Responding to strong interest expressed by Post Oak parents and others, our Board of Trustees is exploring the feasibility of creating a Post Oak High School.

You will ultimately determine whether it happens.

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www.postoakhighschool.org
Post Oak High School: The Vision

by John Long, Head of School

In a beautiful old building in the US’ fourth largest city, in the heart of a vibrant corridor housing some of the world’s foremost artistic, cultural, medical and scientific institutions, a group of young adults is sitting around trading ideas. Contributing to the discussion is a renowned molecular biologist. A museum curator. A Fortune 500 CEO.

These people are students. In total, there are only one hundred of them here. Graduate students at some small, elite liberal arts college, consulting with specialized advisors as they prepare doctoral theses?

No. These are students of The Post Oak High School. They are young people engaged in a four-year program of study that, of itself, will be one of the most meaningful and unforgettable experiences of their lives. And they’ll leave with a diploma that represents rigorous and highly regarded qualification for entry in to the world’s best universities: the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

This is our vision for The Post Oak High School. Our model and partner as we contemplate creating it is the Montessori High School at University Circle in Cleveland, Ohio. We envision situating POHS in Houston’s Museum District—fertile soil for the interdisciplinary partnerships that will be central to this school’s mission. A mission, by the way, that has always been Post Oak’s: to guide and nurture each young person—intellectually, socially, and emotionally.
Creating a high school is a monumental undertaking and Post Oak’s Trustees are committed to thorough analysis before starting down this path. That said, we have the resources, experience and leadership to credibly contemplate such a venture.

And Houston—with its size and diversity—has the cultural, artistic and entrepreneurial infrastructure to support a network of partnerships that could present students with unparalleled opportunity. The path we take (or whether we make the journey at all) has yet to be determined. But the destination is clear. The ultimate goal of this project would be to offer families the kind of high school we heard them ask for during Post Oak’s October planning retreat: a high school in which students could work in an environment that cultivates intrinsic motivation and collaboration; one whose diploma positions students for acceptance into highly selective universities; a high school whose mission is to prepare students to be productive world citizens.

If this project proceeds, we anticipate POHS’ first classes in Fall 2012. As the Board and administration continue with planning efforts, more detailed information will be distributed to parents and posted at postoakhighschool.org.
Frequently asked questions

Here are the questions we’ve heard people ask most often, but they’re only part of a much larger discussion. To learn more, or to join the conversation, visit [www.postoakhighschool.org](http://www.postoakhighschool.org) or [http://blog.postoakhighschool.org](http://blog.postoakhighschool.org) after Friday, April 16.

Is there a projected timeline for opening the Post Oak High School? If the decision is made to proceed with this project, we anticipate first classes in Fall 2012 with Post Oak High School’s first class graduating in May 2016.

Who will attend the Post Oak High School? POHS will not be for everyone. For the right student it will be an extraordinary opportunity, offering a four-year program not available at any other Houston high school. Students who are self-motivated, responsible and disciplined are best equipped to succeed at Post Oak High School.

Where will students come from? The Post Oak School has the potential to feed 20 graduates into POHS annually, and students who successfully complete middle school at POS will be granted admission. POHS will also admit qualified students from other private Montessori schools and HISD Montessori magnets. A small percentage of students will be promising candidates from traditional schools. Total estimated POHS enrollment is one hundred students.

Will POS graduates automatically be admitted? Yes. Students who’ve successfully completed 8th grade at POS will be granted admission (POS students enrolled in primary or higher since 2004 are potential candidates).

Will scholarships and/or financial aid be offered? Post Oak spends 8 – 10% of its annual operating budget on financial
aid to families who need it, a practice that POHS will adopt. Additionally, our Trustees are considering the feasibility of budgeting funds for merit-based high school scholarships. Watch for details as this plan develops.

**Will POHS admit students with learning differences?** What accommodations/modifications will be offered to such students? Among Post Oak School’s current graduates are students with learning differences; these students are well prepared for success at POHS. Accommodations made for them at POS will also be available at POHS. While POHS will not have special resources for students with learning differences, we’ll have the flexibility to adapt for students with mild to moderate needs—provided those students have learned compensation strategies to help themselves and actively seek the support they need from teachers and peers.

**What can students expect from POHS relative to college admissions?**

- **Can a Montessori school, with its lack of emphasis on grades and standardized tests, position students for acceptance at top universities?** Eventually, POHS will speak for itself to college admission officers. Initially, the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, which represent a well-defined level of achievement, will have greater recognition. A defining hallmark of the IB program is its rigorous assessment. All subjects are evaluated both internally (by the school) and externally (by independent examiners around the world). The result is an objective standard that is recognized in 75 countries by more than 2000 universities as high-level qualification for university admission. Consistent with Montessori principles, these assessments are used to communicate achievement after-the-fact, and not as incentives to motivate or reward students’ performance.

- **How will THIS school—small, new, unproven—affect students’ attractiveness as candidates?** The IB program is well known and highly regarded by colleges and universities in Europe, Asia and Australia as well as across the United States. Although Post Oak High School will be a new school, its graduates will benefit from the recognition earned by IB graduates around the world for the past 40 years.

**Will there be sports at POHS?** Sports fields will not be part of the POHS campus. But that doesn’t mean sports won’t be part of students’ experience. Like the rest of their POHS experience, sports and extra-curricular activities will be shaped by students’ own interests. This school will have an Athletic Director as well as a Community Liaison, adults whose purpose it is to coach, facilitate, and connect Post Oak High School students with outside resources that best match what they want to pursue.
Frequently asked questions

How about other extracurriculars? POHS’ network of focused interdisciplinary partnerships will present students with unique extra-curricular opportunities. They will learn from professionals who excel in a wide variety of cultural, artistic, educational, scientific and medical endeavors. For one successful model of this, see the “X-term” programs offered by Montessori High School at University Circle. (www.montessorihighschool.org/student-x-terms.htm).

How will the Post Oak High School be funded? POHS will be self-sustaining once past the start-up phase. Initially, Post Oak will support the high school while it gets off the ground. The board is developing a pro forma business plan to determine the limits of that support, ensuring the fiscal integrity of The Post Oak School as a whole.

How will this project affect the existing school? The addition of a high school will enhance Post Oak’s current program, extending our work further into the developmental spectrum. Dr. Montessori’s work addresses four six-year stages of development from birth to adulthood; a high school would extend our work to the end of the third stage. Expanding our understanding of the spectrum of human development will deepen our work with younger children.

How will having a split campus impact the current school? The high school? The experience of other schools with two campuses suggests how this might impact Post Oak. On the plus side, locating the high school on a separate campus would give it a distinct identity, and would give continuing students a special transition to anticipate. A separate campus would also make the high school more attractive to candidates applying for admission from outside.

On the other hand, the school will need to work hard to maintain a cohesive culture for students, faculty and parents. Some operational efficiencies will be lost: maintaining separate campuses will entail duplication of some personnel and resources. (While the business and development offices work from a single location, reception and admission will be staffed on each campus.) A high school division director would be appointed whether the campuses were separate or joined.

How will this school’s size affect students’ experience? POHS’ small population opens students to real inter-age relationships and collaboration. It enables the school to manage focused partnerships that exposes students to meaningful involvement with Museum District professionals. At a high school level, these students will engage the Real World—and do real work—in ways that adolescents typically don’t. The experience will shape young adults who can begin early on to develop deep commitments to specific interests…interests that often become a life’s work. (During our discovery process, Post Oak Trustees heard stories from other schools that illustrate this beautifully.)
What will make Post Oak High School special and different? The Post Oak High School will be one of only six Houston schools offering the IB program, and the only one presenting that program in a Montessori context. Students will have access to interdisciplinary partnerships with the kinds of institutions and enterprises that can only exist in a city with Houston’s scale and diversity (the world’s largest medical center is one example). The school’s size makes it uniquely attractive. The Post Oak High School will expose students to opportunities that by their very nature are unparalleled at other schools; opportunities most students must create for themselves if they are to have them at all.

Where can I learn more? Our Board of Trustees has taken steps to assess the viability of creating a Post Oak High School and to formulate a potential plan. The Board is working hard to assess our community’s interest in this project, so plans are evolving. Next Friday, April 16, postoakhighschool.org will expand to include a blog devoted to this conversation. Check the site, and the blog, for comments and emerging details.

How can I get involved? School consultant John Littleford moderated Post Oak’s strategic planning retreat in October, and listened as many parents expressed interest in creating a high school. He will return on April 21-22, convening small parent groups to more fully assess what level of interest exists for this idea. Please visit www.postoakhighschool.org today to sign up for one of these sessions.
Join the conversation that will determine what happens.

At a Post Oak strategic planning retreat last October, many parents expressed interest in creating a high school. On April 21-22, we’ll meet again to discuss whether it is an idea whose time has come.

Sign up for a session at:

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