What would the ideal Post Oak School look like? That question has been at the crux of recent school improvement efforts. Seven years ago, we began to offer a series of classes for prospective parents as a part of the enrollment process. Since then, retention rates for rising Elementary students have been at all-time highs, and upper school numbers have grown. Because of this enrollment demand, the school opened a new Lower Elementary class two years ago, and in August will open a new Upper Elementary class.

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During the same time period, the school completed the rigorous accreditation process of the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS). Twenty separate committees comprised of faculty, administration, trustees and parents examined every aspect of the school’s operations, and produced a self-study (2005) that was an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses. Once ISAS accepted our self-study, the association dispatched an evaluation team to visit Post Oak. The team’s report praised the school for “visible fidelity to its mission,” and unequivocally recommended Post Oak for accreditation (2006). The report included both commendations for the school’s strengths, and recommendations for improvement.

The self-study, the ISAS report, and our recent enrollment growth have given faculty, administration, and board a full agenda. Some changes have already been implemented, but other issues are more long-term, involving greater complexity and expense. The board of trustees entered the current school year with strategic planning on the table, anticipating the need to expand current facilities in order to accommodate enrollment growth and enable new program initiatives, such as a music studio, a teacher training center, and a parenting center.

Before finalizing a plan, the board invited consultant John Littleford to help solicit feedback from a variety of Post Oak stakeholders. Last October, Littleford met with small groups of parents, faculty, staff and alumni, and reported his findings to the board and senior administration. Most of the conversations dealt with the already-known issues, but one surprise emerged: “Why doesn’t Post Oak have a high school?”

In many ways, it was the right time for the school to consider this seminal question. By every measure of operational stability—including enrollment, financial standing, and parent satisfaction—the school is in a position of great strength. In addition, it’s been 10 years since other communities around the country began extending Montessori education into the secondary level. Of particular interest is the Montessori High School in Cleveland, Ohio, which opened two years ago after five years in development.

“Why doesn’t Post Oak have a high school?” The board took the question seriously, appointing trustee Stuart Dow to head a committee to explore the issues. Dow, who was the founding head of Houston’s Emery High School, and Post Oak trustee Windi Grimes accompanied Post Oak Head of School John Long on a trip to Cleveland to observe firsthand the Montessori High School in action.

They returned not only excited by the character and quality of the program, but intrigued by the possibility of creating a comparable school in Houston.

The committee set to work crafting a vision statement for the Post Oak High School, one modeled on the Cleveland school. The potential high school would be located in the Houston Museum District in order to promote partnerships between students and experts from area museums, universities and medical center institutions. The school would also become Houston’s fifth International Baccalaureate Program (IB).

To assess the practical details of the high school initiative, the committee moved in several directions. It continued to investigate other Montessori high schools. It contacted nationally-known private schools that have multiple campuses to learn from their experiences. And it formed a financial sub-committee to develop a multi-year, pro-forma, business plan to predict the costs of such a venture.

Finally, and critically, the board wished to explore in greater depth parent interest in Post Oak High School. After interviewing several market research firms, we invited John Littleford to return. Over a two day period, Littleford met with 65 parents in
small groups, and Stuart Dow met with eighteen more. Despite some ongoing questions regarding certain particulars (such as size, sports, etc.), Littleford’s conclusion was that there is strong parent support for this initiative, enough for the high school to succeed—if the board and administration are ready, willing, and able to do the required work.

On May 11, the board convened a special meeting to evaluate all of the information it had gathered about the high school, within the context of the other outstanding strategic initiatives. The discussion was thorough and wide-ranging. This is the board at work, assessing the long-term best interests of the school, in light of its mission, considering both immediate and long-range fiscal implications, and imagining the school from the perspective of the future children of our current students.

In short, the board decided to pursue a Post Oak High School—and at the same time to address the needs of the current facility. This decision reflects a powerful consensus to move forward with a cohesive and comprehensive vision of the ideal Post Oak School, serving children from walking to the onset of young adulthood.

In order to do so well, the school will pursue initiatives to train Montessori teachers as well as Montessori parents. Furthermore, there is a commitment to maintaining the scale of the school, accommodating projected growth on the current campus while developing a high school of 120 students on a separate Museum District campus.

You will have many practical questions in the days ahead. Board and administration know that the devil is in the details. Know now that this is the starting point: board and administration are committed to do this work for your children and for your children’s children, and realize that there is much to be done. This decision marks the culmination of a year’s work, and represents the beginning of the next phase. And know this, too: your help will be needed.

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Public Montessori school honored in White House commencement challenge

On May 4, the White House announced that Kalamazoo Central High in Kalamazoo, MI, was selected as the winner of the “Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge.” The runners up were Clark Montessori School in Cincinnati, OH, and Denver School of Science and Technology in Denver, CO. More than 1,000 schools, nationwide, that took part in this Challenge.

The Challenge, launched in late February, invited public high schools to submit applications showing their dedication to providing students with an excellent education that will prepare them to graduate ready for college and career choices. President Obama selected the winner after public voting narrowed six finalists down to three.

“They represent the best that American public education has to offer,” said the White House about the finalists.

According to the White House website, in recognition of their achievements, the Obama Administration is working to provide a Cabinet secretary or senior administration official to deliver an address at each finalist’s commencement this spring. “We are very honored to have been chosen as the one of the three model high schools in America,” reads a statement on Clark Montessori’s website. “That step alone is enormous and still unbelievable. We were all in this together—working on essays, creating videos, being flexible and spreading the word. This accomplishment speaks volumes about our students, staff, philosophy and community.”

In a note to AMS, Marta Donahoe, founder and program coordinator of Clark Montessori Junior and High School, said: “Just after getting the news from the White House, the seniors called Kalamazoo and Denver to congratulate them. They cheered and clapped over the speaker phone. Then we all gave each other a big group Montessori hug. Just as happens with all our big collaborative Montessori projects—we finish strong and realize we have fallen in love with each other.”

From a letter from Marie Conti, Senior Director of School Accreditation and Member Programs, American Montessori Society
A great year to volunteer

Like most of you, we’re amazed that the end of the school year is already here. We’ve had a terrific year as POPA chairs, in large part because of the many volunteers with whom we’ve had the pleasure of working. For each of this year’s events, we’ve looked to our parent community for help, and so many of you have responded with enthusiasm and energy. We truly appreciate what each of our volunteers has given in their time and talent to the Post Oak School. We look forward to seeing all of you again in the fall, as we gear up for the 2011 Gala. It will be a great year to volunteer!

Have a wonderful summer!

Melissa Cordero and Erin Stus
POP A co-chairs

Montessori Model United Nations 2010

We would like to go to New York to be international ambassadors of peace again in April 2011!

Announcing an evening to introduce the next Montessori Model United Nations program at The Post Oak School.

Parents and students of Upper Elementary and Middle School, (students who will be in grades 4–8 in the 2010-11 school year), are welcome to attend. Come and hear about some of the experiences the pioneer students have had this year.

We will gather in Middle School on
Wednesday, May 26, between 6:00–8:00 pm.

We will announce program details, and the approximate timeline involved for this unique adventure.

Please RSVP to errolpinto@postoakschool.org by Monday, May 24, 2010.
Managing Middle School

Reflections on the Post Oak Middle School travel process

By: Communications Manager, Grade 7

Traveling in the Middle School is one of the most significant components of our curriculum. Voyaging to other parts of our country or our state helps us to experience new places, cultures, and people, as well as giving us an opportunity to utilize resources that are not present in our own community. However, traveling is a difficult process and we often find that there are many hurdles that we must overcome before (and during) our trips. The assortment of complexities we face during our trips are plentiful; yet with the assistance of the manager program, and the guidance of our teachers, we were somehow able to plan five successful trips, with only the final trip to Artesian Lakes left to arrange.

The following reflections from some of the managers in our classroom have been written for your benefit, so that you may understand exactly how much effort goes into the Middle School traveling curriculum. These expressions have been penned by the navigators, the lunchroom managers, the catering managers, and the travel managers, four of the most critical positions when it comes to the planning of Middle School trips. Each one will share their trials with you, and this narrative will show you their perspective on the curriculum. For the Middle School students, this has been a wonderful year full of exhilarating trips, and we hope that those of you who are soon to be middle-school age will soon have these thrilling experiences of your own.

The lunchroom outside of the classroom

By: Lunchroom Manager, Grade 8

As lunchroom managers, and I help restaurant staff bring meals to the table and we synchronize with them to plan who will be receiving each meal. We also make an effort to work with the trip managers on planning meals in advance. Our job is of great importance because we serve as assistants to the trip managers, the restaurant staff, and others involved with the planning of meals. Something that we have mastered throughout the year is the process of asking every student what they want for their meal ahead of time and then submitting it to the wait staff. This was helpful to the restaurant staff because they already knew what each student ordered and their meals were prepared ahead of time.

A problem we encountered as lunchroom managers was that students were eating before everyone at the table was served. This was a problem to the students who didn't yet have their meals. The resolution to this dilemma was that we would be ordering family sized meals or eating food that doesn't need to be heated up. At times it is stressful, when people aren't cooperating, but when everyone is seated with their meal it is very rewarding.

Circumnavigating the globe

By: Navigator, Grade 7

The navigator's job was to write the directions for the places that we were going in Washington, D.C. A large part of this was writing about how to get to the subway stations and which train to board. We also had to figure out the cost, how long it would take, and what time to board the train. It was also our job to figure out when it was a short enough distance to walk, and if it was we would write the walking directions.

A problem that we encountered was that one of the addresses given to us were for the wrong places. When this happened we were unable to get to that place on time. Luckily, no one ever got lost on the subway. It was a very fun job and I'm glad that I got it.

Everything in its place

By: Travel Manager, Grade 7

Before I got this managerial job, I thought it would be easy, but now that I have the job, I realize how hard it is to actually plan a trip. For and me, it's a really big deal and there are so many factors involved in the whole process. We have to ensure that we have a place to stay, meals, activities, and transportation for everyone. Planning the Washington, D.C. trip was even more of a big deal because there were lots of school groups going to D.C. at the same time we were. During the planning

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process, we also encountered some obstacles, such as contacts for different places not calling back, getting wrong addresses, and restaurants that don’t exist having websites. It was a big relief to get all that pressure off our shoulders when we arrived back at the airport on Friday evening.

There were different things that went well before and during the trip such as planning our itinerary and contacting the sites we would be visiting ahead of time, ordering our food at the restaurants ahead of time, our hotel being close to the subway station which we used every day, getting at least some rest on Wednesday, having subway groups so everyone stuck together in a fun way, attending The Liar at the Lansburgh Theater, where we had great seats and enjoyed the show. There were also things that didn’t go so well such as the high luggage fees with United Airlines, the short time we had in Baltimore, malfunctioning/lost subway passes, not enough time at the museums, getting lost, connecting flights, lack of availability at some sites due to large groups visiting, no ya-ya yo-yo night, and complaints from students due to of lack of participation.

I know that it looks like a lot went wrong, but overall it went very well and now we know better for next year. It took a lot of work, stress, planning, and thinking to pull this all together. It was not a one- or two-man job. It took a whole team of people and we could not have done it without them. Everyone, thank you so much for all of your help!

Why attend the eighth grade graduation unless your child is graduating?

Parents of younger children who have attended in years past have told us what an unexpectedly powerful experience it was; one that gave them a living “Portrait of a Graduate.” Here’s the answer to the question, “Does Montessori education work?” Come to graduation May 28, 6:30 pm.
SCENES
from
The Post Oak School

1. Table of Pythagoras: visual rendition of the Pythagorean theorem.
2. Sorting farm animals.
3. Peaceful yoga time.
4. Getting to know the letter “i.”
5. Talent sharing for classmates.
6. Practicing a demonstration for the “History of Fencing.”
7. Where in the world?
8. A visiting student and his mentor.
10. Visiting the Lower Elementary.
11. Division with test tubes.
12. Counting the short nine chain.

Photos by Shannon Neufeld
**CALENDAR**

For more, visit [www postoakschool.org](http://www postoakschool.org)

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**MAY 23–29**

Wed-Thur 05/26-27

Middle School visits the Retreat at Artesian Lakes

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**Thu 05/27**

Buddha Day

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**May 23–29**

Wed-Thur 05/26-27

Middle School visits the Retreat at Artesian Lakes

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**Thu 05/27**

Buddha Day

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**Last day of school**

Early dismissal:

Fri 05/28

IC & PRI at 11:30 am
EL & MS at 12:00 pm

Graduation

6:30 pm

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**MAY 30–JUNE 5**

Mon 05/31

Memorial Day

School Closed—no childcare

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Tue-Thu 06/01-03

Teacher In-Service Days

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**JUNE 6–12**

Mon 06/07

Summer School Begins

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Keep track of school events with our online calendar—or download a fresh copy of the school’s printed calendar, all at [http://www postoakschool.org](http://www postoakschool.org)

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**NOTICE BOARD**

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Looking for a few YEARBOOK volunteers!

Parents: would you like to be part of the committee to design and create next year’s Post Oak yearbook?

Contact Christina Cantu at [christinacantu@postoakschool.org](mailto:christinacantu@postoakschool.org)

Thanks in advance!

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**2010-11 Emergency Release & Health Inquiry Forms**

were due

May 17

For your child’s safety and so that we can print the directory, please turn them in.

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**Barbara Hacker’s green tip of the week**

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**Reuse a shoe:** Nike gathers up old athletic shoes and turns them into a new material that they use in certain styles of shoes and also to make soft, bouncy surfaces for kids’ playgrounds. Inquire at an athletic shoe retailer near you.

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**Seal of approval:** Look for the “Green Seal” on everything from coffee filters to air chillers to make sure that your product has been approved by an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to safeguarding the environment. When you’re buying anything at all made from a tree, look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) seal of approval.

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**ABOUT THE WEEKLY POST**

The Weekly Post appears on most Fridays of the regular school year.

You can receive a printed copy from your oldest child, or a PDF version online.

Submit letters, articles, or photos in electronic form by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before publication to Communications Coordinator Shannon Neufeld ([shannonneufeld@postoakschool.org](mailto:shannonneufeld@postoakschool.org)). If publication is on a Thursday due to school closure on Friday, then the deadline is 5:00 pm on the preceding Monday.

All photos in The Weekly Post are by Shannon Neufeld unless otherwise noted.

The Post Oak School was founded in 1963 and accredited by both the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)

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