A second grade boys. They are practicing addition and their teacher challenged them to build a “math tower.” They began with $7 + 8 = 15$.

To that they added 27. That equals 42. Then they added 63. Then 268 and 487 and 2482. The sum reached 3342. Then they added more.

Where did the numbers come from that they kept adding on? They chose them. When did they stop? Well, do you know the story of Strega Nona who cooked spaghetti in a magic pot? The spaghetti flowed and flowed and flowed out of the pot until the entire village was flooded in spaghetti. The boys’ math problem was like that magic pot. When you are learning addition, you need to practice. They did that. Every day for three weeks they eagerly got out their growing math tower and added on.

Two third grade boys, [redacted], saw them at work and said, “That looks like fun!” so they started their own math tower.

“If your dream is to motivate students, here's your answer.”
Finally the answer reached 39 digits. More than millions, more than billions or trillions... reached the undecillions. They used a chart in their classroom as a guide for how to read large numbers.

They’re learning to add. Kids in other schools learn to add, too. What makes the work of these boys any different? They chose the numbers themselves. And they chose to push the problem to monumental proportions. In fact, they had to tape many sheets of grid paper together in order to record their work, and the final product is taller than the boys are. Elementary students will challenge themselves to do big projects if we do not set arbitrary limits.

We want children to learn to extend their grasp, to “hitch their wagon to a star.” This is more important than the narrow curriculum objective of learning to add. For comparison, the state-wide curriculum guide (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS) calls for second grade students to learn to read and write numbers up to 999. It also calls for second grade students to add and subtract two-digit numbers. And who picks the numbers? Usually the textbook. No reasonable curriculum guide or textbook or teacher would ask second grade boys to add 39 digit numbers. Yet they chose to do so themselves. They were exploring their own limits as they solidified their understanding of addition and the number system. They were learning about the nature of work and found joy in accomplishment. This was not drudgery. They were working with great enthusiasm.

Ironically, the same day I admired their finished work, I received an unsolicited e-mail from Applied Scholastics International. The subject line read, “if your dream is to motivate students, here’s your answer.”

Motivate students? I Googled that phrase and found 749,000 entries. That’s not a 39-digit number, but it’s quite a few. Traditional schools are built on the model where the teacher tells the students what to do and they do it. But it must not work well enough because the teachers are looking for ways to motivate students. They offer rewards. If you do well, you get a gold star or an A. If you do the best, you’re ranked number one. And still there are 749,000 entries aimed to help teachers motivate students. Dr. Montessori observed that children are already motivated to learn. We don’t need to impose motivation on them. In fact, if we give them a little encouragement, they’ll do far more than we would dare ask.
The Post Oak Fund continues behind the scenes

The Post Oak Fund continues behind the scenes as we strive to close the $10,000 gap and reach our $250,000 goal. If you work for a company that has a matching gift program, please consider submitting a matching gift form for the gift you have made to Post Oak. In many cases companies match gifts 1:1 or even 2:1. If you need any information on matching gifts, please call the Post Oak development office, or your company’s HR office. Thank you!

Cinco de Mayo update

Faculty and staff have had two conversations about the school’s Cinco de Mayo performance: one at the employee retreat, and a follow up session with a group of volunteers.

Cinco is a wonderful extension of the Spanish-language program here at Post Oak with a 20-year history. Until 2005, Cinco was held every year; since that time, it has alternated with the opera production.

We need to reassess our approach to the Cinco performance because Elementary enrollment growth and the building renovations completed over the past three years have not only made the number of performers more unwieldy, but also reduced our flex space for dance practice.

I have listened to everyone’s hopes and concerns about our Cinco performance (and the weeks of practice leading up to it) as well as to the many ideas that have been suggested. Here is the plan for what I think will work best for the school:

Cinco will be an event for extended-day Primary students this year. Elementary and Middle School students will not participate. The calendar will be comparable to what it has been in the past: there will be six weeks of practice leading up to the performance at Episcopal High School on Friday, April 30. Patricia Onofre and Mirani Smith will need to discuss the best options for practices (where and when) that will work for the children, preserving the work cycle, and avoiding disruption to other activities.

I appreciate everyone’s input. No doubt there will be children and parents who are disappointed. I assure you we looked at all possible options before making this hard decision. Let me know if you have any questions.

John Long

Coffee with the Elementary Director

Wednesday, December 8
9:00 am
“Introduction to Physical Science in Lower Elementary”

Chinese at Post Oak

By using games, music, story books and activities like role-play, NIHAOMA-Chinese, an educational organization in Houston, makes learning Chinese easy and fun! Students at the Post Oak School are performing a well-known Chinese rhyme “Two Tigers” covering topics of numbers, animals, body parts, and simple actions.
The Post Oak High School: beyond innovation

by James Moudry, Middle School & High School Director

What is it that sets a Montessori high school apart from other high schools? How do the remarkable transformations of early childhood seen in Montessori schools continue when teenagers enter high school?

When Maria Montessori opened the first “children’s house,” people exclaimed, “Look at the new children.” The transformation in the children’s abilities and behavior was so extreme, they seemed not to be the same children at all. To call this “innovation” may have been apropos for 1907. But where is Montessori education today, more than a hundred years later? What are the innovations of the twenty-first century? Could there be new adults?

To many people, teenagers appear apathetic. That is disengagement. Many high schools fail to engage teenage students. So, where will adolescents find authentic engagement in a Montessori high school? How will their teachers—their guides—create environments and experiences conducive to deep connections and excitement about new ideas? What are the core components of such a school? Other environments may find it easy to fill a day with busywork that looks like productive movement. But in truth, such work only saps the energy of adolescents creating disengagement and frustration. So what are those core components that set a Montessori high school apart and help teenagers toward becoming new adults? Here are a few:

Connections with the adult world: This is authentic preparation for adult life. It is not a mock up or an internship at the end of senior year. The access to adult professionals who are living out a contribution to society is a key component that pulls back the curtain on the nature of adult life. Students benefit by working shoulder to shoulder for extended times with subject-matter experts in areas that interest them.

Social justice: Students engage in local, state, national, and global issues of social justice. This is not just to become aware of such issues in the abstract, but to be active in work important to a teenager’s ever-refining ethical mind. It provides opportunities for true compassionate action.

Adaptability: Preparing for life in the world of the twenty-first century means not just learning how to learn, but learning to love learning. Students will not merely be savvy with current tools, technology, and skills, but will become efficiently adaptable, which will serve them in the ever- and more rapidly changing future.

International-mindedness: Students become connected to the whole world and the challenges that face people globally in relation to local and national challenges and opportunities. Life in the twenty-first century will more and more depend on the ability to know and value local and national cultures while simultaneously engaging in productive work as a citizen of the world.

Entrepreneurship and business: Teens are inclined to learn about money and commerce. They are pragmatically interested in social and economic exchange and must develop an economic independence during adolescence. That is, they must become able to earn for themselves and to see what they can do to be a contributing member of society. The questions are, “What do I need?” and “What can I do?”

Post Oak High School will be a school for doing, not waiting. It is more than just a standalone building with bright students and a dynamic faculty (though there certainly will be both of those!). It is a high school where students ask themselves, “How can I contribute to the world?” This vision of high school is more than innovation; it is a school woven into the mesh of human society and the natural world, a place for learning that connects students to their future, new adult selves.
Don’t be left out. Buy your Gala ad now!

Pick up a form at the front desk, online, or contact parent Renée Locklar.
1. Yoga with a partner.
2. Calculating ratio in Upper Elementary.
3. Learning about multiples.
4. Discussing what makes a perfect square.
5. Slicing eggs and apples in Infant Community.
6. Naming animals in ASEP Chinese class.
Becoming a Love and Logic Parent©

This parenting course series is designed to give you practical skills that can be used immediately. The course series is featured in the spring semester on these dates:

**Wednesday evenings** 6:30–8:00 pm,
January 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23.
Cost: $150 per person for the series, plus $20 workbook. ($100 per person if you previously attended all fall 2010 classes).
Drop-ins welcome, $30 per class

**Thursday mornings** 9:10–10:30 am
January 13, 20, 27, February 3, 10, 17, 24.
Cost: $20 per person for the series (includes workbook).

Primary Parent Ed
**save the date**

Tuesday, December 7
7:00 pm

“Honoring the Process at School and Home”

Ginni Sackett, AMI Montessori trainer, lecturer, consultant and examiner will speak.

Primary teachers will be in attendance.

Child care is available ($5 each child) by calling the front desk.
Grandparents’ & Friends’ Days

Thanks to all who volunteered to help make Grandparents’ & Friends’ Days a success. Grandparents, friends, and students alike had a nice time visiting with one another before the Thanksgiving holiday.
**CALENDAR**

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

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<th>DECEMBER 5–11</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mon 12/06</strong></td>
<td><em>Last day for Braes Interfaith Ministries Food Drive</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tue 12/07</strong></td>
<td>Bearkats Basketball 4:30 pm</td>
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<td>Primary Parent Ed 7:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wed 12/8</strong></td>
<td>Bearkats Basketball 4:30 pm</td>
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<td>Parent/Employee Basketball 8:00 pm</td>
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<td><strong>Thu 12/09</strong></td>
<td>Infant Community Transition to Primary meeting 9:00–10:30 am</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fri 12/10</strong></td>
<td>No <em>Weekly Post</em> this week</td>
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<th>DECEMBER 12–18</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wed 12/15</strong></td>
<td>Alumni volleyball &amp; pizza 4:30 pm</td>
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<td><strong>Thu 12/16</strong></td>
<td>Fall ASEP ends</td>
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<td><strong>Fri 12/17</strong></td>
<td>Last day of school: regular dismissal for all students, no aftercare</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sat 12/18</strong></td>
<td>Dad’s Club Workday</td>
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Check out our online calendar—or download a copy of the printed calendar at [www.postoakschool.org](http://www.postoakschool.org)

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**NOTICE BOARD**

**Post Oak Dad’s Club Saturday Workday**

Sat., Dec. 18 from 8–11:00ish

ALL ARE WELCOME

(including upper el & middle school students)

As we help the school with gardening projects

• Meet at the Peace Circle •

RSVP to [Insert Email Address](mailto:[Insert Email Address])

(for breakfast count)

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**Lost & Found:**

**cold-weather clothing**

Is your child missing a jacket? A sweater? Not sure?

Visit our Lost & Found treasure chest in the front lobby before we donate the contents to charity at the close of school before Winter Break (December 17).

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**Barbara Hacker’s green tip**

Unplug all electronic devices when not in use. If you don’t unplug them from the wall socket, they will continue using energy even when switched off.

Source: the “Go Green” app for iPhone.

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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.

Submit letters, articles, or photos in electronic form by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before publication to Communication Coordinator Shannon Neufeld (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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