

SAIS 2016 Self-Study

Montessori School of Huntsville



Table of Contents

Introduction and Overview

Accreditation Team Members	3
Board of Directors	4
School Administration	5
Organizational Chart	6
Introduction	7
Mission & Brief History	8
Governance	9
School Profile	12

Strategic Plan

Self-Study Efforts	14
OGSM	21
Strategic Initiatives	23
Final Thoughts	28

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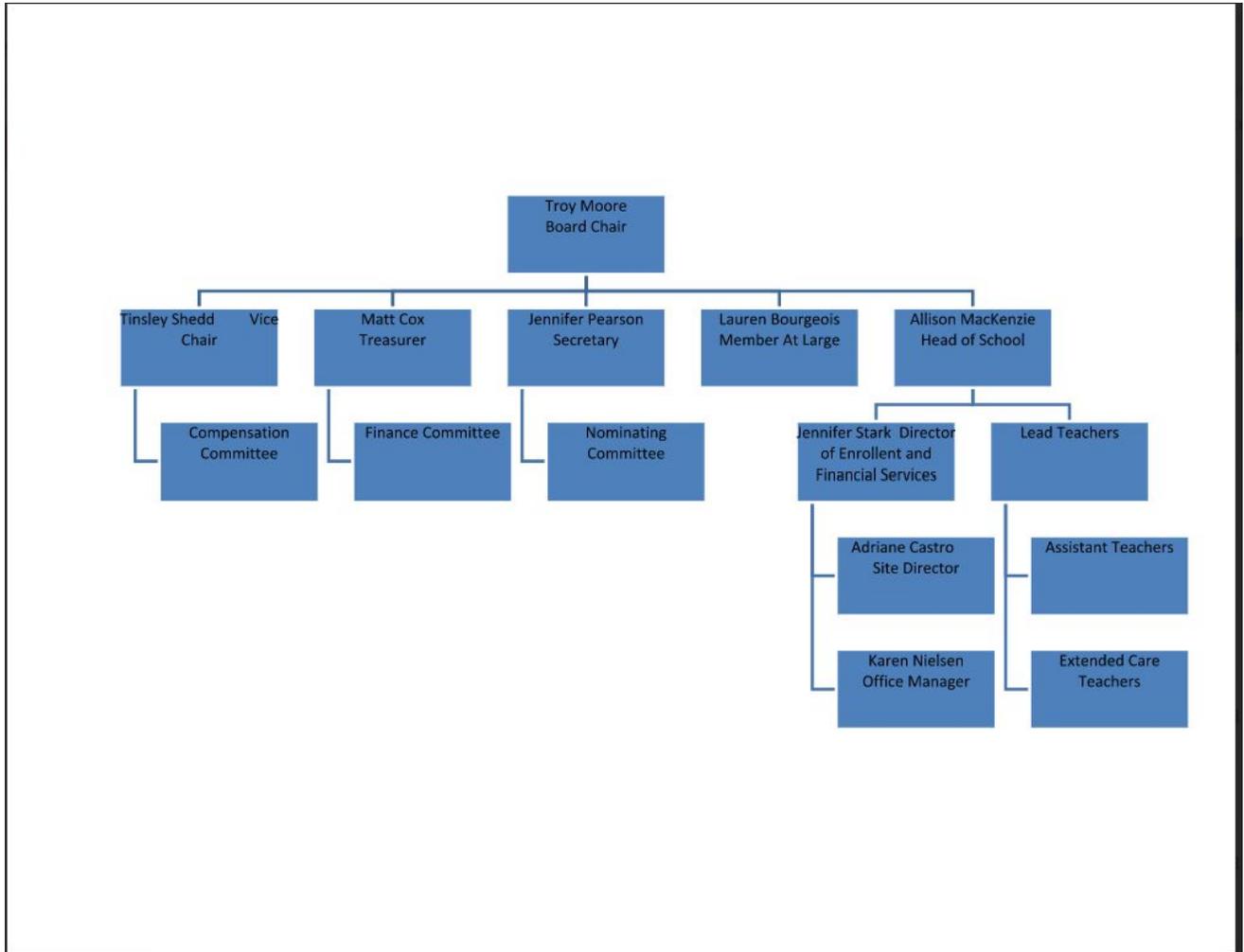
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Organizational Chart



Introduction

Founded in 1965, the Montessori School of Huntsville (MSH) serves the North Alabama area as an independent, non-profit, parent-governed school providing a Montessori education for children ages 18 months through the sixth grade.

The curriculum and pedagogy are based on the teachings of Dr. Maria Montessori. MSH follows the tenets of her philosophy which begin with a deep respect for the whole child and focus instruction on all areas of development including physical, social-emotional and academic development. Although teachers seek to maintain an unobtrusive role in the classroom, they develop deep bonds with their students by closely observing each child and adjusting the environment to meet the child's needs. This fosters independence and supports the child to satisfy unmet needs that can cause frustration and obstacles to the child's full development.

MSH students, like all children, find joy and meaning in purposeful work. Students receive individualized instruction with concrete materials to engage all five senses. Maria Montessori coined the phrase *absorbent mind* to illustrate a child's exceptional ability to assimilate information directly from her environment. From birth to age six, children's minds are especially absorbent and frequently experience what Dr. Montessori called *sensitive periods*, or developmental periods when a child becomes increasingly interested in a particular skill or aspect of his environment allowing him to master it with greater ease. Montessori teachers, often called "guides," respond to each child's naturally absorbent mind and tailor work specifically to a child's sensitive periods. The practice emphasizes respect for self, respect for others, and respect for the environment--both in



the sense of their individual classroom and our global society.

Finally, the program emphasizes interaction of multi-age students wherein younger students learn from older children and older students

develop empathy and leadership by supporting younger ones. The program also strives to develop ties to our community by partnering with other programs and by learning and celebrating our diverse cultures.

Mission

The Montessori School of Huntsville educates children to prepare them for a life of purpose, integrity, and academic accomplishment. We develop independent learners, critical thinkers, and tomorrow's leaders.

Brief History of MSH

MSH was founded by Imogen Stooke Wheeler and Miriam Gates in downtown Huntsville in March of 1965, and chartered under the name Azalea House. A short time later the Montessori Society of Huntsville was formed as a non-profit corporation tasked with the job of running the business aspects of operating a school. The board of directors was comprised of parents with students who were enrolled in the school. In 1967, the name of the school was changed to The Montessori School of Huntsville. In the last fifty years the school has been housed in various traditional "home environments" until 2002, when MSH moved into a newly built daylit building on Chaney Thompson Rd. in south Huntsville. Situated on nearly 11 acres of land, the new campus featured a large wooded area to be later developed into an outdoor classroom and wildlife habitat.



Other changes occurred through the years including expanding the school's scope of practice to include early morning and afterschool care and summer programs for convenience of the families. By 1990, the school offered full-time, year-round care for its families. In 1998, after two years self-study and consultation, the school earned the status of associate member of the American Montessori Society.

In February 2011, earned accreditation through SAIS. In 2012, MSH closed a satellite campus and consolidated all students at the Chaney Thompson campus. In 2015, in an attempt to offer a Montessori experience to more students, the school opened a toddler

and primary (preschool through Kindergarten) program in a traditional home environment in the bedroom community of Hampton Cove.

Since 2010, MSH has focused much of its effort on developing the acreage at the Chaney Thompson location into a multi-faceted outdoor classroom. Projects for the outdoor classroom have been funded largely through local grants and parent support. The school has been recognized by the American Wildlife Federation and the Alabama Wildlife Federation and currently is certified as both a wildlife habitat and an Alabama Outdoor Classroom. Another focus has been to continue to broaden the elementary program. MSH has partnered with SciQuest, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, and other local



organizations, in addition to seeking a AMS/MACTE(Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education) credential for our elementary lead teachers. Next steps for MSH include improving our Spanish language program to a two-way immersion program with a Spanish-speaking teacher in each classroom and pursuing full accreditation from the American Montessori Society, as well as continuing efforts to develop the premier outdoor education

program in Alabama.

MSH experienced both celebration and loss in 2015. The school celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in the newly established Hampton Cove Campus, and one of the very first students and a founder's daughter, Vivian Stooke helped celebrate the



occasion. Mrs. Imogen Stooke Wheeler now lives in England and was unable to make the trip. Ms. Miriam Gates, the other founder, was unable to join the celebration for health reasons and passed away two days later. Her family graciously asked for donations to the school in her memory.

Governance

The Montessori Society of Huntsville is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, in accordance with the Bylaws of the Montessori Society of Huntsville. These Bylaws, in conjunction with the Articles of

Incorporation of the Montessori School of Huntsville, are the authority in defining how the activities of the Montessori Society will be conducted.

The Bylaws currently require the Society to elect members of the Board of Directors. Directors serve staggered three-year terms and have no limit to the amount of time they may serve on the board. However, a member can hold the same office for only two consecutive terms. Board members can receive no compensation for their service.

The Board of Directors is required to meet bimonthly with fourteen days notice to the entire Montessori Society of Huntsville. The meetings are open to the entire society. Although, a closed session may be called at the discretion of the Board of Directors. A recent update to the Bylaws allows directors to participate in meetings via telephone or multi-media conference call.

The primary responsibilities of the Board of Directors are to oversee policy development and the annual budget, while the Chairman is responsible for supervising the Head of School. The Head of School is the supervisor for all MSH teachers and staff and oversees the day-to-day management of the school. The Head of School also communicates directly with parents regarding any concerns they may have, although parents, as Society members, and teachers have direct access to Board members either through contact information shared on our website or through the bimonthly board meetings.

The Board of Directors met in 2014 to update the Society's Bylaws, including its mission statement. Previously, the Society's mission statement had been too long to make an immediate, lasting impression on current and potential families or the larger community. Board members, with input from Society members and MSH teachers and staff, chose to simplify the statement to strengthen its impact.

In 2011, MSH continued efforts to expand enrollment, but met with the immediate challenge of how to house the 40 students located at the traditional home environment on Blevins Gap Rd. upon non-renewal of a twenty-year lease. After examining many alternatives, MSH purchased a modular building from the Montessori School of Knoxville and installed it on the Chaney Thompson campus. The campus was then reconfigured for elementary students to use the modular building and the two primary classes from

the Blevins Gap location moved into our main building giving the elementary students a sense of their own space separate from our preschool program.

In 2012, the board began the process of rewriting its long term plan to address the issue of sustainability. The recent changes of location for primary students coincided with a change in leadership with the Head of School. These changes sparked conversations about long-term sustainability among parents, staff, and board members. In addition, the recommendations of the 2011 SAIS accreditation team were put into practice. In 2012, the teacher representative position was removed from the Board of Directors. Parents with barter agreements were phased out and the services they provided were compensated or became volunteer-only positions. The Crisis Management Plan was re-written after a review of campus security with local law enforcement and a local security service provider. The plan is now available in a tabbed chart in every classroom along with an alarm remote that gives each classroom the ability to alert our security company in the event of emergency. In addition to the crisis plan, the mission statement is also posted in every classroom. The mission statement is the basis from which all new policies are written and is reflected in all print communication. The mission serves as a touchstone in all decision-making.

In 2012, after a review of the school's financial situation and enrollment, the board assessed its long-range plan and felt that the goals were not attainable given the financial resources of the school at that time. Using a review of longitudinal data in the form of exit surveys and parent-satisfaction surveys, anecdotal data through the use of focus groups and an understanding of best practices in child development and education, the directors examined the 2011 Strategic Plan. The 2012-13 Board of Directors adopted a strategic planning system known by the acronym OGSM--Objectives, Goals, Standards and Measurement.

The board spent 2012-2013 evaluating the business operations and management of the school. The new growth plan focused on building on the strengths of the school such as the outdoor classroom and Spanish language program and mitigating some of the challenges faced by the school by focusing on sustainability in the areas of operations, finance, and leadership.

School Profile

Demographics

The Montessori School of Huntsville educates 119 children from 101 families from as early as 18 months of age through sixth grade year round. The group of children is 51% male and 49% female. The ethnicity of the students is as follows: 72% White, 8% Biracial, 5% Asian, 9% Black, and 6% Hispanic. Current MSH families originate from five of the seven continents with nearly 20% of students living in households that speak more than one language.

Teachers and Staff

MSH also has a diverse teaching staff with teachers from India, Peru, the Philippines, and Argentina. Lead teachers for the primary and elementary classrooms all hold four year degrees and a Montessori credential with the exception of one teacher who has an elementary teaching degree, but is awaiting Montessori training. She is working under the supervision of a teacher with a credential. Not all of our toddler teachers have a bachelor's degree, but the school is only hiring toddler teachers now who possess the degree and are working with those teachers grandfathered in to assist them with completion of their degree. In addition to lead teachers, MSH employs specialist teachers to teach music and Spanish to all students, and an Art teacher to work with elementary students. Every MSH staff member is required to be CPR and First Aid certified.

All of the administrative staff hold bachelor's or master's degrees and are also trained in CPR and First Aid. The administrative staff often wears many hats. Office manager, Karen Nielsen, serves as our School Librarian and oversees the Parent/Teacher Committee. The Head of School, Allison MacKenzie, manages all day to day operations and serves the school as a licensed School Counselor. Director of Enrollment and Financial Services, Jennifer Stark, handles all of our Human Resource responsibilities and oversees our extended day and substitutes. Finally, the Site Director, Adriane Castro, manages the operations at the Hampton Cove location and coordinates fundraising and marketing efforts.

Families

All MSH families are required to give 15 hours of service to the school if they have one child enrolled and twenty hours for multiple children. Families support MSH through leadership by serving on the board or other committees. They maintain our facilities by painting, building, gardening, cleaning, or any other necessary task that presents itself. Between 3 or 4 times each year the school will host a parent workday on a Saturday or federal holiday and families will come together to work on larger projects. Parents also support the curriculum by cutting and laminating materials, assisting with cooking classes, or sharing their own experiences ranging from cultural awareness, avocations, and professional expertise.

Social Experiences

The school offers many opportunities for families to get to know one another and to celebrate the school. Parent coffees, Fall Festival, Multicultural Festival, Grandparents' Day and the Year End family picnic all offer times for families to celebrate and socialize.

Parent Education

MSH provides parent educational opportunities with a speaker series in the spring with presenters such as Trevor Eissler, Montessori Advocate and Steve Robinson, SAIS past-president and local experts such as Dr. Ana Byrne presenting on the topic of motivation or Kendall Hampton, local parent educator, speaking about positive discipline.

MSH also hosts regular book studies and have read the following titles since 2012: Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv, Protecting the Gift by Gavin de Becker, Bringing up Bebe by Pamela Druckerman, Nutureshock by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, Mindset by Carol Dweck, Simplicity Parenting by Kim John Payne, Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen and Montessori Madness by Trevor Eissler.

Finally, the school offers two parent education presentations each year. In January, teachers coordinate a four hour tour through the Montessori curriculum known as The Montessori Journey. Teachers also offer parents a class on how to bring Montessori

principles into the home to support the educational process at school, but more importantly, to help young children be independent at home. These programs are offered to the public and publicized through local media.

Self-study Efforts

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Beginning in the 2012 school year, an effort was made to gather data from our parent stakeholders in an organized manner that could be collected annually and reviewed with the Board of Directors and MSH staff. That year an anonymous survey was distributed to families to determine the parents' satisfaction with their experience at MSH. The survey focused on aspects such as the relationships between the teacher and the child, the teacher and the parent, the parents and the administration, and the parents and the board. In addition, overall elements were addressed like campus cleanliness and safety. In 2013-14, questions regarding curriculum outside the core Montessori elements like Spanish and Music were added. The same survey with a few additions has been administered for the last four years, allowing the school leadership to identify on-going parent concerns, identifying trends, and measuring change as new initiatives are implemented. With a goal of 4.5 (Satisfied or Very Satisfied), some areas for growth have emerged. Communication is approaching the goal, with efforts to improve this outcome by using print materials, Constant Contact emails, SchoolCast alert messaging, social media, and just person-to-person communication. Since 2012, MSH has been using the Google platform to give every staff member a professional email address and staff are encouraged to check email daily. Teachers now use Facebook to post pictures and updates. These two platforms have allowed our families who use extended care to connect more readily with staff members who may not be on campus when they drop off or pick up each day.

Another area for growth has been with our extended care program. To improve the efficacy of our extended care teachers, extended care teachers are encouraged to partner with a local training resource, Child Care Central. This organization provides materials in addition to free teacher training. Many custodial duties have been removed

from the extended care teacher job responsibilities to provide more time for planning. Next steps include trying to increase compensation for extended care teachers to attract and retain the very best candidates for these positions.

MSH continues to address parent concerns with campus safety. The Campus Crisis Plan is reviewed every year with MSH staff. The plan has been updated annually using resources such as local law enforcement and the National Association of School Psychologists PREPARE program. In 2013, panic buttons that alert our security system to dispatch law enforcement were added to each classroom at the main campus. In addition, lockdown procedures were developed and practiced with teachers. With the establishment of our Hampton Cove Campus, controlled access using key fobs were installed which was preferred by parents to the keypad system at the main campus. Additional teacher training in the areas of personal safety and crisis preparation were added in 2015.

The final area of growth identified by the survey was administrative organization. Change in the administrative staff has slowed progress in this effort. However, with a major focus identified in the OGSM on sustainable practices, the administrative staff has worked diligently to develop standard operating procedures that will withstand future staff changes and will result in uniform, consistent practice. The policy review undertaken by the Board of Directors in 2014-15 has contributed positively to this effort. Proactive steps taken by the administrative staff to use current tools more efficiently to communicate with parents have been successful. For example, in preparation for enrollment for the 2015-16 school year, parents were given enrollment applications that had already been populated with their child's name, their current address and contact information, etc. All parents had to do was check the accuracy of the information, select the program level for their child and sign the application. Parents were given the choice of attaching a check for the fee or marking a box requesting to be billed the next month for the fee. The return rate for applications increased and the number of incomplete applications were dramatically reduced.

The parent satisfaction survey has revealed strong score increases in the areas that relate directly to our mission such as an increase in teachers' relationships to both students and parents, the establishment of a positive environment and academic

progress for students. Also, in our secondary areas of curriculum of Spanish and Music, parents are significantly more satisfied with those curriculum. This growth correlates with the establishment of a dedicated space for these classes outside of the regular classroom. In addition, the school made the effort to provide the Spanish teacher with a full-time position and established planning times.

Minding the Mission

In the summer and fall of 2015 MSH undertook steps to match its mission to our stakeholders' core values. A survey was made available to current parents, board members, and teachers at the fall meeting of the Montessori Society of Huntsville. Surveys were distributed to small groups at individual tables and answers were compiled and documented for each small group. When asked "What aspect of our curriculum is most important?" MSH stakeholders who were present valued "independence" and "the freedom for students to pursue their own interests at their own pace". The focus groups also revealed that the development of social skills is a high priority for stakeholders. Other areas such as multicultural learning, peace education, hands-on learning, and access to outdoor learning also appeared in the discussion more than once.

The groups were also given a specific set of skills to consider and asked to mark which they felt were most important. The skills included independence, critical thinking, leadership, peace education, integrity and responsibility/purpose. Fifty five percent of the groups expressed that the skills were equally important; however, when pushed further, the skills were ranked in the following order

1. Responsibility/ Purpose
2. Critical Thinking
3. Independence and Integrity (tied)
4. Leadership and Peace Education (tied)

One final questions to the focus group asked for input on what attributes stakeholders felt were vital in our teachers and staff. This question was open-ended and yielded the following results:

1. Patience
2. Understanding

3. Enthusiasm

Other positive character traits were mentioned such as being competent, a good communicator, respectful. This survey format allowed for stakeholders present--board members, teachers and administrative staff, and over half of our parent body to communicate openly and collaboratively.

After our initial survey this school year, we shared an online survey asking stakeholders to evaluate our mission and how it matched to their core values. Our mission validity survey only garnered the opinions of 34 participants. These participants included 22 parents, 9 faculty members, 3 alumni. For this group, we asked them to rank attributes of our curriculum based on what they felt was most important and how well we performed on each.

The data from this survey is helpful, but the low response rate may impact the reliability of the data. This data does give a baseline of what areas the mission aligns with the stakeholders' perceptions of performance. Those areas include academic rigor, outdoor education, individualized instruction, Montessori knowledge, cultural exposure and

Mission- Stakeholder Importance Vs. MSH Performance					
	Importance	Performance	Difference		
Curriculum Attributes					
Academic Rigor	1.47	1.53	-0.06		1= very important/well
Music	1.35	1.76	-0.41		2=important/well
Art	1.35	1.82	-0.47		3= not important/not well
Outdoor Education	1.53	1.56	-0.03		
Foreign Language	1.57	1.79	-0.22		
Individualized Instruction	1.21	1.24	-0.03		
Purposeful Work	1.12	1.3	-0.18		
Whole Child instruction	1.15	1.33	-0.18		
Faculty/Staff Attributes					
Support	1.09	1.47	-0.38		
Inspiring	1.26	1.59	-0.33		
Montessori Expert	1.41	1.47	-0.06		
Developmental Attributes					
Academic	1.26	1.42	-0.16		
Emotional	1.12	1.42	-0.3		
Physical	1.47	1.76	-0.29		
Social	1.24	1.42	-0.18		
Cultural Exposure	1.35	1.36	-0.01		
Global Citizenship	1.41	1.55	-0.14		
Student Personal Traits/Skills					
Independence	1.15	1.24	-0.09		
Critical Thinking	1.15	1.39	-0.24		
Leadership	1.44	1.61	-0.17		
Peace Education	1.62	1.45	0.17		
Integrity	1.12	1.33	-0.21		
Responsibility/Purpose	1.06	1.33	-0.27		

Close alignment between importance and performance

Greatest gap between importance and performance

student independence and are outlined in green above. Areas highlighted in red (music, art, supportive faculty) are areas in which performance least matches the expectations of our stakeholders. We can see these weaknesses reflected in other areas of our self-study like our communication scores in parent surveys which could correlate with teacher supportiveness. Anecdotal data from stakeholders indicate that parents would like to see more in music education which led to the decision to partner with Huntsville Symphony Orchestra. This is the only place MSH received feedback on our visual art program. This may have more to do with a lack of highlighting art education efforts and the fact that art is less prescribed in a Montessori classroom than in traditional programs.

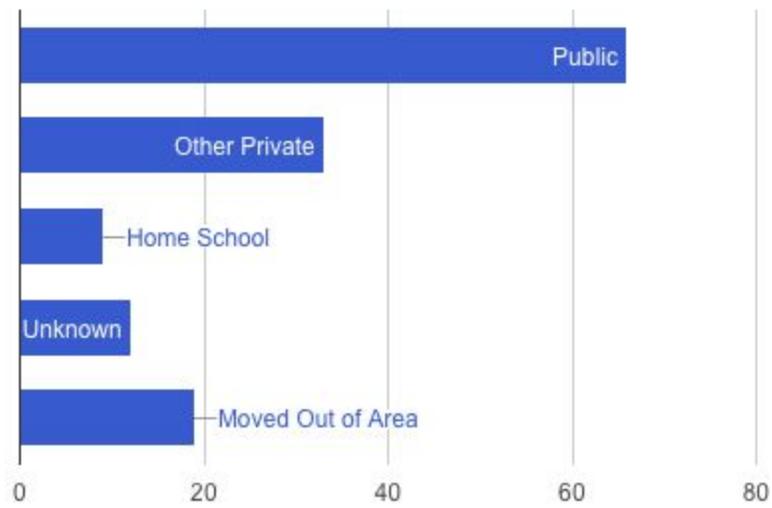
Spotlight on Attrition

With the largest number of students being preschool and a small retention rate to elementary, MSH began collecting data from families at their departure from the school. In 2013, the school requested families complete an exit survey upon withdrawal. Information about why they were leaving and where they were going was captured. Using both longitudinal and anecdotal data from exit surveys, MSH has undertaken efforts to improve retention.

Reasons for Leaving (4 year span)



Where MSH Students Go (4 year span)



With financial reasons being the primary reason for leaving and public school being the largest receiver of exiting students, the cost of MSH seems to be the biggest challenge to overcome in retaining students. In 2011, MSH had a scholarship to cover the cost for one student named in honor of the former director, Kathy O'Reilly. Beginning in 2014-15 the board approved a financial aid program to give assistance to students up to \$50,000. The school uses the ISM program, Financial Assistance for School Tuition (FAST) to screen families for the program. The Finance Committee then allocates funds based on FAST recommendations in February for the upcoming school year beginning in August. The team has targeted those dollars towards elementary students since that is our most expensive tuition and that is where we experience the most attrition.

In addition, the Montessori Society of Huntsville under the BOD's direction applied for and received Scholarship Granting Organization status under new legislation, the Alabama Accountability Act. MSH can now receive taxpayer dollars to grant scholarships to students zoned for schools that have been identified as "failing" by the State Department of Education. The school also accepts students with scholarships from other SGOs in the state such as the Alabama Opportunity Scholarship Fund. The realization of the dollars into revenue has been difficult because MSH is located in southeastern Huntsville with most of the failing schools being in the northern and western portions of the city. Most of the students in these failing schools are from families in poverty and cannot manage the necessary transportation to MSH. MSH continues to look at ways to take advantage of this revenue source and to provide Montessori education to children in other areas of the city.

Finally, great efforts have been made to improve the elementary program's curriculum to entice parents to keep students enrolled at MSH instead of transferring to the local public schools which are regarded in the community as being strong programs. Both of the elementary lead teachers sought additional training and have or are on schedule to receive their American Montessori Society credential by 2017, in addition to the North American Montessori Society credential they previously held. A targeted effort has been made to upgrade materials in those classes especially in the areas of math and science with additions such as the Albanesi Math curriculum, Houston Montessori Materials in math and science, Hands On Equations, Junior Great Books, and more. Finally, for

parents who were concerned about only having observation as a tool for measuring progress, MSH added Renaissance Learning's STAR testing program in Reading and Math in 2014. Parents now receive a standardized metric to chart their child's progress in these two areas at least 2 times per year. In addition, summative assessment in the form of the Stanford Achievement Test was added to grades 4 and 5 instead of only the terminal years of lower and upper elementary, grades 3 and 6 respectively. In 2017, MSH will transition to the ACT Aspire for summative assessment since the Stanford for grade 3 and up retires in 2016.

These efforts have resulted in full enrollment with a waiting list for the lower elementary program in 2015. If this growth continues, MSH is preparing to train a second teacher for lower elementary to open a second classroom in 2017. Retention to upper elementary remains sluggish. The school continues to upgrade materials in this classroom and partner with local organizations to enhance the upper elementary program. This year the upper elementary teacher coordinated with Nature's Classroom in Mentone, AL to provide upper elementary students with a 3 day outdoor experience. Strings instruction was introduced in the 2014-15 school year with a 10 week violin program. That program was upgraded in 2015-16 to a full-year strings instruction course with an instructor from Huntsville Symphony Orchestra.

OGSM

MSH Strategic Goals: 2015 - 2018

For the school years: 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18

The Montessori School of Huntsville educates toddler through upper elementary children to help them realize their richest potential for learning, and to prepare them for a life of purpose, integrity and academic accomplishment in the larger community. We develop independent learners, critical thinkers and tomorrow's leaders.

Program: Provide a multifaceted Montessori program that develops the whole child by providing a nurturing environment rooted in high quality education and cultural exposure.

1. Strengthen the Montessori education experience from toddler to middle school by:

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- a. establishing a Montessori curriculum, materials and training for the lower & upper elementary and middle school classrooms to include a AMS accreditation;
 - b. developing & implementing comprehensive programs in Spanish, music and art, including the adoption of a MSH curriculum standard that includes a annual review of student portfolio and performance;
 - c. fostering the mission of developing student's growth in responsibility, self-guided learning & community involvement; and,
 - d. establishing the plan for an adolescent program extending through 8th grade.
2. Lead the southeast in providing outdoor and green education programs by:
 - a. turning MSH's culture green in spirit & action;
 - b. establishing a track record of grant funding for green and outdoor education; and,
 - c. developing a green and outdoor curriculum for Primary and Elementary classrooms.

Finances: Strengthen the financial platform to reflect and serve the mission, values and long-term sustainability of the school.

1. Development of a long-term financial plan for the school, including role and magnitude of Financial Aid.
2. Continued implementation of a business system infrastructure that improve daily operations and supports the Administration and Finance Committee operations.
3. Progress testing of the satellite site model for revenue growth and elementary student recruitment.
4. Increase the number of major gifts and overall participation in annual giving.
5. Exploration of capital giving and other funding opportunities.

MSH Community: Strengthen a sense of community and connection among parents, students and staff through increased and purposeful engagement of parents, more venues for teacher collaboration, and initiatives to facilitate connection and relationships between students.

1. Foster a deeper understanding of Montessori philosophy, materials and methods within the community.
2. Develop specific programs designed to facilitate learning, connections and interactions between students across all MSH programs.
3. Revitalize parent organization that strives to engage MSH families fully in the life of the school and represents the school in a variety of forums.
4. Establish an ongoing speaker series and seminars developed in collaboration with faculty, staff and parents and responsive to the interests of MSH families.

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5. Improve communication across all available channels to provide relevant and needed information to families.
 6. Engage alumni population to become involved with the school in a variety of ways, advocating for the school and serving as a testimony to the MSH education.

External Communities: Engage and connect with and serve our external communities to provide leadership and innovation in promoting the mission and values of MSH.

1. Publish a document that demonstrates the success of current students and alumni as well as highlights skills and knowledge developed while at MSH.
2. Increase visibility and perceived value within the greater Huntsville community.

Facilities: Optimize available facilities to more effectively support programs, enhance a sense of community among students and families in an environmentally progressive and sustainable way.

1. Produce a comprehensive review of the function, capacity, green building measures, and aesthetic qualities of all facilities and outdoor space using student, parent, faculty and staff input.
2. Development of scenarios for acquiring and/or sharing additional resources that are vital to the future of the school.
3. Development of a long-term campus and facilities plan.

Faculty & Staff: Attract, retain and develop a diverse, outstanding faculty that as a team delivers child-centered education in ways that continue to advance MSH's leadership in Montessori education.

1. Continue to invest in a comprehensive professional development and evaluation program that meets the developmental needs of faculty and staff at all stages of their career.
2. Completion of a long term plan for desired faculty community that addresses compensation, benefits, career opportunity and leadership.

Strategic Initiatives

Program Initiatives

Much progress has been made in our program initiatives. In the past three years we have purchased program materials for all program levels. Six teachers attended

American Montessori Society approved training programs in the summer of 2015 and three more are slated to attend by the end of 2017.

The Spanish and Music programs were given a dedicated space and the Spanish teacher was relieved of all professional duties other than planning for and implementing Spanish instruction in the school. The Music program was enhanced by collaboration with the local symphony.

A lead teacher was identified to oversee the curriculum development for the outdoor program. All teachers were trained in Project Wild, a preschool wildlife curriculum. The elementary program with the support of several grants added a weather station, bat house, chicken coop, compost station, worm bin, walking trails, human sundial, and identification plaques of 25 species of plants native to Alabama. Next, primary students will receive a sensory garden on their playground due to the generosity of local Master Gardeners.

Efforts need to be continued in program development to allow for additional funding for each program. A web-based record keeping program such as MXR or Montessori Compass would be beneficial for our teachers and families and allow us to “green” record-keeping.

The larger task is to plan for and fund the development of the middle school program. The Board of Directors begin the process of planning this year. Interest remains high in the program, but space and funding are obstacles to be addressed. The BOD began preliminary planning for this process this year. At this time, parent input has been received through a paper survey. The survey indicates that math, science, arts and a service component are high priorities for our families.

Finance Initiatives

As previously mentioned in the self-study section, a financial aid program was initiated in 2014. That program is slated to continue and MSH will actively seek other sources of revenue to support families in affordable tuition. The Board of Directors is also working to hold tuition to with only 1% raises in the past two years.

The Board of Directors met in 2014 to update the Society's Bylaws, including its mission statement. Previously, the Society's mission statement had been too long to make an immediate, lasting impression on current and potential families or the larger community. Board members, with input from Society members and MSH teachers and staff, chose to simplify the mission statement, paring down language that distracted from the core message.

Throughout the 2014-15 school year the Board of Directors took on the task of reviewing all MSH policies. BOD members reviewed all the Administrative, Financial, Legal and Staff policies over the course of the year to ensure that the policies still reflected the values and best interest of MSH and its stakeholders. Some policies were removed such as the Administrative policy of Bartering for Goods and Services. Others were rewritten solely because of grammatical errors such as the Legal policy for Filing of Tax Form 990. The mission and concern for students and families remained at the forefront of each policy change which resulted in an updated non-discrimination policy to also include protection based on religious beliefs and genetics. The discipline policy was updated to define and include provisions for bullying and in school suspension was removed as a consequence for misbehavior. A list of all policies, called Policy Review Tracking, with comments regarding their review, and their current status is available upon request.

In addition to policy review, the administrative staff has been working diligently to design and implement standard operating procedures. Procedures have been developed in the form of checklists for student admission processes. A short video to explain policies to new parents was designed titled MSH 101 and is available on YouTube for parents who enroll after the beginning of the year. Canned email responses have been crafted for parent inquiries to ensure consistent information is communicated. New hire checklists and employee orientation checklists are now available to ensure continuity in services when adding new staff.



To increase revenue, a model of satellite preschool campuses was piloted in the 2015-16 school year. The primary ages provide the highest margin of financial return and a large preschool enrollment may foster a more substantial elementary program. MSH has a three

year lease on a traditional home environment in Hampton Cove. This site can accommodate up to 40 students. In 2013, in conjunction with the University of Alabama Huntsville's School of Business, Hampton Cove and Madison were both communities identified as potential markets for a Montessori program. With Hampton Cove's proximity to our current location and repeated complaints from tours from that area that driving over the mountain was too inconvenient, the school opened a second campus in that location in August 2015. Interest is high, but enrollment still remains at 38 percent of capacity after 6 months of operation.

To increase enrollment at both locations, MSH takes advantage of all low cost, no cost marketing efforts. The school participates in local events like the Rocket City Mom Learning Expo and the Baby and Kids Expo. The school maintains an active Facebook page and uses strategic boosting of posts to reach potential customers. In addition, MSH families are active on local social media groups promoting the school. Local media is utilized to publicize any free events we offer and the school provides content to print materials in which advertising is cost-prohibitive. For example, our Hampton Cove Campus will be spotlighted in the March edition of *Life in Hampton Cove*. Tuition rebates are available for parents who refer another family to MSH which results in an enrollment.

The Hampton Cove campus will also be sponsoring a free baby/caregiver playgroup to the parents in Hampton Cove who are not quite as familiar with the Montessori curriculum and are price sensitive when comparing costs with the Mother's Morning Out programs available at the local churches.

The next focus for the finance objectives will be to focus on improving annual giving and explore the possibility for a Capital Campaign. This is an area that will receive intense focus in the 2016-17 year with a potential signature fundraiser in development, a corporate kickball tournament. MSH's previous fundraiser, Spring Zing, lost momentum as the community became flooded with 5Ks, 10ks, trail runs, and themed runs.

Community Initiatives

Progress on MSH's community initiatives is strong. Providing learning opportunities for parents is a strength for the school. Improving communication with families has been an identified issue presented earlier in the self-study. The administrative staff has worked

with the teaching staff to continue to improve this area. The goal is that standardizing procedures and using multiple avenues of communication will continue to impact communication in a positive way.

MSH does need to improve the connections it has with alumni. In this area, the school has attempted to reconnect alumni via mail with 500 invitations to the 50th anniversary celebration in May 2015. Alumni emails are now being captured via Constant Contact and alumni are invited to campus events and encouraged to stay in touch via Facebook. One strategy that MSH is exploring to encourage alumni involvement is the establishment of a Founders' Day celebration to occur annually in May.

Some of the same strategies to engage alumni will hopefully connect the school with the external community, as well. As mentioned earlier, MSH uses low/no cost methods to engage the external community for marketing and for educational purposes. MSH regularly participates in the Huntsville Botanical Garden's Scarecrow Trail and joined the Downtown Huntsville's Tinsel Trail this year. MSH has been active in the Huntsville Madison County Private School Association, BNI Cove (business networking) and volunteered with a local charity, CASA (Care Assurance for the Aging). Almost all of MSH's parent education are made available for the public to attend.

Facilities

MSH's facilities are maintained primarily by parent volunteers. In 2014, the school did engage a janitor to do daily cleanings of the building, but switched to a janitorial service in 2015 to ensure regularity of cleaning. Using Google docs, a calendar of tasks is maintained to remind the administrative staff of regular maintenance. A quote was acquired by the board from local companies to provide comprehensive maintenance, but the service was cost-prohibitive. An effort has been made to develop a vigorous, active buildings and grounds committee, but the bulk of the work generally has fallen to the chair of that committee. MSH has had great success with scheduling seasonal parent work events and getting major projects accomplished with volunteer parent labor.

Faculty and Staff

Improving the opportunities for Faculty and Staff have been a major focus for the past few years. The evaluation system for teachers has been transformed from a point based evaluation system completed by supervisors to a growth model that engages the teacher with multiple stakeholders. Teachers now set their own professional growth goals, select a significant portion of their professional development with a focus on individual goals, and have the opportunity to self-reflect and observe and learn from one another.

Teacher leadership is a priority. Opportunities to observe other schools are encouraged. Teachers have an opportunity to give their voice on day-to-day operations via regular staff meetings with a time devoted to communication, quality control, mission integrity, and curriculum. Every board meeting has a time on the agenda for both teachers and parents to voice concerns or offer recommendations.

Continued effort is still needed to raise teacher salaries to the same level as public school teachers, but teachers and staff have experienced a 3% raise for the last 3 years, which is a rate higher than the Cost of Living Adjustment recommended by Social Security for the past three years (1.5 in 2013, 1.7 in 2014, and 0.0 in 2015.)

Final Thoughts

Just as we want our students to be independent learners, critical thinkers, and tomorrow's leaders, MSH strives for the same in its own performance. We feel that a Montessori education is a gift that every child deserves. Our self-study and subsequent strategic initiatives are focused on keeping our program sustainable for the long haul while providing a Montessori environment for as many families as possible and for as long as possible. We are grateful to SAIS for giving us a mechanism to examine our work and improve it.

