



MSGH

Follow the Child
Timeless Foundations for
a Changing World

WINTER EDITION

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Montessori Matters More Than Ever



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MSGH, in its 61st year, is a model of Montessori excellence and a sanctuary for children to grow to be their best selves.

In a time that seems defined by insistent speed and artificial intelligence, our world can feel hectic and uncertain. Traditional educational models, which were designed for a more predictable industrial age, can struggle to prepare children for a future that defies prediction. Montessori pedagogy, now over a century old, offers not just an alternative, but a necessary shift. Montessori emphasizes trust in the child's true nature which when cultivated develops individuals who are **adaptable, resilient, and compassionate.**

This community publication gives staff and parent writers an opportunity to bring to life their firsthand experience of how Montessori and the child intersect at MSGH. Leslie Wetmore writes an illustrative article on what it really means “to follow the child” by explaining children’s need for clear boundaries. Dr. Montessori believed that children possess an “inner teacher” – an innate, biological drive for development and learning that flourishes with the right mix of freedom and discipline. In her piece, Renee Lockhart further expands on getting the balance right when she writes about freedom and responsibility. The Montessori prepared environment provides boundaries within which children make meaningful choices. They learn to manage their time, focus on tasks that capture their interest, and navigate social interactions naturally. This autonomy prepares them for an adult world that requires **self-direction, personal accountability, and collaboration with others.**

Collaboration and community take on an outsized role as students enter adolescence. Their drive for peer interaction and acceptance is intense.

Lauren Casey illuminates life in the Adolescent Program for us in her piece, “Prepared for the Future, Rooted in the Present.” Adolescents and their teachers work side by side, on a shared journey of building community, and caring for others and the environment. Students thrive when academic work is woven into community living and purposeful work. The combination builds feelings of **capability and connection**. The pace is steady and deliberate, allowing the young adult to emerge trusting in themselves and the contribution they can make.

Montessori has stood the test of time, and time has not changed its tenets. Why? Because it is rooted in human nature. It leverages the immense gifts nature has bestowed on the child to learn and grow to be their optimum selves. This doesn't happen by accident. The environment and the adult need some commonsense preparation. Of course, this is what we do expertly at MSGH, though it can be done anywhere. Read Moriah Jackson's observations of the Toddler community, which honestly could be true of any level or happen in any environment. In her article, Toko Odorczyk aptly extols the value of allowing children room to fumble, again an approach that can be used regardless of age or environment.



We are honored and excited that this edition also has parent and grandparent contributors. For example, Isabel Harvey Camino and Shane Chase (parents of Nico, Diego and Javier) bring their experience of a technologically saturated world and workplace into focus as they consider their sons' immersion in a non-tech, Montessori environment. They do a wonderful job linking Montessori's goals for human development as the best preparation for the evolving workplace, where skills like **critical thinking** and **creativity** will bring high value.

Dr. Maria Montessori wrote, "**It is absolutely certain that the secret of future human power lies hidden within humanity as it develops, within young people.**"

I invite you to explore the unique journey detailed within these pages and discover why the human-centric approach of Montessori matters now more than ever as the best preparation for the unpredictable future.

Mary

Silent Journey: A Child's Perspective



Every three years, our community takes a moment to slow down and enter the child's world through Silent Journey & Discovery. This isn't a presentation or a tour; it is an experience that encourages adults to pause, let go of our assumptions, and observe.

This year, parents, caregivers, and new families came together for a two-part journey that began in silence.

The Silent Journey

That silence is important.

Participants enter the classrooms just as the children do, without instructions, explanations, or someone directing their attention. They move slowly through the spaces, noticing the arrangement of the shelves, the care in each material, and the calm atmosphere of the room. There is no agenda; just being present.

In that quiet, something changes.

Without the pressure to hurry or interpret, adults start to see what children experience daily: a space designed with purpose, where every object has a role and every action matters.

What once seemed simple starts to feel thoughtful and complex. Repetition transforms from a routine into practice. Choice shifts to focus. Movement evolves into learning.

As one parent shared, **“The silence changed everything. When I slowed down, I finally saw what my child sees, a world made for discovery.”**

Another reflected, “I had no idea how academic this really is. There is so much going on beneath the surface.”

The Discovery

The second part of the experience, Discovery, invites adults to fully occupy their child's space.

They sit at small tables, choose activities, and learn from Montessori guides. Hands start to move. Pieces come together. Slowly, understanding grows not because someone explains it, but because it is felt.

For many, this is the moment it clicks.

The materials no longer feel strange. The work becomes engaging. Time passes quickly. 6

Adults experience the same focus, challenge, and quiet satisfaction that their children feel every day.

One parent put it well: **“I wish I had learned this way. I’m so incredibly grateful my child does.”**

By the end of Discovery, the bigger picture becomes clear-how early sensory work leads to writing, how hands-on math turns into abstract thinking, how language builds confidence and voice. What once appeared as play now seems deeper: meaningful, intentional work.

**"The Silent Journey invited me to slow down.
The Discovery helped me understand how
intentionally Montessori supports my child’s
growth, independence, and sense of purpose."**

-MSGH Parent





I wish I had learned this way.
I'm incredibly grateful my child does.

-MSGH Parent





Don't Follow the Child Off the Cliff

By Leslie Wetmore, Primary Guide

When I took my Montessori teacher training, my trainer, Silvia Dubovoy, said something I still think about, even now. It was a discussion on Freedom and Discipline, about how to balance two (seemingly) opposite ideas. “We follow the child,” she said, “but—” she added, with her customary knowing twinkle, “We do not follow the child off a cliff.”

Anyone familiar with Montessori has heard the first phrase before – it’s even the title of our school’s most significant publication – but the second phrase is the one that still comes to my mind, time and time again. In Montessori philosophy, we say we “follow the child” because, rather than teaching every child the same lesson at the same time, we follow each child’s interests and needs. We hold to the idea that the child ‘tells us’ what they’re looking for developmentally through their behavior and their engagement in the environment. However, in this case, Silvia was alluding to the mistaken belief that the “freedom” of a Montessori classroom means the children can do whatever they want, whenever they want.

In Montessori theory, there is strong emphasis on freedom: in the classroom, children are encouraged to make their own choices of what to work on and how long to work on it, to choose where to work and with whom, and are allowed to exist, as much as possible, without an adult prompting or correcting them. All of these freedoms are some of the first things you may notice when you walk into a classroom.

What is much harder to see, however, is that the freedom our children enjoy is freedom within limits. A child can choose what activity to use – as long as they have had a lesson on it, and no one else is using it. They can work with it for as long as they like – as long as they use it purposefully and do not damage the material. A child can walk freely around the classroom – as long as they walk with control, not run. The children can speak together as they please – as long as they are kind, respectful, and not disturbing anyone’s work. These limits – the rules of the classroom – are what make all these seemingly amazing freedoms possible.

Children in this stage of development are in the Sensitive Period of Order; at this time of their lives, they are driven to understand how the world works, whether the “rules” they discover are true all the time, and if they apply to everyone.

Their brains are focused on taking in the seeming chaos around them and finding the

A child whose environment is consistent and predictable is a confident, comfortable child; they begin to construct their own internal order through experiencing the structure of the world around them.

Instead of relying solely on the adult to impose rules and order on their choices, children start to notice patterns and to choose actions not out of whim or impulse, but because it will result in the best outcome in that moment, for themselves and the others around them.

The motivation to stay within the classroom's limits, to take on responsibility for the people and things in it, begins to come from within the child – they follow the rules because they want to (or at least because they prefer that outcome to the alternative). These are children who – in general – can be trusted to “do the right thing” even if an adult is not actively watching, because they truly understand why the limits are in place, and take pride in being conscientious members of their community.

Contrast this outcome with two other standard methods of disciplining children. Authoritarian discipline relies on adults demanding unquestioning obedience from children, and the rules are often enforced arbitrarily (“Because I said so, that’s why!”). These adults do not follow the child at all – they demand the child follow the path they set, and call them out for misbehaving at the first sign of deviation.

Children who experience authoritarian discipline follow the rules not because they understand or care about the situation, but because they fear punishment or the disapproval of their authority figures;

moreover, they are doubtful to continue following the rules if they think they can “get away with it,” and tend to sneak around or shift blame out of sheer self-defense.

Permissive discipline, on the other hand, is typified by adults who really do allow children to do whatever they want. There’s a feeling that giving in is “easier” than setting limits or saying no, and that a child who constantly gets their way must necessarily be happier. These are adults who follow the child, yes, but they follow that child even if they’re headed right off that cliff, because that’s what the child “wants.” However, children who experience permissive discipline, with no boundaries and no structure, are actually quite insecure.

Their Sensitive Period of Order is craving to know what the rules of their world are, and to be given the message that there are none leaves children feeling completely adrift, with no “guidrails” to help them make choices that will actually help them. Permissive discipline also deprives the child of valuable experience in learning how to manage their emotions in the face of disappointment. After all, like it or not we all have to hear “no” in our lives, and without the practiced ability to self-regulate and accept that sometimes we have to pivot and go with the flow, life can be nigh impossible.

Montessori philosophy walks a fine line in the middle, following the child but still guiding them as needed. Freedom within limits is akin to training wheels for free will: the child is given as much independence and choice as they can handle, but still has a thoughtful structure to ensure they do not come to harm.





The limits change and grow with them, with the ultimate goal being that the adult gives over control bit by bit, until at last the child can do it for themselves.

So when Silvia delivered her memorable quip, it was with this in mind. We follow what the child desires in that moment of their development, but we always remember that if we want them to be successful, we must provide them with what they need, not necessarily what they think they want. So, please – give your child as much independence as possible at home. Treat them with compassion and respect. But do give them boundaries and remind them of the rules; set limits and allow them to explore within them. **Follow the child** as they explore and grow – **but do not follow the child off a cliff.**

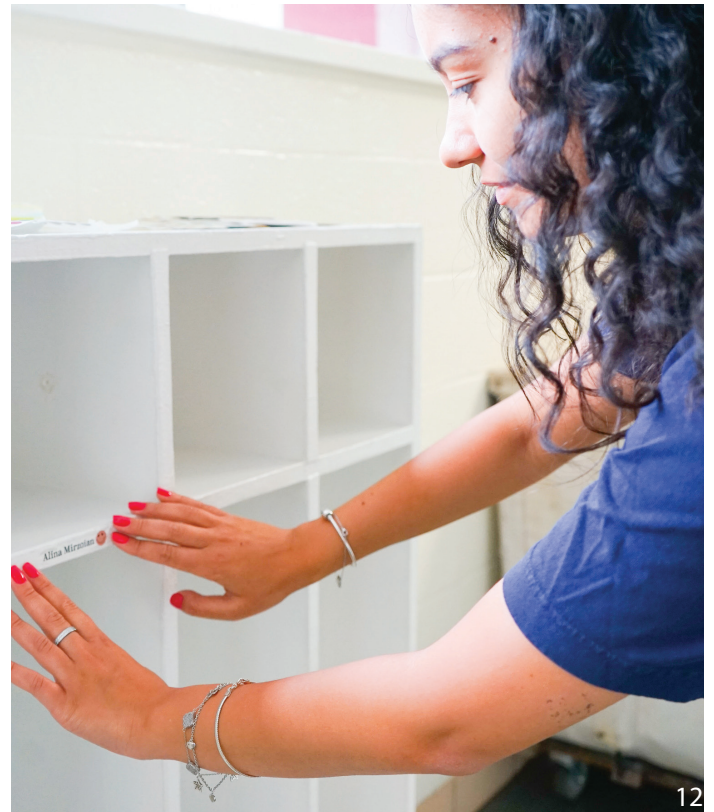


First Day of School

Long before the first students arrived, the staff at MSGH were thoughtfully preparing the environments to welcome each child. Shelves were carefully dusted, materials intentionally arranged, cubbies labeled with name tags, and lessons prepared with the individual child in mind. Teachers also connected with families in advance, seeking to understand each child's rhythms, interests, and needs so that home and school work in partnership from the very beginning.



When the first day of school arrived, the atmosphere was one of calm excitement. Students returned to the MSGH community eager to reconnect and begin the year, and teachers welcomed them with warmth and familiarity. This careful preparation of the environment and relationships sets the foundation for a year of meaningful work, growth, and shared discovery, supporting each child in the Montessori way.



Everyday Moments



Stewarding the Mission into the Future

By Rebecca London, Board Chair



The MSGH Board of Trustees is proud to launch our new Strategic Plan. Strategic planning is one of the most essential responsibilities of a board of trustees and we have taken on this responsibility with the utmost seriousness and dedication to our community. Our new Strategic Plan will guide the work of the board for the next five years and is the product of an intensive, yearlong, reflective process that included all MSGH constituencies. We want to thank you for your participation in helping us grapple with what makes MSGH the strong, vibrant and exceptional community we love and what will strengthen, protect and enhance our school in the future. Through focus groups, surveys, generative board sessions and more, we refined the thoughts and feedback gathered and are excited to share with you the strategic priorities we will be focusing on in the coming years.

Our new Strategic Plan is made up of four central goals; each of which focus on continuing and expanding both MSGH's excellence and ability to meet the needs of our community to the fullest. The following four goals will serve as the guide star of our work in the coming years:



Sustainability: While MSGH is in a stable position, we must continue to safeguard the sustainability of the school by enhancing our financial security and ensuring we are sustaining and improving our school in a way that is aligned with Montessori philosophy and pedagogy.



Education and Communication: It is critical that our parents (and other stakeholders) understand AMI Montessori pedagogy and how it informs our teaching and other decisions. We must assess and analyze the school's communications mechanisms to ensure we reach our intended audiences with the information they need at the right time.



Facilities: Beyond regular maintenance of our facility, we must navigate the significant risks and capital improvements needed to ensure our space is safe, hardened, and supports our students' needs year-round and through challenging climate scenarios.



Daily Operations: This goal seeks to ensure that we continue to manage MSGH in a fiscally responsible way that successfully oversees daily operations.

These goals are built out with more detailed initiatives, which in turn are tracked by Key Performance Indicators. In this way we ensure that we are holding ourselves accountable to the strategic goals and we will be able to monitor and communicate where we are on the journey. You can find more information about the strategic priorities and the supporting initiatives on the MSGH website.

This is a five-year plan as much of the work outlined will require time and thoughtful effort in the direction of our shared goals. This plan will act as our signposts to ensure that every decision we make is in accordance with the path we have set for ourselves. We look forward to partnering with you and to sharing important milestones along the way. Again, we thank you for your participation in this process, for your commitment to MSGH, and to your continued partnership in ensuring that MSGH continues to be a beacon of AMI Montessori excellence and a warm and supportive space for every member of our community.

"Our role as a Board is not to change what makes this school special, but to protect it, and to ensure it continues to serve children well in a world that is constantly evolving."



Alumni Spotlight



Guess, where our hearts are...

It feels like just yesterday that we left—and at the same time, like forever ago.

We miss you all, we miss WCHA and the States, and at the same time we're getting used to our "old new" life here in Germany.

The kids have settled in quite well, Matti more easily than Mila, who wouldn't hesitate for a second to take the next flight back to what she calls home (and honestly, none of us would mind either). Still, she's made new friends at her school and loves her dance and swim classes, as well as the fact that our neighbors have dogs—and even a pony she can help take care of.

Matti enjoys his newly gained independence: he rides his bike to school, meets friends who live just around the corner spontaneously in the afternoons, and loves the freedom that comes with it. He's also enjoying his flag football team (yes—in Germany!) and being one of the very best students in English and Spanish.

Simon and I are staying busy with the reconstruction work at home, along with the usual thousand things that need to be done alongside work and professional training.

We're truly looking forward to a few quiet days and will be celebrating Christmas with our families. We wish you a very happy festive season and a smooth transition into 2026. We'd love to hear from you.

XXX.

The Kolbeck family

"Looking back, Montessori shaped the way I approach the world. It taught me to be curious, adaptable and confident in new situations. These are qualities that guide me in my career and in life."

-MSGH Alumni

“Montessori didn’t just teach me facts, it taught me how to think.”
-MSGH Alumni



Share your memories with us, here!

Alumni, you were once here at MSGH making friendships, bonds, and memories. By stringing those meaningful stories together, we are building our history.



Our recent Alumni Gathering at Yemera Coffee was a lovely moment of reconnection, filled with familiar faces, shared stories, and plenty of smiles. We are always grateful for the chance to welcome our alumni back and celebrate the lasting bonds of our community.

We LOVE Our Family Association!

The Family Association (FA) has been busy this fall organizing community events for families! Since the beginning of the year, our FA leadership, Christine, Devon, Isabel, and Palka have planned many opportunities for our community to come together. So far this year, the FA has hosted monthly coffee hours, supplied a pumpkin for each child, planned a wonderful Fall Fest, hosted open meetings, and so much more!



In addition, our amazing classroom representatives hosted fall classroom socials with fun opportunities for children and their families to gather outside of school. MSGH is so grateful to our FA Leadership and to every one of our classroom representatives for their work on building community so far this year.



There are still more FA events to come in the spring from monthly coffee hours to spring socials. Look in the weekly bulletin for FA events and details. We hope you will join the FA at one of the many community gatherings that they offer!

There are still opportunities to get involved in the FA. If you are interested in getting more involved, email FamilyAssociation@msgh.org.



Freedom and Responsibility:

By Renee Lockhart, Primary Guide and AMI Consultant

One of the cornerstones of Montessori education is the balance between freedom and responsibility. In a Montessori classroom, freedom means that children are given meaningful choices about their work and how they spend their time. This is not unlimited freedom, but freedom within clear and supportive limits. Children may choose to work with Math, Language, Sensorial, or Practical life materials, following their natural curiosity and internal motivation.

Responsibility naturally accompanies this freedom. With each choice, the child learns to care for the materials, respect their peers, and contribute thoughtfully to the classroom community. Choosing a material means using it with intention and returning it in a condition that allows the next child to use it with the same care. Through this process, children develop accountability, respect, and an awareness of how their actions affect others.



Freedom without responsibility can lead to disorder, while responsibility without freedom can feel restrictive. When these two elements are held in balance, children thrive. They develop self-discipline, confidence, and the ability to manage themselves within a group, skills that support both independence and belonging.



Montessori: Prepared for the Future, Rooted in the Present

By Lauren Casey, Adolescent Guide



If you happen to be on the farm around 8:30 a.m. on a weekday morning, you'll notice a lot of movement and a lot of noise. You may notice a student pushing a wheelbarrow through the barn, or one preparing to milk a goat; you may notice a student standing over the stove with a thermometer, carefully watching for the exact degree; you may notice a student rolling logs of chèvre, preparing a morning snack, or crafting an item for an upcoming farm stand sale. While working independently, they are moving toward a common goal, with a shared purpose.

This understanding of independence as relational is not new. Maria Montessori wrote extensively about the individual's growth within a community, particularly through meaningful work. Studs Terkel later captured this same sentiment when he observed, "The individual discovers his strength because he has, along the way, discovered others share his feelings—he is not alone, and thus, a community is formed." Here, independence is understood not as isolation, but as interdependence practiced with intention.



As if navigating adolescence were not complex enough, today's young people are growing up in a world defined less by certainty and more by change. There is less to be prepared for, which is why Montessori education does not prepare students for a single outcome, but instead equips them with the capacities for decision-making, adaptability, and compassion. Through purposeful work of the head, hands, and heart, students learn to follow their interests, hold autonomy over their education, and explore concepts that extend well beyond academic lessons. They learn to plan, experiment, adjust, encounter setbacks, and repair, not only in their work, but in their relationships and sense of self. These lessons stay with them, shaping their values long after the work is complete.

*Artwork by adolescent students.

Montessori understood adolescence as a time of social turbulence. Young people are seeking meaning, dignity, and opportunities to contribute to something greater than themselves. The work they do matters. Yes, the work is to cook, and that work feeds others. Yes, the work is to create products or explore new skills, and that work serves a community. Yes, the work is to care for animals, and that work sustains a system. In the prepared environment of the farm, students are entrusted with real responsibility, which in turn cultivates confidence and leads to the valorization of the adolescent.

A Montessori community rests on the belief that humans possess the capacity to grow toward competence, care, and connection. While we cannot control the outcomes our students will face in the future, we can create conditions today in which they learn to trust, and question, themselves and one another. We believe in steadiness, patience, and the power of becoming in a world that often communicates urgency and fear. In doing so, we uphold a deliberate commitment to preparing young people to meet the future with competence, conscience, and hope.

If you're lucky enough to be on the farm at 8:30 a.m. on a weekday morning, you'll notice that the work continues. You'll notice the noise and the movement, and perhaps, too, the quiet competence taking root, as the future is practiced one purposeful act at a time.





Learning is led from within the child

By Moriah Jackson, Toddler Guide

We are continually reminded of how deeply toddlers observe and engage with the world around them. Their learning is rooted in noticing small changes in the environment, textures in their hands, movement outdoors, and the quiet rhythms of daily life. These moments of observation become invitations for exploration, language, and connection.

As time unfolds, toddlers become part of the community, developing relationships, finding their rhythm, and letting curiosity guide them toward purposeful work. In a Montessori environment, learning is not rushed or prescribed; it emerges through choice, repetition, and concentration. The classroom is carefully prepared to support this process, and the guide and assistant observe with intention, seeking to understand what work each child is drawn to and why.

Dr. Maria Montessori spoke of an “inner teacher” that guides each child’s development. In the Toddler Community, this inner guide is visible in the way children return again and again to a particular material or activity, refining a movement or deepening a skill until their inner need is met. This repetition is not incidental, it is essential. It reflects the child’s innate drive toward mastery and self-construction.

Within the classroom, adults hold clear and consistent boundaries that support safety, respect, and care for the community. Within these limits, toddlers are offered meaningful freedom: freedom to choose their work, to move with purpose, to express themselves, and to engage fully in the present moment. This balance of freedom and structure nurtures confidence, autonomy, and a growing sense of self.

Through the fall, parents had the opportunity to observe the classroom and experience a glimpse of the children’s mornings. On display were both the quiet intensity of focused work and the joy found in shared moments, gathering for song, movement, and meals. Together, these experiences form the foundation of a vibrant and thoughtful learning community.

Upcoming: Parent Information Series

Toddler: Practical Life
Thursday, March 19
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.



A Personal Note From an MSGH Grandparent

By Annelieke Schauer

As I watch my grandchildren grow, I've been able to see patterns in my family that were not necessarily visible to me before. I don't honestly know why I missed them; they are so clear to me now, but for me, this looking backward as well as forward is proving to be interesting. For example, my childhood was shaped by parents who were in Occupied Netherlands during WWII with all of that unresolved trauma. And how I was raised deeply influenced how I raised my children, either in line with my childhood or in opposition to it. My husband would have his own story on this. And my children are raising their children with this history, as well as experiencing new influences. And then of course, there is genetics to consider.



Pretty interesting, right?

I know this is true for all of us. And as these insights are coming, I can see they are made much easier for me because of the presence of my grandchildren in my life. The evidence is right in front of me so to speak. Part of being an Elder, I have read, because that's who I am now, with all of my accumulated wisdom, is actually doing this work, looking back, gaining new understanding about old events. My point is that the presence of my grandchildren is helping to unlock some of these insights. My gratitude for them is boundless.

And for the reason above, because of the love my husband and I have for them, the ability to watch them thrive, mess up, try again, learn what it means to be a kind person, learn what it's going to take to care for the earth, to live and work with others, be a friend, be a leader, we are willing to help support their incredible school, MSGH. The excellent education of these little beings is our highest priority as grandparents.

Join us for
a lovely morning

*Grandparent's
Tea*

Tuesday, 9:00
March 10 10:30 a.m.

141 North Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

RSVP : alexandrar@msgh.org

Get to know your fellow
grandparents while enjoying a
cup of tea, a delicious treat, and a
tour of our school.

Elder Friends, I am dispensing with the word 'Senior' forever. It carries none of the gravitas and wisdom we hold. And Elders, if you can, help the school. You will feel great about it and know that you are nourishing every single child there. My grandparents were all in Europe, so they were absent from my life. I missed them very much. But now I get to live out what I wished for years ago. What a gift it is.

See you soon,

Annelieke, Grandparent of five fabulous grandchildren,
including three MSGH Montessorians

Why Should Independent Children be Dependent on Any Technology?

By Shane Chase & Isabel Harvey Camino, MSGH Parents



“Everyone is talking about AI and we cannot ignore it...” But can we?

Maybe.

When our kids first started in Montessori we had very limited knowledge of the philosophy behind the pedagogy, the intention and the purpose. Coming out of quarantine—remember that?—all we knew was that it promised to foster independence from early childhood. Our only reference point was that our kid’s uncle went to Montessori in pre-school and he knew how to grab a knife correctly when his older siblings didn’t. On our first tour while active classrooms were still closed off from visits, we observed mainly pretty materials and a well taken care of school with a beautiful work environment. We liked what we heard and saw, but really didn’t know what we, and more importantly, our child would be in for.

As the years have gone by and we have experienced our now 3 children develop, we keep understanding the effects of the environment on our kids better and better. The curiosity for learning all other parents talk about. The gradual and then sudden advancements made from slow, repetitive, effortful practice and the self-awareness and self-worth when they achieve those new goals.

And the ability to have their own opinions and think critically at such an early age. This is the independence MSGH told us about, promised us as parents, and subsequently delivered.

As professionals, we have been working on Innovation and Technology for some years. We are in constant contact with Generative AI (think ChatGPT, Gemini, Co-pilot, Claude, and we’re encouraged to use it at work. “It will make things easier,” they say, “you can be faster,” “you can augment yourself,” “it’s going to replace you UNLESS you learn to use it.” But all the messages that come across in the workplace make it seem like there’s no other way and AI will take over efficiency and even creative work. The ultimate goal being increased productivity.

For Isabel, after almost 2 years of intense use of AI, I felt like my brain started to slow down. I was encouraged to use it for everything to augment my skills and capabilities, so I started building complex tasks, agendas, and things as easy as emails.

I’ve gone from - this is awesome, to, I need to use AI for my email might not be perfect.

My mind started to become weaker and I felt a level of not trusting my instinct as much anymore. So I talked to some co-workers about it, ultimately deciding I wouldn’t use it to replace my creativity, correct my ideas or build my sessions. I would only use it for creating different versions of the same work for different stakeholders - which sometimes can be extremely time consuming and redundant in the workplace.

I also found myself in need of more articulation, and reading rather than giving it to an AI bot to do it. I started to learn that in order to give AI a specific instruction I needed to be extremely clear in my thoughts, and that doesn't come from using AI, that comes from reading, writing, practicing. After a few months I got confirmation from a few coworkers that were feeling the same way. In order to direct the AI to augment their work, they needed to do even more work to get prepared, generate instructions that are more evolved to get more quality work and spend a lot of time correcting results. Ultimately, I still believe GenAI is pretty impressive as a human discovery, yet I use it with caution.

For Shane, the use of AI reaffirmed my organizational pet theory that the only thing that scales quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently in the workplace is confusion. I found myself getting inundated with more work to review than ever from my peers and boss and the more I read, the less I understood. With a search engine you get results, with AI you get answers and what I realized is that myself and my colleagues were losing sight of the underlying questions that we were initially seeking to understand in the first place. In lieu of better questions, my main use of AI became generating bullet points to appease my boss's request for constant updates, knowing it was a 50/50 chance he would even read those before summarizing them using AI...

We immediately started to compare this to how our kids are learning in school, without any technology, but where there is deep development of their thinking with core understanding of concepts, practice of math and handwriting, along with use of imagination and critical thinking. Maria Montessori said, "The hands are the instruments of man's intelligence," and we're understanding that sentence each day more and more. Children who know how to write and use their hands to put their thoughts together once and again and again, independent of any one technology, will be able to better formulate questions, develop their own answers, critically review results and ultimately direct AI or whatever new technology comes their way.

Something we have to understand about GenAI is that every answer is the most statistically probable character, word, sentence, paragraph and idea, based on patterns in its training data. Imagine we are giving the kids a tool where the output is the "most probable" rather than what they are saying with their ideas, questions, and personality embedded. We want our children to follow their natural instincts. They should explore, learn, think, express, and support their ideas. This will help them build the confidence to create the world they envision, instead of just conforming to what already exists.

We chose MSGH nearly 4 years ago from knowing nothing more than it intended to foster independence from early childhood. And we will stay longer given its steadfast commitment to our children, agnostic of the newest technological trend or advancement.

Definitely.



SLOW Down.

By Laurie Garrec,
Marketing & Communications Coordinator



When I first arrived at MSGH, I thought I was here to take pictures, snap, frame, move on. Instead, I found myself learning how to truly see.

Being immersed in the daily rhythm of the school has shifted my understanding of Montessori in ways I didn't expect. It has been humbling, joyful, and deeply meaningful in subtle ways. Most of all, it has asked something of me that does not come naturally... to slow down.

Slowing down has never been easy for me. I move quickly, walking fast, thinking fast, stepping in to help. Montessori invites another way of being. A more intentional pace. And time and again, the children gently lead me there.

These small, warm reminders have shifted everything. When I slow down, I stop trying to capture moments and begin truly noticing them.

That is where the magic lives.

Peeking into a classroom doorway, I notice a toddler carefully placing pinecones into a basket, in deep concentration. A primary student pours water with such steadiness that the room seems to quiet around her. An elementary student works intently among maps and books, a mess of materials around him, absorbed in independent thought.

This is the child's great work, simple on the surface, profound in its purpose.

Through my lens, I witness moments of deep engagement, where the world seems to pause and a child is fully connected to their work.

When I allow myself to notice, I feel honored to be present.

My role may be marketing, but it is also something more human. It is connection. It is presence. It is sharing laughter on the playground, celebrating a finished piece of work, and witnessing a lesson unfold just as it was meant to.

Once known as "the camera lady," now, instead of shying away from me, the children welcome me. They show me their work, not for the photograph, but because they know I care. Because they know

I see them.

I see their curiosity and pride. I see them discovering who they are.



Being here has given me a new lens. At MSGH, when I pause, observe, and follow the child, the world opens up. And through my lens, I am grateful to share that world with you.



Facilities Update: A Facelift for the Hallway

At MSGH we are consistently upgrading our facilities with a view to improving program, safety, comfort level and aesthetics. Over the summer, a long-planned ceiling project was completed in the main hallway, extending approximately 200 feet through the Toddler and Primary wing. The new dropped ceiling boasts efficient (harvests daylight) motion sensor lighting. All the cabling (electric, security, phone, internet, fire alarm, intercom, etc.) is now housed above the ceiling. This work was carried out in partnership with MSGH's Facilities Committee and overseen by our Facilities Manager, Mr. Billy. Their thoughtful planning and dedication have created a cleaner, brighter, and more welcoming environment for students, families, and staff. The next phase is already underway, continuing the "facelift" in the main lobby ceiling.



From Parent to Observer: A Deeper Appreciation

By Vanessa A. Sparagna, MSGH Parent

Dear Montessori School of Greater Hartford Community,

I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to shadow as a substitute across the different Montessori cycles and classrooms at MSGH.

Due to an unexpected change in my career path, I found myself in a position to explore this opportunity, and I am truly thankful that it led me to spend time within the MSGH classrooms. What began as a moment of transition quickly became an incredibly meaningful and affirming experience.

Spending time in each environment allowed me to observe the care, intention, and respect shown to the children at every level. Seeing the Montessori philosophy in action, from the calm focus within the classrooms to the independence and confidence encouraged in the children, was both inspiring and eye-opening.

I also gained a new and deeper appreciation for the teachers and assistants who support these classrooms each day. The patience, dedication, collaboration, and thoughtfulness demonstrated by the adults in each environment left a lasting impression on me. The work being done is both purposeful and impactful, and it does not go unnoticed.

I am especially thankful to the teachers and staff who welcomed me so warmly, took the time to answer my questions, and allowed me to learn by observing their daily routines and interactions. Each classroom offered a unique perspective, and I gained a greater understanding of how the Montessori approach evolves across cycles while remaining rooted in the same core values of respect, curiosity, and purposeful work.

This experience has been both educational and meaningful, and I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of the MSGH community, even in a small way on the other side of things and not just as a parent. Thank you for the trust, guidance, and support that was extended to me during my time shadowing.

*With appreciation,
Vanessa A. Sparagna*

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Garden Party

Each September, we gather for one of our cherished traditions, the annual Garden Party. This community potluck brings together new and returning families, students, and staff for an evening of shared food, conversation, and connection. Set against the backdrop of late summer, the Garden Party reflects the heart of MSGH as a place where relationships matter and a sense of belonging is carefully nurtured. Moments like these remind us that our community is built not only through learning but through coming together to cultivate connections.



Everyday Moments





The Elementary Classroom

By Sarah McCabe,
Upper Elementary Guide

Cosmic Education guides the Elementary classroom and represents Montessori's beautiful way of presenting the big picture of the universe.

Through this approach, children come to understand how people, places, sciences, and stories are deeply interconnected. At its core, Cosmic Education

is a uniquely Montessori framework that invites children to see the universe as an ordered, interdependent whole and to understand their own role and responsibility within it. Using age appropriate narratives, integrated lessons, and multidisciplinary projects, Cosmic Education helps students develop meaning, curiosity, and a sense of responsibility for the world they inherit. By exploring how human choices shape the world, children begin to develop ethical awareness, global perspective, and a sense of purpose that becomes especially important as they approach adolescence.

In a nine to twelve Upper Elementary classroom, cosmic work takes the form of sustained, hands on exploration. Students engage with timelines that trace human inventions, experiments that reveal natural laws, maps that bring geography to life, and projects that allow them to contribute meaningfully to the classroom community. Research on experiential and project based learning shows that this kind of active engagement strengthens understanding and supports academic outcomes, particularly in science and problem solving.

A core Montessori practice is offering students freedom within clear limits. When children are given meaningful choices and learn to manage their own time, they develop intrinsic motivation, persistence, and executive function skills. Research consistently shows that autonomy supportive instruction and meaningful choice increase both motivation and learning. These capacities form an essential foundation for lifelong learning and responsible participation in the world.

Supporting Work Management and Academic Alignment

In our classroom, students gradually take greater ownership of their learning by planning and prioritizing their work with guidance and reflection. Together, we look at the full scope of their week, considering both academic expectations and areas of personal curiosity, and work to balance the two. Rather than directing every step, the teacher supports students in learning how to set goals, monitor progress, and make adjustments when needed. Over time, students become more confident in approaching long term projects, breaking work into manageable steps, and advocating for support when challenges arise. This shared process helps children understand that organization and flexibility can coexist, and that their choices directly influence their growth and success.



Upcoming: Parent Information Series

Elementary: Math
Wednesday, March 25
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Partnering with Families to Support Independence

When school and home share a common understanding of independence, children experience a sense of consistency that strengthens both confidence and responsibility. Families can support this development by offering limited choices that encourage ownership, providing simple tools such as planners or checklists to support time management, and creating an organized, consistent workspace that fosters focus and pride in effort. Thoughtful reflection at home, through simple questions about what went well or what could be approached differently, further supports children in developing self awareness and resilience.

Together, these practices reinforce the core aims of Cosmic Education: nurturing confident, curious, capable learners who understand their place in the world and their responsibility within it.



Gifting the Child the Opportunity to Fumble

By Toko Odorczyk, AMI Auxiliary Trainer



Gifting the child the opportunity to explore and fumble means giving them the space to experiment, make mistakes, and figure things out for themselves. It is easy to want to step in and make things smoother for our children. These gestures often come from love and a genuine desire to help. We tie the laces when we are rushing out the door, carry the cup to avoid a spill, or answer a question before a child has had time to wonder. Yet in Montessori, we understand that one of the most meaningful gifts we can offer a child is the room to explore, to fumble a little, and to try again.

Dr. Maria Montessori reminds us, “Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed” (The Absorbent Mind). This guidance asks us to pause, to observe, and to trust the child’s process rather than rushing toward a polished result.

Children learn by doing. They make sense of the world through real experiences, not through perfect outcomes.

When a toddler pours water and half of it ends up on the tray, something important is happening. When a three-year-old insists on dressing independently and the sweater goes on backward, that moment matters far more than efficiency. These early struggles strengthen coordination, patience, and self-correction. They also build something deeper, the quiet inner message of “I can figure this out.”

As children grow, this kind of experimentation changes shape, but it never stops being essential. For the elementary child, fumbling often happens through big ideas. They begin a research project that grows larger than expected.

They redraw a map several times because accuracy matters deeply to them. They attempt to solve a math problem in a way that does not quite work, only to discover a clearer path the second or third time.

When we allow children to work through these moments, we support the development of flexibility, curiosity, and the willingness to revise one’s thinking.

By adolescence, fumbling takes on new forms. A young person may step into a leadership role and realize it is more complex than it appeared from the outside. They may attempt to organize their time and learn that this, too, takes practice. They may pour themselves into a project and still find that the outcome falls short of their vision.

These are not failures. These are the lived experiences that build resilience, empathy, and adaptability. These qualities prepare them for adult life far more effectively than constant intervention ever could.



Allowing a child to explore and fumble is not a burden or an inconvenience. It is a gift. It is one of the most powerful ways we support their development, not into perfect performers, but into capable, adaptable, and wholehearted human beings. Every spill, misstep, and imperfect attempt is practice for facing life's uncertainties with confidence, resilience, and curiosity.

"Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Across every stage of development, the message remains consistent. When we give children space to struggle just enough, we are not abandoning them. We are trusting them. Children feel that trust, and it strengthens them from within.

Our children are growing up in a world of rapid change, shifting expectations, and technologies we ourselves are still learning to navigate. We cannot predict the exact challenges they will face. What we can do is prepare them to meet the unknown with confidence and curiosity. That preparation begins in the small, everyday moments: the spill they wipe up, the project that needs reworking, the friendship that requires honest communication, the idea that takes several attempts before it feels right.



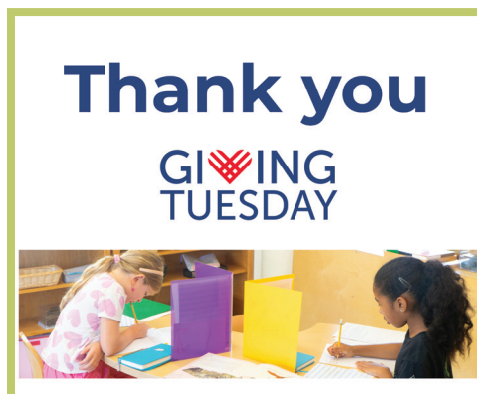
MSGH Celebrates International Peace Day



In September, students and staff gathered at our West Hartford campus to honor the United Nations International Day of Peace. Beneath blue skies and white clouds, the school assembled on the field to acknowledge the importance of peace in our lives, in our communities, and in the world. With minds, hearts, voices, and bodies, we celebrated together through joyful singing, movement, and readings shared by our ninth-year students.



We unveiled a newly added language on our Peace Pole, Spanish. Crafted from native Eastern Hemlock and visible as families enter and leave campus, MSGH's Peace Pole now carries the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in English, American Sign Language, and Spanish, *Que la Paz Prevalezca en la Tierra*. As part of a global tradition observed in communities around the world, the Peace Pole stands as a lasting reminder of our commitment to peace, unity, and shared humanity, with more languages to be added in the years ahead.



Giving Tuesday is a global day of generosity. At MSGH, we celebrated by welcoming families at drop-off and gathering for a Family Association coffee hour. We are grateful every day for the community that makes MSGH so special.

We are so grateful for you.

Elementary Community Outreach



This past fall, our elementary students laced up their sneakers and took part in the MSGH Jog-a-thon, a fun tradition that combines running, community, and giving back. Students ran lap after lap with energy and excitement, inviting family and friends to sponsor their efforts. This tradition started and continues because of the students, who genuinely want to help others.

With support from the local “Town That Cares” program, students learned about the impact of their efforts and how their participation would help local families in need. This year, they raised \$6,000 dollars to support families and personally delivered gift cards in handmade gift bags to three West Hartford public schools: Florence E. Smith STEM School, Edward W. Morley Elementary School, and Whiting Lane Elementary School. The Jog-a-Thon is more than just a race, it is a way for students to see the impact they can have in the broader community, and to experience the joy of giving.



Memory Care Visits with Songs of Joy!

Through monthly visits to Aviva Memory Care in West Hartford, Upper Elementary students live the Montessori philosophy. Community service fosters empathy, responsibility, and thoughtful connection beyond the classroom.



Winter Celebration

Our December Winter Celebration marked a joyful gathering as a school community. Students from Primary through Adolescent sang, danced, played, and twirled, filling the winter darkness with light, music, and love.

"Movement is the door to learning."

-Dr. Maria Montessori





The Gift that Keeps on Giving: An MSGH Education



Every morning, before the school day begins, children gather at the entrance, eager, smiling, and excited for their day ahead! The joy and excitement on their faces reflect the deep sense of belonging they feel here at MSGH.

Recently, an Upper Elementary student donated to the MSGH's Children's Fund. As they gave, they asked a simple, but powerful question, "Can this go to a child who can't afford to come to MSGH? I want them to be able to come to the school and have this every day." That question captures the heart of the Children's Fund: the children of MSGH. The Children's Fund helps sustain our Flexible Tuition Program, which expands access to an MSGH education for more families. Read below to find out more ways that your gift impacts the children of MSGH.

Your Impact at a Glance

Your Children's Fund gift has a direct impact by:

- **Equipping classrooms** with beloved AMI Montessori materials such as the Dressing Frames, the Pink Tower, the Bead Chains, and more.
- **Expanding learning beyond MSGH** through educational field trip destinations and cultural enrichment experiences. This year, gifts to the Children's Fund have allowed us to have some incredible field trips, such as the Eli Whitney Museum, the Connecticut College Arboretum, and the Bushnell to see a production of Stone Soup. In addition, gifts to the Children's Fund have allowed us to restore and update the materials for the Salmon-in-Schools program at the Elementary and Adolescent levels.
- **Investing in our staff** by supporting AMI Montessori training at all levels, and ongoing professional development that nurtures the development of our staff.
- **Making an MSGH education accessible** through supporting MSGH's Flexible Tuition Program.
- **Securing our future** by growing the endowment to sustain our excellence in Montessori education for generations to come.

Your gift to the Children's Fund makes all this possible and more!

Thank you to everyone who has already supported this year's Children's Fund!



Scan to Donate



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Montessori School of Greater Hartford

2025-2026 Children's Fund

Categories of Giving

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Education for Peace | \$10,000+ | Benefactor | \$1,000-\$1,499 |
| The Maria Montessori Circle | \$5,000 - \$9,999 | Sustainer | \$500-\$999 |
| The Pink Tower Circle | \$2,500-\$4,999 | Patron | \$250-\$499 |
| The Director's Circle | \$1,500-\$2,499 | Supporter | \$100-\$249 |
| | | Friend | \$1 to \$99 |

I/We gift \$ _____

- Where MSGH needs it most
 Staff Professional Development
 MSGH Endowment
 Classroom Materials and Programming
 Flexible Tuition

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

Name(s) _____

Maiden Name, if MSGH Alumna _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ E-mail _____

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

_____ Please initial here if your company will match this contribution

AFFILIATION TO MSGH:

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

MY GIFT IS:

In Honor of: _____

In Memory of: _____

To give online, visit:

www.msgh.org → Support MSGH → Children's Fund



For questions, please contact Toko Odorczyk, Director of Advancement at 860.236.4565 ext. 112.

MSGH is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

Thank you for supporting the Montessori School of Greater Hartford!



Montessori School
of Greater Hartford

141 North Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107



OUR MISSION

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

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