen and Audrey.

With a family that included several artists and a musician, Jenn grew up in Cleveland, Ohio with a great exposure to both artistic communities and the rhythms of a city. "I love the city experience, and the arts have always been an important part of my life, so I try to instill those loves in my

own children. We go to local art museums frequently, and over time, the kids have identified their favorite paintings at each. Now when we visit, it's almost as if we are going back to see old friends. We see the paintings that they used to like, and we laugh and talk about them before we go off to find new ones. The repetitiveness of our visits anchors the experience for them and encourages them to see something new in the familiar and to go beyond, so that each visit is a new and unique experience."

"And while we do spend time visiting nearby cities, we frequently seek out community activities in our area. We go to concerts and parades and the things that may jump to mind, but we also spend time in the local food markets. Cooking is a big part of our family, and when we visit the smaller markets, we will sometimes look at the different kinds of ingredients and try to think about how they are prepared in different cultures; we wonder together what the different cooking methods may be able to teach us about that culture."



All photos have been submitted

"I really want my children to enjoy where they live, and for them to see the diversity of cultures and life experiences that surround them." With children who are now 8 and 11, Jenn also recognizes how their time spent in various cultures in our community can be an experiential way to help her children learn perspective taking.

"Sometimes the kids will find themselves in a situation where they feel different from others, and I've tried to help them understand that it is an important experience to feel that you may not belong. There is a great deal of empathy that can come from those experiences, and I hope that will translate when they are in a majority situation. Perhaps they can recognize that another person may not be feeling comfortable and be moved to make that situation easier for another person."

As you listen to more examples of how others are parenting consciously, it's interesting to note that many of the people who enjoy parenting are regularly sharing the things they love and value about life with their children. They recognize that Conscious Parenting is about more than just the child; it's also about the environment of the child and the happiness of the people creating that environment.

For those who wish to explore Meg's blog, it can be found at www.backpacktobuggy.com.

"Averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education." -Maria Montessori



“Montessori believed education was the most powerful and universal way through which to reconstruct society; a way to transition from war to peace. Therefore, it is necessary to think of education as peace, not education for peace. [She also] recognized children as the redeeming factor in the evolution of humankind. In order to bring about a world of peace and tolerance, where war is an absurdity, it is important to focus and teach peace early. As Montessori teachers, we realize that it is not enough to simply talk about peace. We must create an environment that will promote the development of peaceful individuals.”

* Excerpt taken from the North American Montessori Center

JOIN UNA AND REPRESENT MSGH AT THE CONNECTICUT PEACE WALK MAY 21, 2011

On Saturday, May 21, 2011, West Hartford and Hartford will host the centerpiece of the Peace Walks Program: the Connecticut Peace Walk. Thousands of individuals from across the state will convene to demonstrate their commitment to peace building on a local and global scale. Archbishop Desmond Tutu will serve as the Grand Marshal of the Peace Walks.

The Peace Walk is one component of The 2011 World Youth Peace Summit, which will be preceded by the 5th World Scholar-Athlete Games (June 26 to July 1, 2011).

If you are interested in walking with Una, please email information@msgh.org.

If you are interested in hosting one of the international scholar-athletes in your home, contact sharonmurray.iis@gmail.com.



Lunchtime: There's More Going on Than Just Eating

Lunchtime is not just an opportunity for the children to sit calmly and enjoy the experience of eating with others; it's also a time when many of their lessons are practiced and applied. The children choose with whom they will sit, and teachers have yet another opportunity to observe and nurture social dynamics.

Enjoy this series of photos highlighting a typical Primary lunch experience.



“We thank the earth for the gifts we are about to receive. Bon Apetit; Now you may eat.”



Patience is practiced when the children wait to say the blessing until everyone is seated, and when they clear only when everyone is finished.



Small groups reinforce social graces and courtesy, as the children enjoy the give and take of conversation with friends at their table while eating slowly.



Practical Life lessons are practiced when tables are set up, placemats and settings are arranged, dishes are cleared and washed, tables and floors are tidied, and the classroom is returned to order.



Parent
Information
Night



Winter
Sing-Along





Come See My School

Jump Rope for Heart





Many thanks to our hard-working committee who designed and executed this event

Early Shirane, Kristen Singh, Michele Tabora, Setareh Mozafari, Deanna Crooks and Chris Francis, Tracey Harris-Dowdell, Amanda Aronson, Bonnie Huang, Meg Keough, Dahlia and Stephen Pendergrass, Anna Barresi, Claudia Phelan, Wendy Glisson, Dhurata Margolis, Susan Rich-Bye, Yummie Oberstein and Laura and Mark Miele



Thanks Also to Our Event-Day Volunteers

Julie, Jonathan and Joel Reuning-Scherer, Jennifer and Stefan Ausberger, Christy D'Aquila, Hyacinth Ellis, Steve Dai, Jennifer Hicks, Marama Pramanik, Pannada Madden, Laurie Mailhot, Rebecca London, Shelly Aronson, Deb Murray, Michaela Murray, Jen and Leon Pierce, Shalika Bansal, Teresa Reynolds, Orla Black, Melanie Cilfone, Mary McHale, Una Barry, Storm and Stephanie.

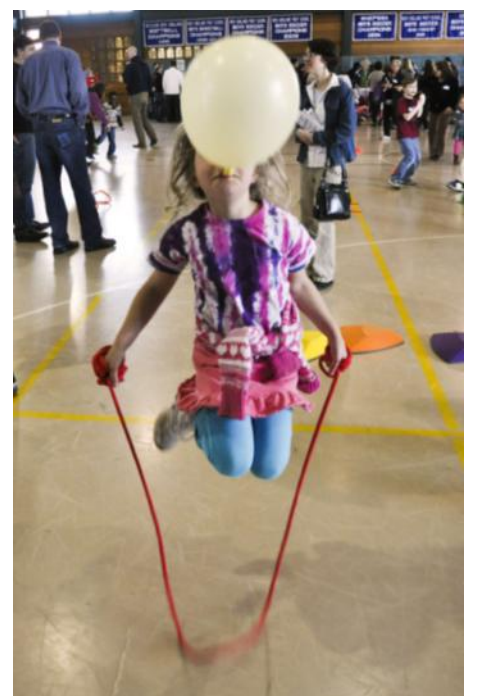
And to Our Performers and Activity-Station Supporters

Bob Bloom of Drumming-about-You
Members of The Hartt School of Music Violin and Cello Ensembles and
Carmen Irons and Elizabeth Keller
Dancers from The Coogan School of Irish Step Dancing and
Brenda and Regina Coogan
The Jump Bunch and the American Heart Association

A special thank you to the Watkinson School community for graciously allowing us to hold our event on their campus, and to Jon O'Leary for facilitating our planning.



On Saturday, March 19, hundreds gathered to enjoy this fun-filled event!



MARCH 4, 2011 - TEACHER APPRECIATION DAY

On Friday, March 4, the MSGH Family Association hosted its annual **Teacher Appreciation Luncheon**.

Many thanks to P3 Parent, Rebecca London, for chairing this event, and to her husband Shawn who supported her behind the scenes and assisted with child-care. Thanks also to T2 and P1 Parent, Kyoko Simpson, and her colleague Rebecca McMahon, for volunteering to do mini massages!



Teachers were treated to a Mediterranean-inspired lunch from Tapas and received handmade books filled with art and notes of love and appreciation from their parents and students. As you can see, there were some laughs and some tears as the notes were read and enjoyed.

Elementary Parent, Dr. Len Ellis, was our keynote speaker and excerpts from his speech follow. Thank you, Len!



Mentorship

“Our children spend up to 7 hours per day during a crucial stage of development with their Montessori teacher, more than the time spent with their grandparents or other close relatives. Our teachers can be considered as a third parent, or an aunt or uncle. They help to nurture our children, teaching them the precepts of discipline, fair play, responsibility and generally, how to function in a social environment. They also act as first responders, doctors and nurses for our children, as well as lawyers and arbitrators when important disputes need to be settled between children, and on occasion, between parents. This role of our teachers often goes unrecognized as we are often focused exclusively on the academic side of our children’s development. Daniel Goleman and others have reminded us of the importance of what they have described as emotional intelligence to success. I have found that the environment created by our teachers in the classroom has helped to develop my boys socially, helping them to be confident without being arrogant, and assertive without being insensitive to the feelings of others. They have blossomed as independent thinkers and learners, who at the same time are willing to collaborate with friends on particular projects of interest.”



Teaching Excellence

I came to the Montessori as a result of concerns that I had about our educational system. However, what I learned when we came here was not what I expected. The aspect of the Montessori philosophy that struck me the most was that how we learn is far more important than how much we learn. With the explosion of available information afforded by the internet, it is clear that we cannot learn everything, and so teachers should not attempt to teach everything. The Montessori method of introducing a lesson and then allowing the child to learn by exploration, self-discovery and repetition truly promotes the love of learning. I believe that learning in this way will be more effective in promoting lifelong learning than more didactic methods which foster dependency on a ‘teacher’. Worse yet are the coercive methods of teaching, which may be effective in the short term, but are unlikely to encourage independent learning in the long run.



A generation ago, it was enough to master a discipline such as medicine, law, or accounting, and to work within that discipline until retirement. Today, with the rapid evolution of knowledge, continuous adaptation through lifelong learning has become essential for survival. Our Montessori teachers are true facilitators of this type of learning during a critical period of our children’s development and are helping to prepare our children for an uncertain future.



Passion

I am always impressed by the commitment and conviction demonstrated by all the Montessori teachers I have had a chance to communicate with. Whether it is a presentation by Ms. Una or one of the senior teachers, or at a one-on-one meeting, the passion of the teachers for the job is evident. I believe that teaching is one of the great vocations, and the Montessori teacher, in deciding to be specially trained in the Montessori method has demonstrated another level of commitment to teaching excellence.

I have also found that in addition to the love of the work, the teachers love the children. After all, what would be the point of teaching if there were no children to teach?

From a personal perspective, I will say that both of my boys love and appreciate all their Montessori teachers. As their father, I am compelled to do the same. Thank you, teachers, and have a wonderful Teacher Appreciation Day!



Photos by Amanda Aronson

MSGH The ART OF LEARNING *Annual Gala*

"The palette of life"

MSGH Spring Fling: Art of Learning Annual Gala

By Susan Rich-Bye

The snow is finally melting, the crocuses are bursting out of the ground, and MSGH's **Art of Learning Annual Gala** is just around the corner. This event is a highlight of the social calendar for MSGH families every year, and plays a very important role in our school's strong operations. After months of planning, hard work, and fun, our community will gather for an evening of food, wine, socializing and bidding on Friday, May 13 at the Hartford Golf Club. Devoted and generous parents, **Valerie and Lawrence Santilli**, are Gala co-chairs this year, along with a dedicated group of volunteers serving on the Auction Committee. We are anticipating another terrific evening for our school community. And due to the success of last year's Gala, our Celebrity Auctioneers, *Fox CT's* reporters Jim Altman and Laurie Perez, were excited to make it a repeat engagement.



Auction Invitation

Annual Gala Auction
Friday, May 13
Hartford Golf Club

The Gala Auction has two goals: to raise necessary funds to help support MSGH's cultural programming and financial assistance programs; and to provide our families, staff and friends with an opportunity to celebrate the unique and wonderful qualities that bring each of us to MSGH. Volunteers are hard at work to ensure that we succeed at accomplishing both of these important goals.

In order for this evening to be a big success, every family needs to participate—even those who cannot attend the Gala. There are many important ways to be involved:

- Volunteer on the Auction Committee and contribute your time and talents before the event, or especially on the day of the event;
- Solicit or contribute a sponsorship;
- Donate items for the auctions, or solicit the donation of items;
- Approach a business or family member to place an advertisement in the program book, or ask him or her to make a contribution to support this special evening;

Sponsorship levels are listed across the fold on the next page in the [blue box](#), and ideas for auction item donations are listed in the [green box](#).

Each member of our community will have a variety of opportunities to choose from to show support. Most of them are directly tied to the children's experiences at MSGH, and some are focused on providing families with chances to learn and grow, have fun, relax, and experience new places and things! Likewise, it is crucial that we make it easy for each and every family to participate. Options include everything from your very presence at the event in the form of your ticket purchase to the purchase of mystery boxes, items in the silent and live auctions, or a special remembrance of your child's experience at school.

New for this year: tiered ticket pricing. Tickets will be offered at three different levels, \$75, or \$150 and \$250 for patron tickets. Guests who purchase patron tickets will be providing a higher level of support for the event, and will have preferred seating at the Gala as a show of gratitude for the depth of their commitment to our school.

Highlights of this year's offerings include a trip to Myrtle Beach, weekend getaways, a flat screen television, tickets to a variety of shows, sporting events, musicals and performances, and home-improvement items. Of course, the most popular items are typically the **Classroom Projects** and **Teacher Outings**. What a wonderful gauge of our families' commitment to and investment in our school! The teachers have been busy planning, and students are now beginning to work on their projects. And through the Montessori method, children don't merely work on the project, it is integrated into their group lessons providing a multi-layered, focused experience for them. Teacher outings provide unique opportunities for children to spend time with a cherished teacher.



Participate. Support. Enjoy!

A Few Particulars for the Evening:

The fun will start at 6 pm with a lavish spread of hors d'oeuvres, wine, bidding, mystery boxes, and a display of Live Auction items; next, we will move to dinner, which will include a feature presentation and the Live Auction. New for this year: dance the night away after the conclusion of the Live Auction. Dress: come cocktail, come festive, come dressed for fun!

Auction Sponsorships

Director	\$3,000	Supporter	\$1,000
Benefactor	\$2,500	Contributor	\$500
Patron	\$1,500	Friend	\$250

Sponsorships offer donors increasing levels of recognition before, during and after the Gala. For details, please contact Susan Rich-Bye at susanr@msgh.org or visit www.msgh.org to download Sponsorship forms.

Auction Donation Ideas

- Gift Certificates to stores, salons, restaurants, children's classes, exercise studios/gyms,
- Specialized services,
- Family friendly activities, lessons,
- Tickets to sports and performing arts events,
- Travel,
- Custom items such as original works of art.

Please visit www.msgh.org for a list of current Auction donors and to download Donor Agreement Forms. Donations can be delivered to Susan Rich-Bye through the Main Office, or at susanr@msgh.org.

Getting Ready for Spring?

Spring clothes for your growing children, gardening supplies from Home Depot, graduation presents and cards...

Chances are you are planning on purchasing things to support the changing of the seasons. **Please, plan ahead and order gift cards through Scrip to the stores you know you will visit.** Scrip is great for groceries and gas, too! Every dollar you spend comes back to you on a gift card. It doesn't require any additional money; yet, the school gets a percentage of your purchase amount!

*Our next order is due to the MSGH Main Office by **Wednesday, April 6.***

The MSGH Weekly bulletin contains links to any Scrip forms you may need, but please contact lauriemailhot@yahoo.com, for enrollment information.

FAMILY ASSOCIATION NEWS

Dear Families,

As you can see, it has not been a quiet winter around MSGH! The classrooms have been abuzz with activity, and committees have been meeting and building the structure for spring events. Our year of transition to a Family Association continues, and we are beginning to gain a better sense of clarity as to how we can structure our Family Association moving forward. Fortunately, we are seeing many new faces volunteering, which is very encouraging as we prepare for next year.

This spring, we hope to solidify the roles and responsibilities that will help strengthen our work for the 2011-12 school year. If you have any interest in volunteering in some capacity to support your child's school community, please be in touch and we can help determine what role will be the best fit for your schedule and your interests. If email is your preferred way to communicate, feel free to send your thoughts to information@msgh.org and we will get in touch with you to talk further. We do need more help to support the many areas that keep our community connected, so please reach out and get involved.

Thank you for all you do to support MSGH, and we look forward to hearing from you!

Yummie Oberstein
Family Association President



Rebecca London, Chair of the MSGH Teacher Appreciation Luncheon, and FA President, Yummie Oberstein.

NATURE'S CORNER

Each issue will offer ideas or resources for enjoying nature with your family.

“A child... is a spontaneous observer of nature... he needs to have at his disposal material upon which he can work.”

It's no secret that kids love water. With the snow melting and spring rains in full shower, now is the perfect time to get out and enjoy it! As the saying goes, “there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing.”

This spring, commit to enjoying water. Find a local waterfall and track its flow with your child. Close your eyes and listen to the rushing sound. Or just keep it simple: jump in puddles or play sink and float with found object like leaves and pebbles. If it's raining, head out and get silly with your kids. Do your own rendition of “Raindrops are Falling on My Head” and dance with your umbrella. Don't let wet weather chase you indoors; get out there and enjoy it. (And if you want to cut down on muddy laundry, pick up a pair of rain pants. That little addition to your child's wardrobe kept handy by the door can make all the difference.)



Upcoming Dates

(Check the online calendar for specifics.)

Friday, April 8
Elementary Play

Friday, May 13
Annual Gala Auction

Saturday, May 21
Peace Walk

Wednesday, May 25
Annual Meeting

Thursday, June 9
Bushnell Park Carousel

Wednesday, June 15
Last Day of School &
Graduation

Monday, June 20
Toddler & Primary Summer Days Program
Begins

Parent Information Night
5:30-7:30 pm (Dinner Included)

Thursday, April 14
Toddler: Movement
Primary: Math Part 3: *Memorization and the
Passage to Abstraction*
Elementary: Geometry





Catherine Bayer is the mother of Taylor Bayer, who completed the full 9-year MSGH cycle. Taylor attended independent middle and high schools after leaving MSGH and is currently enrolled at Smith College.

We asked Catherine to respond to the question: What would you like parents to know about an MSGH Montessori education? Here is what she had to say:

WHAT I'D LIKE PARENTS TO KNOW

By Catherine Bayer

Looking back after all these years, I can't help but feel a sense of satisfaction and joy with regard to the choice of a Montessori education for my daughter. In fact, if I had to make a list of a few things I "got right" as a parent, this one would have to be at the top of the list.

The funny thing is, we more or less stumbled into it, knowing next to nothing about Maria Montessori or Montessori philosophy when we first got started. What we really ended up gaining was a Montessori *Childhood*, and that was the prize.

From my current perspective as the parent of a college student, what strikes me most is how terribly short actual childhood is. To give a child the gift of being able to spend those precious years in a loving, secure, ordered, harmonious, stimulating, stress-free and joyful Montessori community environment is like nothing else you can do for her.

“What we really ended up gaining was a Montessori Childhood, and that was the prize.”

Painless Learning: The Child Takes the Lead

In a traditional school, you would count yourself lucky to have a teacher know one unique thing about your child's learning style by November or December each year. In the Montessori classroom, the teacher stays with your child from year to year, so you can be sure that you have someone guiding your child who really knows and understands her. Each child is carefully and quietly observed by the Montessori teaching staff, so they know when to introduce your child to the next step.

The beauty of the system is that *the child takes the lead* - signaling to the teacher when she is ready for the next challenge. Learning then becomes an endless journey of success upon success, joy upon joy, discovery, challenge, and progress. In a traditional classroom when it is time for "Unit 2," "Unit 2" takes priority, not your child's readiness for the new material or concept. A child who is not yet ready for progress in a particular subject area may be labeled "slow," while a child who was ready months earlier may become bored and troublesome. This only creates stress for the child, stress for the parents, stress for the teacher. What a waste! What a shame.

Present Moment Awareness and Concentration

Instead of the traditional approach of learning as preparation for a future test, the Montessori child is always allowed to become fully engaged in "present moment" activity—learning for the sake of learning, for the love of learning—engaged and absorbed in the present moment, the present task and challenge, without any stressful projections about some test at the end of the week, or the nearing end of a semester or keeping up with the little Joneses. In a world where children are

often rushed endlessly from one activity to another, and competition with one's peers has been elevated to insane heights, the Montessori child is allowed the peaceful luxury of being absorbed for as long as is necessary in tasks that challenges her and therefore interest her—moving on to new and more challenging material when her own readiness dictates.

Because there is a range of ages and abilities, a Montessori child learns to be very comfortable with herself and her own present abilities. There are other children doing tasks that she may be not quite be ready for yet, but she knows full well that she is going to get there—and she is comfortable knowing it's not a competition. The mix of ages also allows for each child to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when she is able to assist a younger child with something she has previously mastered.

The "Real World"

Shortly after making the decision to stay with the Montessori approach for the Upper Elementary program, I remember being asked by a co-worker how long I was going to wait before taking my child out of Montessori and putting her into the "real" world. While I must admit that I was *very* tempted to tell that person to "mind his own business," I nevertheless very gracefully and truthfully replied that the Montessori environment actually *is* a "real world environment"—much more so than a traditional educational classroom environment could ever be. The "real world" is not desks all in a row with everyone doing the same work in unison with a leader standing at the front of the room; the real world is constant interaction with other people to find the answers needed to accomplish the goals one has set for the day, for the week, for a lifetime.



At the elementary level, Montessori children have the responsibility of using their day-planners to schedule their own daily workflow. They have learned to work with their classmates to solve problems, learned to find answers to many of their own questions using encyclopedias and other reference tools, rather than developing a teacher-dependent approach to problem solving. They have developed a respect for each other, learned to assist each other courteously, and gained a sense of pride and responsibility toward their shared environment.

3-Year Cycles

I remember well the un-necessary anxiety we had over exactly when would be the right time to "leave" Montessori. Because Middle School in our town started at Grade 6, we seriously considered making the move after the middle year of what would have been Taylor's 3-year Upper Elementary cycle. But she was happy exactly where she was and adamant that she wanted to finish her final year even though she understood she would then face being "the new kid" in Grade 7. We decided to go with the flow of the system and stick it out for that last year. In the process we learned the beauty, wisdom and validity of the 3-year-cycle approach. That final third year of the Upper Elementary cycle gave Taylor the chance to experience new levels of responsibility and gain a greater sense of self-confidence that made her ready and excited about moving onward and upward only one year later.

**“Learning then becomes an
endless journey of
success upon success,
joy upon joy.”**

Alumni

Please share your stories and photos!
We would love to hear from you.
Communication can be sent to
information@msggh.org.

THE ANNUAL FUND: SHOW YOUR COMMUNITY STRENGTH

By Susan Rich-Bye

MSGH is a very special place. That is why you chose to have your child spend his or her time here—learning, growing and exploring. And whether you are a parent, grandparent or alumni parent, we hope you want to spend your time being vital members of the MSGH community. A community thrives on the strength of its members' commitment, and you show that commitment by being involved in our school each and every day in a myriad of ways. Participating in the Annual Fund is an extremely important way to demonstrate your support of our school.

Every donation to the Annual Fund, regardless of the amount, makes a big difference in the lives of the school's students—your children and grandchildren. Annual Fund dollars support important components of the MSGH program for all children, providing scholarships to make our unique educational experience accessible to those who otherwise would not be able to participate in it; ensuring that all classrooms have the materials and programming needed to create stimulating learning environments; offering a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities through field trips, and strengthening the quality of our teaching through professional training.

One of the most important and unique components of the MSGH experience is the diversity of our school population. Students come here from all parts of the globe, and all walks of life. This aspect of school is indeed celebrated by Montessori philosophy and by our school in particular. And as a diverse community, we understand that families come to charitable giving from many points of view and a variety of levels. We would like to stress that it is not the amount of your contribution that matters. What matters most is that everyone participates in the Annual Fund and shows their support of our school.



For some, deciding upon the amount of their contribution is a challenge that hinders their ability to make a gift. You may want to contribute but worry that a donation must be significant to make a difference. This is simply not the case. **A vibrant and strong Annual Fund is made up of contributions both large and small.** You can make a meaningful contribution to the Annual Fund, and stay within your family budget. A donation of even \$5, \$10, or \$25 makes a big difference in our ability to provide the nurturing and unique Montessori experience you have all chosen for your children and grandchildren. Or you can think of your contribution in terms of giving a small amount for each of the 39 weeks of the school year, such as \$1, \$5 or \$10 per week. However you decide upon the amount, the most important thing to remember is that we all need to participate!

“A donation of even \$5, \$10, or \$25 makes a difference...”

This is your chance to participate!

2010-2011 Annual Fund – As of March 21, 2011

The MSGH 2010-2011 Annual Fund is underway and we are off to a great start—we have received over \$38,000 to date in gifts and pledges **thanks to the generosity** of those listed below.

Please remember that fundraising goals are part of our budget and are **earmarked to meet this year's needs**.

CURRENT PARENTS

Sam and Geetha Ahilan
Sahar Al Seesi and Houssam Amer*
Anonymous
Amanda and Scott Aronson*
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Jennifer Apgar and
Michael Christopher*
The Askintowitz Family
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Vidya Sundaram
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Lilian Margolis

ALUMNI

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2010-2011 Annual Fund cont.

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Ruby Tull Arguilla and Brian Tull
Big Y World Class Markets*
Paul Cryan Photography
Carol and Jim Kuszik
Mike and Pat Kuszik
Marianne Craig Moore

IN HONOR OF

Nathaniel and Maia Aronson
Riley Christopher
Riley and Piper Christopher
The Cloud Grandchildren (Danielle,
Sydney, Adam, Scotty and Sandy
Cloud)
Abigail and Keely Hughes
Teresa Reynolds

IN MEMORY OF

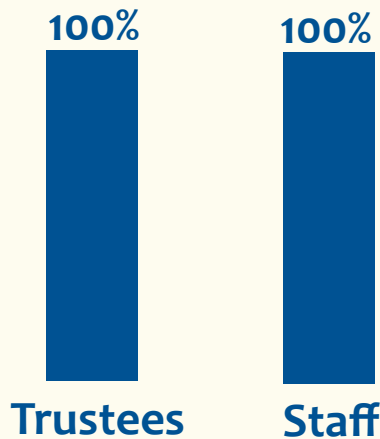
Rithisha Ramesh

MATCHING GIFTS

Aetna Foundation
Arch Re Facultative Underwriters, Inc.
Babson Capital Management LLC
Honeywell
United Health Group
United Technologies Corporation

*Indicates a Leadership Gift
Giving Levels will be published in the
Annual Report.

2010/2011 Annual Fund Participation



How About You?

MSGH Annual Fund



Lend A Hand



Montessori School of GREATER HARTFORD Annual Fund Campaign 2010/2011

Categories of Giving

The Maria Montessori Circle	\$5,000 +	Sustainer	\$500-\$999 (<i>Leadership Level Begins</i>)
The Pink Tower Circle	\$2,500-\$4,999	Patron	\$250-\$499
The Director's Circle	\$1,500-\$2,499	Supporter	up to \$249
Benefactor	\$1,000-\$1,499		

Name(s): _____

(As you wish to appear in the Annual Report)

Maiden Name, if Alumna _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ E-mail _____

_____ *Please initial here if you wish to remain an anonymous donor.*

Please accept my/our gift to MSGH's Annual Fund:

I/We pledge a total gift of \$ _____

Indicate your choice:

Pledge to be fulfilled by June 30, 2011

Check enclosed

Charge my gift

one payment or _____ installments in the months of _____

Payments must be completed by June 30, 2011

VISA MasterCard Discover

Card Number: _____ Expiration date: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

My employer, _____ will match my gift.

(Please enclose your employer's gift form.)

Gift of Stock (Advancement Office will send information.)

(over)

Please designate my gift to the following fund:

- Classroom Materials and Programming
- Faculty Professional Development
- Financial Assistance
- Where MSGH needs it most

Please apply \$_____ of my gift to the Endowment

Should any fund become oversubscribed, MSGH will use the gift where it is most needed.

My gift is:

- In Honor of: _____
- In Memory of: _____

Affiliation (Please check all that apply.):

- Alumnus/a
- Grandparent
- Current Parent
- Grandparent of Alumnus/a
- Parent of Alumnus/a
- Friend

**If more convenient, you may donate online at:
www.msgh.org >Support MSGH >Give Online**

For questions, please call Susan Rich-Bye, Director of Advancement 860.236.4565 ext. 24

Thank you for supporting the Montessori School of Greater Hartford!

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