

A LETTER FROM JOHN LONG

August 26, 2015

Dear Post Oak Community,

This is my 21st year at Post Oak and I have informed the board that it will be my last. It will bring to a close my forty-three year career as an educator. I first encountered Montessori in 1976 at Capitol Hill Montessori School in Washington, D.C. when I returned home at the conclusion of Peace Corps service in Afghanistan. I worked for a semester as an elementary classroom assistant and had never seen such an engaging, hands-on approach to learning. I felt at home. It was the kind of rich, wide-ranging, and creative education I wished I'd had as a child. The classroom was filled with intriguing learning materials; the curriculum had a breadth and depth I could not even imagine as an elementary pupil; and its experiential approach invited the individual student to explore his own interests even as he learned to work collaboratively with classmates and friends.

My family and I relocated to Houston in 1995 when I was invited to become head of The Post Oak School. During the past twenty years, the school's mission and fundamental educational principles have remained constant; and during the same time period, much has changed. Enrollment has grown by 50% to more than 480 students; a second campus has been developed in the Museum District to house the school's two newest initiatives: The Post Oak High School and the Houston Montessori Institute (HMI) teacher training center; the Bissonnet facilities were expanded by 25% when we added the gym, art studio, library and upper elementary classrooms, and five significant renovation projects have been done as well, including a complete redesign of the playground and outdoor environment; our 2006 accreditation by the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS) is a clear expression of the quality of our professional associations; our multi-dimensional involvement with AMI, even as we assume leadership among schools calling for organizational reform, indicates our ongoing commitment to our founding pedagogical principles; our participation in multiple research projects makes clear our leadership role within the national movement for education reform; and all of these strategic initiatives have been within our grasp because of the school's greatly improved financial strength—a direct result of fiscal prudence and a consistent 24-year partnership between the board, the administration and Independent School Management (ISM).

This body of work has been accomplished because so many people have worked with relentless dedication to a common cause. Each of us plays our personal part, contributing to the work of the whole, and for a finite period of time. Together we have created an extraordinary school. Each morning as I watch the children arrive one by one, I am reminded that the school is here for this child, and for that one. For each child individually; and for all of them as a community of learners: it is here for the children of the present moment, just as it was for our former students, and as it will be for the Post Oak students of the future. We have made a school to last.

It has been my privilege to work with so many dedicated and talented people over the past two decades. Faculty, administrative staff, trustees and parent volunteers: all commit so much time and talent to the

work of the school. Who among us has the longest current tenure at Post Oak? Chief custodian Manuel Mejia, whose commitment to our work is as tangible as anyone's; largely unsung, he is here late into the night, on weekends and holidays as needed. Whenever there is an event at school, he is there to make sure that we are prepared, and when all is done, that we are buttoned up. A variation of Manuel's story could be repeated over and over, changing the names and the roles played by the many faculty, staff, trustees and parent volunteers who over the years have worked in service to the school. I am humbled to have been a part of this collective effort.

My tenure at Post Oak ends at a culminating moment in the school's evolution. Our first class will graduate from The Post Oak High School in May 2016. The new high school building will be complete and the middle school will have moved into new quarters on the Museum District campus, creating the Post Oak Center for Adolescent Education. At the same time, the renovation project on the Bissonnet campus will have begun, transforming it by August 2016 into the Post Oak Center for Early Childhood and Elementary Education. The Houston Montessori Institute just graduated its first class of Montessori teachers and the second course has launched. The Post Oak Parenting Center is poised to open. The Big Work capital campaign is wrapping up. The school will have assumed the educational structure and created the physical facilities that will serve it decades into the future.

As I conclude this letter, I must mention the special partnership that I have enjoyed with Kathy Long during our time at Post Oak. Kathy has taken on many roles over the last twenty years: lower elementary teacher, middle school teacher, curriculum coordinator, lower school director, and interim admission director. Her spirit is kind, calm and resolute; she works tirelessly. A consulting psychologist once commented while observing her classroom, "Kathy heads off trouble before it has a chance to begin." She is a systems thinker and a creative problem solver. In fact, it was Kathy who answered the crucial question, "How can we increase student retention between primary and elementary?" Elementary enrollment has grown by 60% in the decade since she implemented our Prospective Parent Classes—an idea she conceived while attending the School for Innovators.

Kathy and I will retire at the same time, and we are grateful to Post Oak for the opportunity to have shared this work. We both look forward to an extraordinary year of culmination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the left and a sharp hook at the end.

John Long
Head of School