

# Follow *the* Child

THE MSGH COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER



## Dear Families,



ÚNA'S CHAT

My husband occasionally helps our next door neighbor's children with their homework. Recently their 14 year old, let's call him Alan, asked for help with geometry. My husband, the math lover/wiz, was gung-ho to help. The homework was two pages; the first page, a ditto



**Personal challenge:** A math problem the length of the floor. Having the opportunity to challenge oneself yields amazing results.

sheet with questions related to the second page which was filled with random intersecting horizontal and vertical lines creating multiple and varied angles. The task was to answer the questions while referring to the second page.

Alan's body language throughout the encounter was telling. He slumped in his chair, ran his hands through his hair agitatedly and generally gave the impression that the dentist would be fun compared to what he was enduring.

After Alan left, my husband asked how he could encourage him to go beyond the minimum, as Alan was only interested in getting the right answer and in being finished as fast as possible, and not at all in the process. He seemed to know some rules, but only in a rote sense and didn't demonstrate any real understanding of the concepts. This was a purely academic exercise for Alan, with no concrete

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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.

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## FOLLOW THE CHILD

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**The Decanomial Square**, a sensorial material at the Primary Level, gives the child an opportunity to further refine his discrimination of size, shape, and color. The child is presented with 10 squares of various colors (that represent the squares of the first 10 natural numbers), each increasing by 1 square cm, and rectangles of similar colors to complete the decanomial square. The Primary child's initial task is to "build the square," organizing the one hundred plus pieces. Not only is the child working to refine her discrimination of shape, size, and color, she is being prepared for the geometric representation of multiplication and algebra later. The child is undoubtedly developing concentration in the organization and execution of this multi-step work.

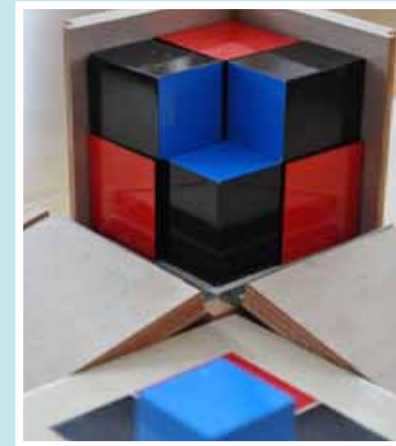
underpinnings to which he could refer. It carried no meaning or value for him. You should know that this child is extremely smart, quick witted and enthusiastically joyful when interested. He taught himself chess and regularly visits to demonstrate a new move he has created, while beating my husband at that game.

Back to my husband's question, and in response I thought, "Wow, where do I start?" The answer is at once simple and extremely complex. The problem is that the geometry work does not belong to Alan and probably never did. The answer is to give Alan the opportunity to make it his own as he did with chess. That's the simple part. The complex part is that in order to enable Alan to make the work his own, it has to come from him, or at least he has to think it came from him.

This is our usual mode of operation in Montessori, allowing

the excitement and drive for work to come from the child and/or doing a little 'engineering' to make the child feel he initiated. It is supported by our mixed aged classrooms and the Montessori materials, and requires that the adult have an understanding and knowledge of the individual child's ability and interests. A deep respect for and trust in the child's ability to take charge of his own learning is essential as well the adult's willingness to resist the urge to 'teach' and showcase her superior knowledge.

As our children live in their Montessori communities each day, they see concepts practically demonstrated and in action constantly, and, as children will, they strive to explore and master those concepts. They do this because they are natural learners, fueled by a drive to adapt and master their environment; they take on the work and make it their



## Binomial Cube

Originally, this material was designed by Dr. Montessori for use at the Elementary Level, but seeing how the younger children were drawn to it, she included it in the Primary Sensorial materials as a puzzle. This material represents the cube of the binomial. It is made up of eight small prisms to represent the formula  $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + 3a^2b + 3ab^2 + b^2$ . In working with this material, the Primary child not only builds the cube within the structure of the box and using the map on the lid as support, but will build it free standing on the lid or even while blindfolded. As the child progresses onto Elementary, she will use the cube to explore both the geometric, arithmetic and algebraic aspects of the binomial.

own. The Montessori teacher's role in this process is to facilitate, feed, and guide this drive. This is what we mean when we say we "follow the child."

So, having excited the child's interest through observations followed by a precise demonstration, we encourage the child to take over (we dip in only when truly required and get out as soon as the child is ready to resume). Then, time is the essence! The crucial element of time allows the child to explore, manipulate and make mistakes and figure out how to fix them, make more mistakes, recognize patterns, make discoveries, and make more mistakes. Do you recognize this? It has many names: trial and error, tinkering, playing, exploring; it's the way of true learning and it cannot be on a schedule. Go back to your childhood, do you remember trying to learn something you wanted to master? How did you go about it? Do you still remember the process? Do you still have the skill? The saying, "It's just like riding a bike," is true because no one can learn to ride a bike for you. You can't do it by rote. You have to be fully engaged, mind and body. You have to practice and fall, practice and fall and then you never forget, and it

has become a part of you. Even if you don't do it for a long time, it's in your bones and you can bring it back on demand. Maybe a little rusty, but very quickly those skills can be polished up.

Dr. Montessori witnessed this process many, many times with children in many cultures. She recognized the child as an innate learner whose curiosity and drive to learn combined to create an active, engaged, spontaneous learner, who automatically fell into the process of exploration

just described. She realized that any man-made "education" in which we expect the child to fully participate had to incorporate an environment rich with opportunities to excite the child's curiosity and rich with opportunities for real work. She called this the "Prepared Environment." Dr. Montessori filled this environment, our classrooms, with what she described as "the keys to the world" for the Primary Child, and the "keys to the universe" for the Elementary Child. This indoor/



## Extending a lesson

Recently, a few Upper Elementary students took their area & volume work to a new level by constructing towns using the Geometric Solids material. The students calculated the surface area and volume of the different buildings they had constructed.

outdoor environment contains materials that, when manipulated, demonstrate key concepts. It offers real things and real work and a real, living, and dynamic community. In this milieu the child has the opportunity to touch, manipulate, explore, make mistakes, etc. An essential element of the Prepared Environment is the community of mixed aged children, who bring the concepts inherent in the materials alive as they manipulate and explore, thus exciting their peers to learn and master. Overlaid on this special environment is the trained adult who is knowledgeable in child development, and who provides the link between the environment and the child. Last and most important, the child is offered time. Time to explore and repeat at a pace that is unique to each one of us, and cannot be rushed without losing something precious, and that something precious is deep and meaningful learning. The kind of learning that changes who we are and enriches our lives and our experiences. The kind that lives in our bones forever and can be taken out and polished up whenever we need it, just like riding that bike.

So, my husband has his work cut out for him to help Alan, in that he has to give geometry back to him. I know it won't be with paper and pencil, but with wood, nails, tools, and with fun and engagement, as they build something together that has been chosen by Alan.

*Mua*

*This Follow the Child is in loving memory of John & Rita Chakalos.*



**Box of Geometric Sticks:** This material allows students to construct and experiment with lines, angles, and shapes.



**Constructive Triangle Boxes:** This material explores the equivalency of shapes at a sensorial level.

## Daily Rhythms



Thank you, to our wonderful Parent Panel during our Parent Information Series. You were fantastic!

**Save the date:**

**Alumni Night and Panel  
January 9**

## Mystery History



## MSGH Visits Montessori Middle School

The weather and atmosphere were bright and sunny as some of our MSGH Students arrived at the Montessori Middle School at Millstream Farm. Our students quickly fell into step with the veteran students as they explored the barn and learned the responsibilities of a working farm. After sampling some fresh made goat cheese, made by the Middle School Students, our students participated in a lesson on the scientific principle of half-lives or the time required for half of a pesticide or radioactive element to break down in the environment. They graphed exponential decay to see how substances with known half-lives decay predictably over time. M&M's & Twizzlers were used to deliciously model this concept.



# Toddler Language

By Toko Odorczyk



It is a human tendency to communicate with others. Dr. Montessori realized this, declaring, “To talk is in the nature of man.” Children, therefore, are programmed to take in and master the language of their culture. Infants have an innate ability to recreate language, simply by hearing it in their natural environment. The child becomes a sponge, soaking up everything around him.

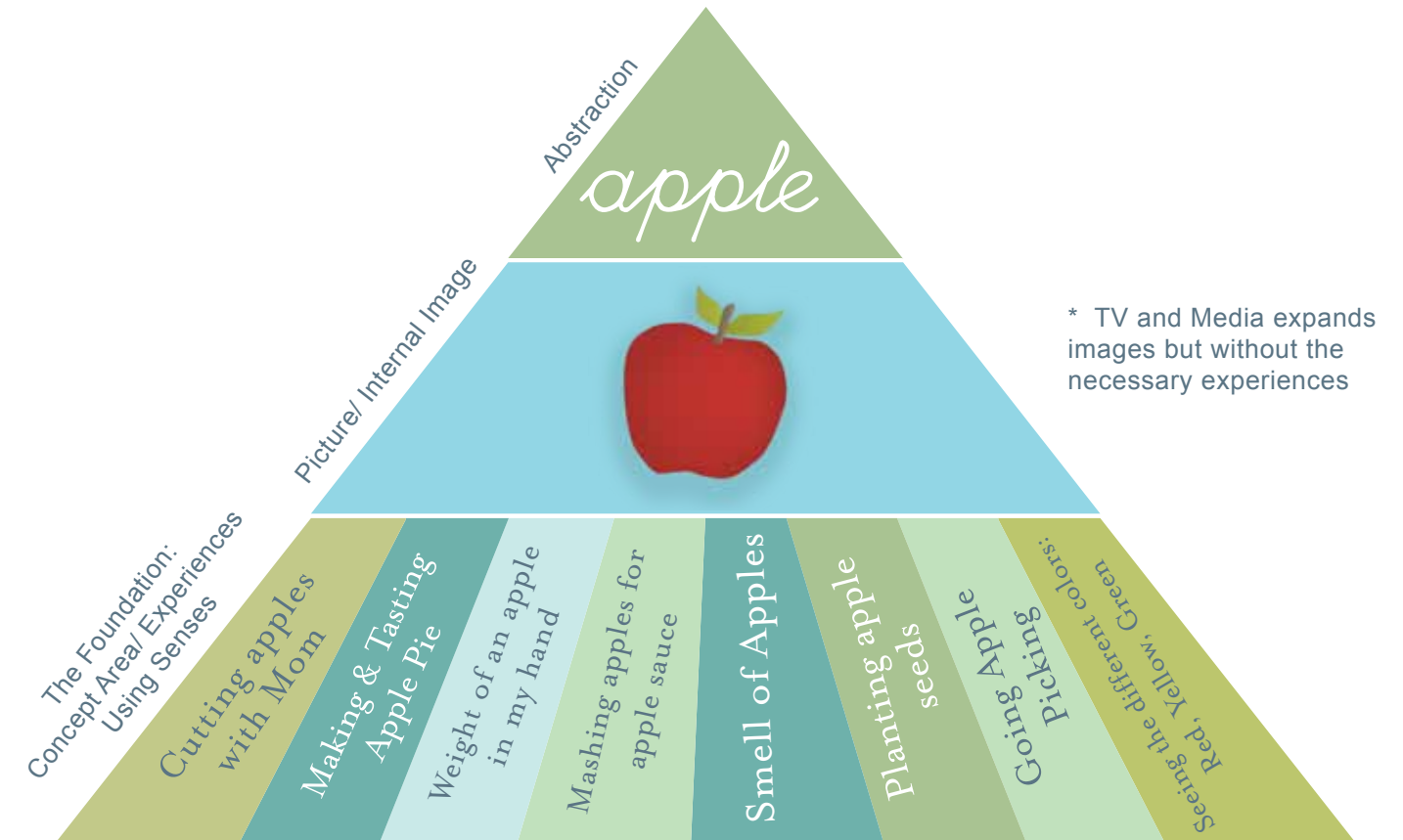
During the very early years, children use their senses and movement to get to know themselves and the world. When they learn to give a name to each piece of information they receive, they begin making the transition from the concrete to the abstract. Language transforms sensory-motor reality into symbols and images of words. This is really a qualitative leap in the development of human intelligence.

Experiences create the foundation for the images of words. Images and words expand as the child matures and encounters more experiences; we gain a better basis on which to communicate based on our personal experiences. A young child can only understand deeply what s/he has experienced.

When building language, it is important to begin with experiences; thus, building the foundation for language. To accomplish this we

must provide concrete materials the child can manipulate and label. The more senses we involve in the foundation, the stronger the language base. We encourage you to explore the outdoor environment, visit your local pet store, observe other community settings; all experiences encourage language development and a better understanding of your child's surroundings.

Along with providing rich experiences, it is important to consider your interaction with your small learner. Keep in mind, “the more language in, the more language out.” When toddlers are immersed in language, they tend to use language earlier and more efficiently. During this period of life, toddlers are ripe for language learning, soaking up every word presented. Toddlers who are exposed to more stimulating language environments in the first two years tend to have a larger vocabulary and more complex sentence structures when they are three years of age. Children learn language by hearing language.



## Tools for more effective communication with children

**Eye-gaze.** When communicating with your child, make sure you are at his/her level (whenever possible), facing your child, and giving him/her your full attention. This will let your little one know s/he is a part of the conversation, his/her thoughts are important, and s/he will not feel rushed to communicate his or her needs or feelings.

**Pause during the conversation.** Remember, we are models for what is expected. Creating pauses during the conversation and allowing for others to speak when you are done will give the toddler the appropriate cues for when to communicate.

**Observe your own voice.** It is necessary to consider what your toddler is actually hearing when you communicate. Is your voice at an appropriate volume? How is your tone and pitch? When does it flux during conversations? Are you careful to use proper articulation? Are you modeling kindness when speaking to or about others? Children observe everything around them, even when we think they aren't listening.

**Slow down.** Often times we are in a rush to quickly



speaking to young children, try to slow down your speech, using rich, precise words.

**Avoid correcting the small child when s/he is speaking.** Instead, find opportunities to demonstrate the proper phrase.

**Try to use language that is based on the child's reality.** Fantasy books and play can be very confusing, and sometimes frightening for little ones who are very literal based learners.

**Reduce background noise.** This can be difficult for the young child to filter out.

**Limit TV/Media time.** Watching images flash on the

television or iPad is a poor substitute for actual experiences, which are vital for gaining a deep understanding of objects and the world.

### Benefits of a Bilingual Classroom

The young child possesses an awesome power: the ability to absorb all around them, including multiple languages and their complexities. Between birth and the age of six is the optimal time to introduce a second language and allow your child to effortlessly master the language and native-like pronunciation. Studies have shown that children who learn other languages before the age of five experience them with the same part of the brain used to speak their mother tongue.

If you speak a different language in your home, you are highly encouraged to do so with your little one. What a gift you're offering them! Language is the key to culture and research shows it's wonderful for brain development, along with all the benefits that come with speaking multiple languages. There is no need for formal "lessons" either, simply speak your native tongue and they will soak it up. It's very important for the person who is speaking the alternate language to be native speaking and to be consistent; speaking that language exclusively when with the child. As they mature, you may notice they tend to converse in English. Don't fret, as children often speak the tongue of their peers. They are still taking in both languages and will have the native accent and ability to use both.



## Material Spotlight:

### The Bells

Setting foot in a Montessori classroom, it is hard to miss the bells. Children and adults alike are drawn to their beautiful appearance and melodic sound. This sensorial material works directly to help refine the child's auditory discrimination of pitch, tuned to demonstrate the pitches of the C Major Scale. The child first works with the bells playing one, then two, noticing the difference in pitch. Once he has explored variance in pitches, he begins to work with matching like pitches, and grading pitches. With this material, the Primary child begins to learn the names of the pitches, how to notate those pitches on a musical staff, and is given the freedom to write and record his own music. So, next time you're in a Primary Classroom, listen not only to the sound of concentration, but to the sound of the bells.

### Tone Bars

On the heels of the bells, come the Elementary tone bars. This music material gives the child exposure to two octaves of pitches, allowing him to continue his exploration of music. The Elementary child plays scales from around the world, begins to read music, and begins to compose her own music with this material. At the heart of the elementary curriculum is the interconnectedness of all subjects; this is no different with the tone bars. The child is able to connect studies of various cultures to the scales used as the basis for music in that culture or play melodies on the tone bars written by historical composers.



Classroom Moments



# Interview with Ms. Kathy

**Name:** Kathy Aldridge

Toddler 1-Head Teacher

**Degrees and Education:** BA from the University of Connecticut; attended UConn School of Social Work

**AMI Montessori Certificates:** Primary and Toddler

## How long have you been part of the MSGH community and in what capacities?

I've worked at MSGH for eighteen years, sixteen in the classroom and two as Director of Development. Prior to my being employed at the school, my son attended and I served on the Board of Trustees.

## Before coming to MSGH, what other fields did you work in?

Department of Children and Youth Services/Case Worker

Insurance/ Methods and Procedures Analyst

Retail/Owner of a Tennis and Golf Apparel Shop

Property Manager



## What drew you to teaching and specifically Montessori education?

My son drew me to teaching and specifically to Montessori. I had Daniel when I was older and felt that I had waited forever for him. After he was born, I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible. When he started school, I went into teaching so that our schedules would coincide. He attended MSGH and I was at a traditional preschool. When I compared the two programs, the differences convinced me that I wanted to be in Montessori.

## Describe your AMI training. What did you find the most challenging? The most exciting? The most rewarding?

I received my primary training at the Maria Montessori Training Organisation in London, England and my toddler training at The Montessori Institute in Denver, Colorado. My son was 10 when he and I moved to London for the training. My husband was able to visit a few times a year. It was a challenge to return to school after so many years. It took a while to regain the skill of listening to a lecture while taking notes. I remember those first

few weeks when Daniel missed his friends and wanted to leave - when I couldn't make any sense of my lecture notes - when I was tired of lugging around groceries or laundry (we walked or took the tube everywhere). It was getting very old. I called my husband saying, "I can't do this. We need to come home." Fortunately, he convinced me to stick it out because the experience was very rewarding for both my son and me. London is a great city and living there was exciting in and of itself. The students in both of our schools were from all over the world and we learned a lot about various cultures. I loved the coursework, but did find it difficult to stay

up half the night to fulfill the requirement to type and illustrate all the manuals. I realized, however, that you're never too old to take on a challenge which was a help to me recently when I decided to go for my toddler certificate. This time I had the luxury of not having any family responsibilities during the two summers of training. I was familiar with much of the theory, so it made the coursework that much easier. The challenge was fulfilling the 250 hour observation requirement over the winter while working full-time. Again, the challenge became the biggest reward. By taking that much time to observe the motor, verbal, and social development of children, the theory was brought full circle. It was a fascinating experience that couldn't be duplicated in a book.

## How do your life's experiences influence you as a teacher in the classroom?

Over the years, I've grown more patient and fortunately I've always seen the humor in things - especially in frustrating situations. I've found both are invaluable when working with children. I've also learned that children will meet the expectation level you set, so you need to set the bar high and remind yourself that the child before you today is not the same as yesterday. You need to have faith in the child and treat each day as a new beginning.

## Why is the Prepared Environment so important to your classroom?

When we say the environment (classroom) is "prepared" we mean that it is set up to meet the developmental needs of the child. The appropriate materials need to be well maintained, complete, attractive, and easily accessible to the child. The room needs to be organized in a way that makes sense to the child; the various areas (practical life, language, art, manipulatives) are separate and the material within these areas are either classified or color-coded. Organizing the materials in such a way encourages exploration and independence. Without a prepared environment, our job would be impossible.

## Anything else to share or add?

Yes. I would like to thank everyone who's contributed to the MSGH Annual Fund. Without this support, teacher training and development would not be possible. Every child benefits from a donation to the Annual Fund whether it's designated for materials, cultural enrichment, teacher training, or financial assistance. It truly is a gift that continues to give to every child.



## Finish the sentence:

**Favorite food:** I love to eat so that is a difficult question. I guess if I were to choose a last meal it would be pasta with pesto.

**I can't start my day without:** Breakfast and the news.

**Last book I read:** Goldfinch by Donna Tartt

**Last movie I watched:** The Butler

**Favorite color:** Blue

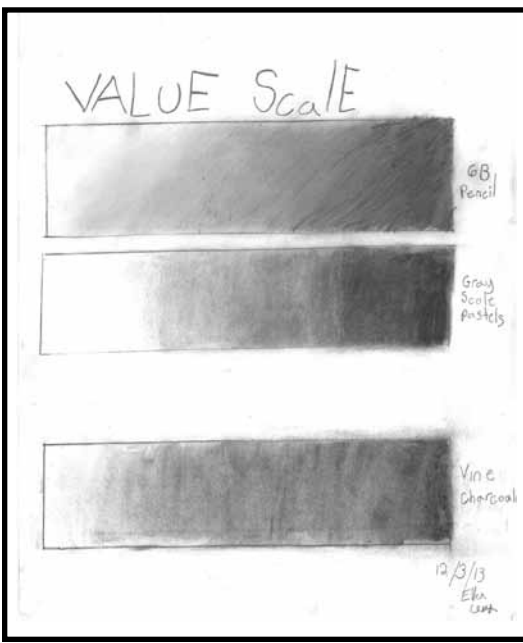
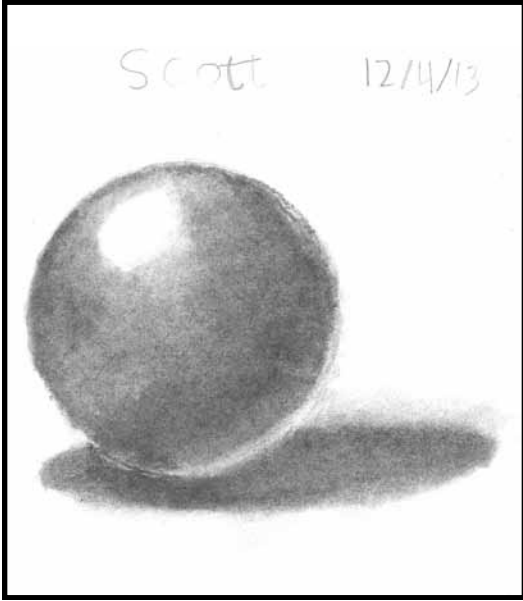
**If I could have dinner with anyone, living or dead, I would have dinner with...** My son and my father so that the two would have the opportunity to meet. My father loved to tell stories over dinner about his life growing up in New York and the escapades of his very colorful family. He had a hearty laugh that drew you in and was he was great fun to listen to. Through these stories you not only got an appreciation of life in a different era, but you got a real sense of his values. I wish Daniel had his own memories of this loving, generous man instead of having to rely on mine.



# Artist in Residence



Under the tutelage of the talented MSGH Artist in Residence, Michelle Thomas, the Elementary and Primary Teachers (and Administration) have gotten a little artsy. Allow us to explain. We are dedicated to our classrooms, our teachers, and our students. To better support these budding artists, we have enlisted Michelle to lead a series of art workshops for our faculty. In this way, the teachers can incorporate these learned techniques and mediums into the framework of the existing classroom curriculum. This integrated approach has truly caught fire in the classrooms and the children have greatly benefited. In outings to the New Britain Art Museum, the children witness multiple examples of introduced mediums and techniques.



Contributed Photos: Shawn London

# MSGH out in the Community

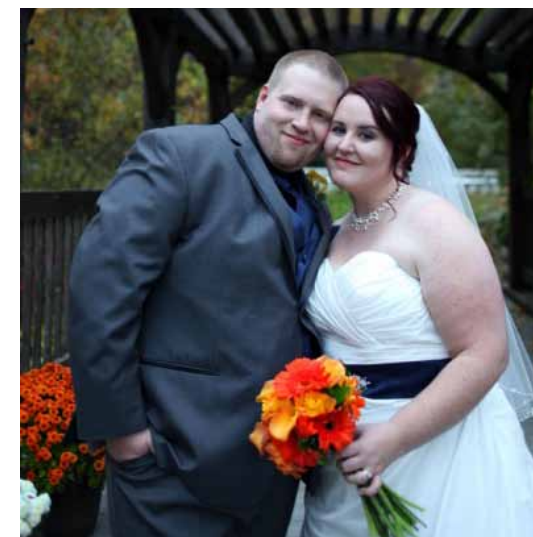
We are a proud member of the Greater Hartford community. As we extend our reach further into that community, we continue to enrich our students' education. Through our Spanish program and the passionate dedication of Señora Rivera, Elementary students volunteer, hone their Spanish conversational skills, and embody the best practice of Montessori Grace and Courtesy in their trips to the Hispanic Senior Center in Hartford. Our Primary Students practiced their Winter Sing Along song-set for the residents of the Hughes Health & Rehabilitation Center in West Hartford. Their songs and smiling faces brought so much joy to those at the facility recovering from surgery. As we continue to grow our relationships with area organizations, we look forward to continuing to give back to the larger community.



Welcome  
Alexios Coss and  
Susanna Winship Lane!



Congratulations  
Amanda & Dave and  
Kathy & Carlos!



Additions to the family, alumni news, or other announcements can be submitted to: [karaf@msgh.org](mailto:karaf@msgh.org)



Our own special arrival:  
The baby salmon have arrived!  
Stay tuned...



It is our mission to prepare them to inherit the world.

*Thank you to our Faculty, Staff, and Board in joining together in support of our Mission by contributing to our Annual Fund! Your generous support of MSGH means so much to our students and our community. Thank you for your leadership and advocacy.*

A tax deductible gift to the Annual Fund supports our Students' love of learning, our Teachers' passion for teaching, and our Mission for a peaceful world.



# Montessori School of Greater Hartford Annual Fund Campaign 2013/2014

## Categories of Giving

<b>The Maria Montessori Circle</b>	\$5,000 +	<b>Sustainer</b>	\$500-\$999 (Leadership Level begins)
<b>The Pink Tower Circle</b>	\$2,500-\$4,999	<b>Patron</b>	\$250-\$499
<b>The Director's Circle</b>	\$1,500-\$2,499	<b>Supporter</b>	\$100-\$249
<b>Benefactor</b>	\$1,000-\$1,499	<b>Friend</b>	up to \$99

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- Classroom Materials and Programming
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- Where MSGH needs it most**

*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:

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

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For questions, please contact Kara Fenn, Director of Advancement at 860.236.4565 ext.27.



**Thank you for supporting the Montessori School of Greater Hartford!**

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# Family Association News

Hi Everyone,

It is amazing to think we are already half way through the school year, my how the time flies! First and foremost, I would like to thank all of you for making this year so successful thus far. Whether you volunteered to host an event or attended one it has been great to see so many faces at coffee talks, play dates and classroom socials! Building on the success of the fall we have many more fun things to look forward to in the upcoming months. New this year the Family Association and the school will be combining resources and collaborating on the much loved Heart of Montessori event. We will honor the Family Association's skating social tradition and the **Heart of Montessori's** child centered community day with a combined (Warm your) **Heart of Montessori!** Look for fun family activities and a new community service component so that we can spread some of the warmth of our community to others. We are looking for a few volunteers to help out with this event. Please contact Kara if you are interested in volunteering. All members of our community (parents, grandparents, older children) are welcomed volunteers. Also, something new to look forward to in the spring are some improvements to the lobby. The FA has taken on the project, with the help of some fabulous family volunteers; we hope to give the lobby a modest facelift. Last but not least, mark your calendars for the much-loved Primary and Elementary Teas where we seek advice and inspiration not only from Úna and Mary but also from each other.

As always, the successes of all FA projects are a direct result of family involvement and participation. Not only do I encourage you to volunteer at whatever level you can, I also encourage you to take advantage of all the FA has to offer. We have such a wonderful community and every time you volunteer or participate in the FA our community becomes more vibrant and beautiful, thank you!

Rebecca London  
Family Association Chair

## Family Association

- Toddler 1:** Dean Batchelder and Ami Chokshi
- Toddler 2:** Katheryn Sivel and Rachel Coburn
- Toddler 3:** Rosangela Naut and Amanda Looney
- Primary 1:** Kimberly Moster and Meghan Fanning
- Primary 2:** Michele Tabora and Katie Ahearn
- Primary 3:** Francie Ghose and Krista Wells
- Primary 4:** Joyce Aparicio and Julia Erlikh
- Lower Elementary:** Lorraine Tobrocke
- Upper Elementary:** Hyacinth Ellis
- Chair:** Rebecca London
- Staff Appreciation:** Lorraine Tobrocke, Lynn Lofberg, and Jennifer Augsberger
- Treasurer:** Brian Osoba
- Family Association Liaison:** Kara Fenn

## Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

Heart of Montessori Committee is now forming!

Lower Elementary assists in the nap room.

**“We must therefore turn to the child as the key to the fate of our future life.”**

– Maria Montessori





Montessori School  
of Greater Hartford

141 North Main Street  
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**Be Inspired.**

MSGH Annual Gala  
& Grandparents' Day

Friday, May 9

*Save the Date!*