HMS
Monthly News

ARTICLES, TIPS, PHOTOS, & MORE!

January 2021

New year, Same Us!

Happy New Year! This is the time of year when we all start thinking about resolutions, new endeavors and changes we want to make. As the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclites said, the only thing that is constant is change. And, while I am not one to shy away from change, I also think we've had plenty of it in 2020. So this month, I want to reflect on our mission: Harbor Montessori School is dedicated to nurturing the whole child through intentional academic guidance, purposeful learning environments, and peace-minded community support. While so many things have changed this year, our mission remains constant, dependable, and consistent.

Nurturing the Whole Child - Learning has never been exclusively about academics. It has always involved the evolution of understanding yourself, your environment, and how to connect with those around you. At HMS teachers form relationships with students and families, this relationship building is key in a child's success. Getting to know how a child learns, what obstacles they face as learners, and when to intervene when a child is struggling is all part of the role of the teacher. It is imperative that students know they are seen, valued, and loved by the adults they interact with every day.This creates felt-safety, the idea that you are both physically and emotionally safe in your environment. Teachers know that a smile, a handshake/hug (or air hug nowadays), a simple morning greeting and a predictable routine are all components of felt-safety. These simple things nurture the child to grow into the curious learner that they are

No matter how well-adjusted a child is, we know that during this pandemic children have experienced unexpected challenges and loss. The relationships that teachers have formed between themselves and the families allow for us to further nurture our students and to lay a foundation for learning, connecting, and growing.

Intentional Academic Guidance - One of the wonders of humanity is our desire to learn. Yet we are all different: we have an array of strengths and challenges, we have diverse interests, our pace for processing information varies greatly. A Montessori classroom allows our students to be guided by their interests and to move at their own pace. However, we have a curriculum that we follow and benchmarks that students need to meet. This means that sometimes children have to engage in work that they are not as interested in or that doesn't come as easily to them. This is a dance that our teachers are quite good at. They set up their academic curriculum with intention and follow a plan to make sure your child gets what they need, while still allowing them to follow their interests and curiosities.

Of course during this pandemic some of the ways we meet the academic needs of the child has had to change. Teachers have had to get creative with group work, with meeting the needs of children at home, at school, and in hybrid models. Materials have to be stored and cleaned differently and a few items have been stored away until Covid is gone. But the goals remain the same: we want children to have a strong academic foundation, we want to fuel their curiosity, and we want to give them the tools to be able to make independent discoveries.

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Purposeful Learning Environments - One of the things our families have really become familiar with this year is the role of the learning environment. Whether we are talking about our infants, our middle schoolers, or anyone in between, our children are truly students of the world and of their environments. A prepared environment is a significant part of our philosophy at HMS. This means that everything the student has access to has an educational purpose. It also means everything that is put on the shelf is complete (no pieces missing), is attractive (we prefer natural wood to plastic), and allows the students the opportunity for hands-on learning. A purposeful learning environment also involves thoughtful scheduling, opportunities for brain-breaks and play, and opportunities for children to make mistakes and self-correct. Whether at home or at school, the prepared and purposeful learning environment is an important piece to a successful Montessori experience. For those of you with young children, you will enjoy Oxana's article about Montessori in the home.

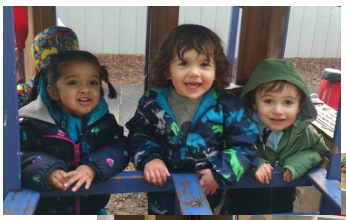
Our children, staff, and families have been fastidious in following the protocols and guidelines given to us by the many regulatory agencies. And because of this commitment and dedication to one another we are able to continue to offer high-fidelity Montessori education to our students.

Peace-Minded Community Support - Last, but certainly not least, is the idea of peace-minded community support. Maria Montessori lived through two world wars and had a deep set belief that education could bring about a more peaceful society. The idea of peace education in Montessori has evolved over time, but the main components—learning to see things from others' perspectives, managing emotions and frustrations, directly teaching empathy, taking responsibility for one's actions, and teaching conflict resolution instead of conflict avoidance—continue to be an important part of our mission at HMS and in Montessori education in general. Our teachers work with the students from the very beginning on building self-awareness and developing an understanding and respect for others. You can see this when a toddler takes something away from another toddler and the teacher steps in and points out the look on the friend's face or when an upper el student is empowered to moderate a disagreement. Peace-minded community support allows students to build character and to take time to understand one another.

While we all hold our breaths and step cautiously into 2021, it's comforting to recognize that the mission of our school has endured. Only time will tell what this year has in store for us, but we know wherever it takes us, we have the capacity to continue to live our mission and nurture your child at HMS.

Warmly,

-Aimee



Aimee Allen
Head of School

The Montessori Friendly Home

by Oxana Matsegorova, Maple Room Teacher

Last year brought for our children a new reality of remote learning. For many parents, remote learning raised a question of how to effectively adapt our home and lifestyle for our young remote learners. When your child started Montessori school, you probably already made some adjustments. If not, that's ok; it is never too late to implement some principles of the Montessori prepared environment in your home. The idea is not to copy a Montessori classroom but to make small adjustments to create Montessori-friendly learning and play spaces for your child. The key components of success are accessibility, zoning, order and beauty, limiting the number, rotation, and observation. The good news is that these changes should not be huge, expensive or time-consuming.

The most significant change you can make is to identify the areas of the house where you can support your child's growing independence. For example, empower your children in the kitchen by organizing a shelf or a low drawer with kitchen stuff just for them. A step stool will invite children to help with washing dishes or food preparation. Low hanging shelves, bins and clothes rods in the bedroom will make it easier to reach and put away their clothes. Consider adding a few low hanging hooks for outerwear and a backpack in the entryway or a mudroom.

Another idea is to create small play/learn areas around your house vs. devoting a full-room as a playroom. For example you can create art and practical life stations in the kitchen area, sensorial and open-ended activities (such as Legos, blocks, puzzles) in the living room, and pretend-play activities and books in the bedroom. Having these play stations will allow a child to change the scenery and stimulate different forms of play. This will also allow both parent and child autonomy and flexibility in movement.

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When it comes to toys with a lot of small pieces, we have to follow the principle, "less is more." Limiting the number will allow young children to truly enjoy an activity and explore it more fully. It may as well apply to other belongings such as clothes. In the Montessori classroom, we use woven baskets, bins, and trays to display the material on the shelf. Easy to carry baskets and trays make the cleanup process easier and put a focus on the activity instead of the package. Now that the activities are limited, don't forget to rotate the contents regularly. Regular rotation keeps activity fresh and keeps the child engaged longer. There are many toys on the market that rate ages 2-5 or 3-6 that siblings can play together. Older children can have their special toys stored in containers with lids that would help to keep them out of reach for younger siblings.

Children ages 2-7 have a strong sense of order and a need for routine. Now that you have limited the quantities and have easy to handle baskets and containers, it is time to identify where things go. Providing designated places for storing activities is beneficial to a child's development. Also, the consistency of putting things in their place usually minimizes frustration and opposition when cleaning up.

Observation is one of the important elements of Montessori philosophy. Spend time observing your child at play without interfering. This will inform you whether or not your child can maintain a reasonable order and put most of the material in design places. Are there too many or not enough choices? Are the choices still interesting and challenging? Short observations will help you follow your child's interests.

Lastly, just a few words about imagination and fantasy. In the early childhood Montessori classroom, we encourage imagination and realistic pretend play rather than fantasy:

"(The young child) cannot distinguish well between the real and the imaginary, between things that are possible and things that are merely 'made up'." – Dr. Montessori, Times Education Supplement, 1919

We don't tell the children to stop their fantasy games. We let them play it out but offer reality to keep them grounded. Many children love Disney fantasy superheroes, fairies, and fictitious animated characters. You can enrich this fantasy play by adding realistic figures of animals and people. I bet that pegasus or unicorn will enjoy meeting new friends on the farm and Elsa will love to go grocery shopping with a doctor.

I hope these suggestions will help you to make small but functional changes that will support the development of your children.

Parent Grove Presents

By Aleah DiCrescentis and Nicole Knodt, Alder Room Parents

For this month's Parent Grove corner, we present to you a favorite winter recipe, courtesy of the DiCrescentis family! Try this at home on a gloomy, dark day - it's sure to brighten your spirits. :)

Amma's Icelandic Pancakes

3 Tbs butter
3 egg yolks
3 egg whites, beaten
1/2 cup sugar
3 cups flour
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. vanilla
2 1/2 cup milk (more or less until batter is thin)
Fillings: jam with whipping cream or sugar

Melt butter in a crepe pan. Cool slightly. Mix all ingredients together; stir in melted butter. Fold in egg whites. Add small amounts of butter to heated pan and then the pancake batter. Make pancakes very thin. Sprinkle with sugar and roll up or spread with a little jam and a spoonful of whipping cream. Fold into quarters.

My family's secret ingredient: pinch of cardamom for flavor. A splash of left over coffee for color.

A warning! They will be eaten faster than you can make them!

enjoy!

Board Corner

Happy 2021!

I hope everyone's winter break was filled with lots of memories, new traditions and some reflection on what an interesting year we just had! January is one of my favorite months to start fresh – especially after the craziest year we just ended. While I'm not big on New Year's resolutions, I do like to select a word of focus for the year. In 2020, my word was Tenacious. Interesting choice, I know. I don't think anyone could've predicted how tenacious it really was. Slightly different definition than intended.Because most expectations were thrown out the window after last year, I decided to set the bar a little lower this year, while still maintaining some level of focus! Instead of selecting my word on my own, we talked about each of our goals as a family, read through them and each chose a word that best reflected what we wanted to accomplish. The word I've chosen for 2020 is Discipline. My husband chose Focus, our 5-year old chose Kind and my 7-year old chose Respect. We then came up with three goals as a family and then a word to summarize those goals – and our family word is Gratitude. While 2020 certainly was not all sunshine and rainbows, we can carry the gratitude of what 2020 brought us into 2021 and beyond and continue to take time to pause, reflect and share our gratitude for all that we DO have.

Julie Thorn
Board Chair

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Board Chair

This month's staff contributor:

Oxana Matsegorova
Primary Teacher