Our building at 4600 Bissonnet was designed to meet our needs as a Montessori school. It is aesthetically pleasing, physically welcoming, and provides for the children an orderly, well-prepared environment. Every square inch of building and grounds is utilized intentionally and maintained fastidiously. Constructed in 1985, there were additions in 1990 and 2000, as well as renovations in 2008 and 2010.

Elementary and Middle School enrollment growth over the past few years (from 135 students in 2004 to 193 students next year—a 43% change) has been driven by increased retention of students between Primary and Elementary and has required us to open a new Lower Elementary classroom (2008) and a new Upper Elementary classroom (2010).

At the same time as enrollment growth has put additional demands on our facility, our aspirations as a leader among Montessori schools have grown.
For more than five years we have been planning to open an AMI Montessori teacher training center and a center for parent education. We have also begun to take steps to improve music instruction at Post Oak, an area which has been inconsistent in the past. The faculty committee, which looked at this question, made a series of recommendations including the creation of a music studio comparable to our art studio.

You first heard us present this constellation of issues 18 months ago when we brought internationally-known school consultant John Littleford to campus to help us develop a new strategic plan. Littleford met with 100 parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees over a three-day period to explore the above needs and to consider the school’s options to respond.

In order to complete the new strategic plan and begin to move forward on its implementation, the board and administration first needed to answer one question that emerged from the Littleford sessions: “Why doesn’t Post Oak start a high school?” You may recall “Post Oak 2.0,” a Weekly Post article written at that crucial moment in the school’s history.

Plans for the new Post Oak High School are moving forward and we are now ready to tackle the needs of our current facility. As I write this note, small groups of faculty and staff are taking time from their lunch breaks to meet with architects John Clements and Janann Pittman. They are responding to the question, “What do you see as our long-term facilities needs at Post Oak?”

We will be asking for your input in the days ahead. I encourage you to give the following question some thought: In thinking about building renovations, what are our most pressing needs? The sky is not the limit, so please recognize that we will need to prioritize.

In the meantime, here is part of the background information that I sent to faculty and staff:

**Current Situation**

The two most recent building renovations (2008 and 2010) have accommodated our pressing need for one new Lower Elementary and one new Upper Elementary classroom. However, here are some issues that resulted from those changes:

- The common room has added value by creating a multi-use space at the center of our building. In fact, it actually created a center where none existed previously. This space houses the before- and after-school program for Elementary and Middle School students (thanks to Asenet for her flexibility on that shift.)

- Relocating the library to the atrium was seen by faculty and staff as the best possible solution when faced with the need for a new Upper Elementary classroom. This has worked amazingly well (thanks to BR for leading our effort to make the change.)

- Shifting the dismissal area to the enclosed portico required real problem solving and adaptability. In some ways, it actually works better than the atrium did as a dismissal area.

- However, we have lost the atrium as a flex space for parent and faculty meetings, receptions, and student activities.

- Expanding the multi-purpose room (formerly the reading room) and creating the tile room in the gym have added meeting space and counter-balanced some of our loss of facility and flexibility.

- In fact, the tile room now houses music classes. It is small for that purpose and in using it for music classes, reduces its availability as a meeting space.

- The school uses every square inch of space intensely and intentionally. There is very little flex space available. Good will and a cooperative spirit make this work. Let none of us take that for granted.

**Future Needs**

This list goes back to the work we did with the architect (2008) and to the program we presented during the strategic planning process (2009)—and incorporates my latest thinking about our needs. It is helpful to remember this as we re-open that conversation.

Not only will these additional facilities augment and strengthen our work with our current students, they will also expand
the scope of the schools’ work with teachers and parents.

- **Music studio.** The faculty committee addressing the recommendations from the self-study and the ISAS visiting team recommended a music studio about the size of a Lower Elementary classroom to accommodate instrumental music, vocal music and movement. (What about drama?)

- **Middle School.** Increased student retention that has required opening two new Elementary classrooms will impact the Middle School over the next four years, increasing from its current enrollment of 26 to a projected enrollment of 40. The current facility is not large enough for that number of adolescent students.

- **Lower Elementary classroom.** Our newest Lower Elementary classroom is two-thirds the size of the others. At current enrollment, that is not an issue. However, enrollment projections show increasing numbers of Lower Elementary students over the next three years to full capacity of 28 students per class. That will be difficult in the newest LE classroom.

- **Teacher training center.** In the 1980s, Post Oak housed an AMI teacher training center. This recommendation has been on the table since the 2000 strategic planning process. Mirani Smith is nearing completion of the training of trainers program for the Primary level. Erin Smith is about to enter the training of trainers program for the Infant Community level. Post Oak needs Houston to become a stronger center for AMI Montessori implementation. An AMI teacher training center will promote that, benefit Post Oak, and strengthen the other Montessori schools in Houston. The training center will hold courses during the summer months.

- **Parenting center.** Post Oak Infant Community teachers have been conducting infant-parent classes since the early 90s, first at Post Oak and now, for the last five years, at The Motherhood Center on West Alabama. We aspire to expand the scope of that program and to meet the needs of parents from the prenatal period through high school. This center will serve the needs of current Post Oak parents as well as prospective parents and the wider community as well. This center will establish Post Oak and Montessori as an influential source on matters pertaining to child development and parenting, solidifying the school’s reputation for expertise in these areas, and that will certainly promote the school’s strategic long-term interest. If parenting center courses took place during the academic year, it could share space/facilities with the teacher training center.

- **Library/atrium/flex space.** Does the library function well enough in its current location? How do we accommodate our needs for flex space, meeting space, gathering space?

- **The central courtyard.** Half-Day Infant Community children need space for gardening and other meaningful outdoor activities. The current design of the central courtyard dedicates that for play and circulation only. That space must be thoughtfully redesigned with the needs of the entire school in mind.

- **Administrative offices.** Ever look in on Debbie, Shannon, and Mirna?

- **Auxiliary space.** We have lost space for ASEP music classes and tutoring.

- **Parking and traffic flow.** Need I say more? ☺

© John Long and The Post Oak School
Faculty and staff transitions

Dear Parents,

I want to update you on anticipated staff changes and transitions for next year.

Primary
Primary teacher Erin Smith has beenaccepted into a multi-summer training program to become a Montessori teacher trainer at the Infant Community level. This is an incredible honor and responsibility for Erin and will provide real benefit to the children and her fellow faculty here at Post Oak as she brings an enriched perspective to her work. In the meantime, Erin will continue teaching her Primary class.

Elementary
At the Elementary level there are several transitions. Later this month, Simran Sood will complete her AMI training at the Washington Montessori Institute. Simran has B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from the University of Delhi and 15 years’ experience in the corporate world before choosing to follow her calling into education as a vocation. Simran will assist Orly Kluk as an intern at the Lower Elementary level.

Jamie Ward, who is Orly’s assistant this year, has been accepted into the Hershey Montessori Training Center and will complete Elementary training over the next three summers. When Jamie returns in August, she will work with Maya Pinto as an assistant/intern. Maya’s current assistant, Anita Taj, is heading to Cleveland, Ohio, in the fall to enter the academic-year Elementary course at the Hershey Montessori Training Center. Anita will return to Post Oak in August 2012.

We will also be joined by Beth Smith, an AMI-trained Elementary teacher relocating to Houston. Beth earned a B.A. from Clemson University, taught English in France for two years, and has one year experience leading a Montessori Lower Elementary class in suburban Atlanta. Beth will work with Kathy Long as an intern.

Middle School
Shekkola Gray, who has served as Middle School coordinator for the past three years, has been named Middle School director. (This year James Mondry has acted as High School and Middle School director. As High School planning work ramps up next year, it is the right time to make this change.) In addition to her administrative responsibilities, Shekkola will continue to teach math in the Middle School. Kelly McNamara, Middle School science teacher, will attend AMI’s Orientation to Adolescent Studies in Cleveland, Ohio. We also learned this week that Middle School Humanities Teacher Joshua Noah will not be returning to Post Oak. Josh has accepted an extraordinary offer from the Princeton Theological Seminary and will enter a double degree program in the fall. Josh has been with us for two years and we will miss him. I’ll have to ask him (or his Middle School students) how to say that in Ancient Greek.

Specialists
Art specialist Luiza Grandelbamp is leaving Post Oak after 10 years. Diana Muñiz joined us this year in anticipation of this change, and has worked with Luiza to make the transition as seamless as possible. Nevertheless, we will miss Luiza’s enormous talent and vivacious energy.

Administrative Staff
Shannon Neufeld, communications coordinator for the past three years, will leave us at the end of May. She and her husband are relocating to Dubai. Since this story is about Shannon, who will take the photos? Perhaps Elaine Schweizer will do so. Elaine is Shannon’s successor, and began working with us this week in order to learn the ropes. Elaine has a B.F.A. from The University of Texas at Austin and 18 years experience as a graphic designer and photographer. She is also an essayist and novelist.

Francesca Shoemaker, who has welcomed visitors from the front office for over seven years, is retiring to spend time with her family. Her bright smile and caring nature will certainly be missed.

I invite the Post Oak community to a “Farewell to Friends” on Tuesday, May 24, from 4:00–5:00 pm. We will gather in the gym to honor and extend best wishes to all of our colleagues and friends who are moving on to new life adventures.

John Long, Head of School
April 26, 2011
Men at work: meet the maintenance crew

Manuel Mejia, Head Custodian
Manuel has been with The Post Oak School for more than 25 years. Originally from Guatemala, Manuel came to the United States in 1985. Manuel lives close to the school and can always be counted on in case of emergency. He has four children and enjoys soccer and painting in his time off.

Marvin Mejia, Custodian
Marvin has been with the school for seven years. He currently works part time and has several other business interests. He is Manuel’s son.

Christopher Mejia, Custodian
Christopher has been with the school for four years. He worked part time for us while he was in high school and currently works in the evening. Christopher enjoys traveling and being with friends in his time off. He is also Manuel’s son.

Daniel Anastacio, Custodian
Daniel has worked at the school for 10 years. Daniel is originally from Guatemala. He works for the school on a part-time basis and enjoys soccer and spending time with his family in his time off.

Catarino Gonzalez, Custodian
Catarino is the newest member of the maintenance staff and has been with us for two months. He is originally from Guatemala and lived in California for a number of years before moving to Houston. He works for us part time and enjoys soccer and spending time with his family in his time off. He has four children.

Nazario Anastacio, Custodian
Nazario has been with Post Oak for two years. He is originally from Guatemala as well. He works full time for us in the evenings and enjoys soccer and being with his family in his time off. Nazario has two children. He is Daniel’s son.

Redirecting Children’s Behavior

The Gentle Art of Parenting

Pre-register for this 15-hour course designed to guide parents to use discipline as a process of teaching children self control and responsibility. This class is a positive, powerful, informative, and fun training course that will give you a system to handle every situation in which adults and children interact, from infancy to adolescence.

Visit www.deborah-fry.com for more information.

Dates: June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
(five Wednesday evenings)
Time: 6:15–9:15 pm
Place: The Post Oak School
Cost: $225 per person, $325 per couple

For registration, call 713-840-8663.

Deborah Fry, Ph.D. is a certified instructor for the International Network for Children and Families. She gives talks and seminars for parents, teachers, and people involved with children and families, as well as teach at Westminster Weekday School.
SCENES from The Post Oak School

1. Spoiler alert: preparing Mother’s Day gifts.
2. Multiplication on the checkerboard.
3. Combining the pink tower and the broad stairs for advanced Primary work.
4. Focused on the details of table washing.
5. Learning to write with the moveable alphabet.
6. Working on agility in PF.
7. Repujado—three-dimensional relief in metal.
Graduation night: bringing community together

Make plans early to attend our eighth-grade graduation. David Bergt will tell you why:

“Graduation night in the spring is a fantastic evening. It is very, very inspirational to hear these graduates give their speeches and confirms why we have our children in the school. It is hard to believe how mature and moving they can be all because of their great founding at Post Oak School. At such a tender age, they already sound like senators and congressmen—oops! Maybe that was a bad example. They’re better than congressmen!”

—David Bergt, POPA Dinner 2010

Student play: ‘Nineteen’

by [Redacted] Grade 8

The students of Post Oak Middle School will perform a student-produced original production titled Nineteen that documents the events of the 20th century. Come watch 100 years of major historical events in 100 minutes. Watch WWI through the eyes of two brothers; travel through the roaring 20s. Experience the counterculture of 1968, and follow the stars of the 1980s.

Date: Wednesday, May 18, 2011
Time: 6:30 pm
Location: Post Oak School Gym

Gentle reminder... pledges due

All Gala and Post Oak Fund pledges are due this month. Pledge reminders are being mailed. Please contact Christina Cantu in the development office if you have any questions. Thank you.

Emergency Release Forms due May 16

2011-2012 Emergency Release Forms for each student will be sent to parents in the mail this week. These forms must be returned to the school by Monday, May 16. This information is used to update our database and create the parent directory for next year.
Japan relief bake sale

by Grade 3

After reading an article in TIME for Kids about the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in early March, we wanted to do a bake sale for Japan relief. We worked with Sue Smith of the Red Cross to organize the sale last week. Everyone from our class brought baked goods—even the teachers! We raised $1,168.41 to donate to the American Red Cross for Japan Relief, which we presented to them on Thursday of this week. We’d like to thank Mrs. Long, Mrs. Radecker, Mrs. Cantu, Mrs. Peterson, Mrs. O’Neill, and Mrs. Stus for helping us with the event. We feel very proud of ourselves and thank you for helping us make this happen.

Babies

Samano is finally here! Born to Lower Elementary assistant Jessica Samano and her husband Hugo on Wednesday, April 27, weighing 7 lbs., 11 oz., and measuring 22 in. long. Jessica and Hugo want everyone to know that they are all doing great and hope everyone can meet him soon.

Baby Bollinger was born to alumna Allison (Dryden) Bollinger and her husband Blake on Friday, February 25 at 2:10 am. She was 6 lbs., 13 oz., and 19 in. long. Ali, Blake, and are doing well adjusting to family life in Nashville.

You are invited!

A Farewell to Friends

Tuesday, May 24
4:00–5:00 pm
The Post Oak School Gym

Drop by to give your well wishes to those employees who are leaving the school this year.
Preparing for our 50th!

Post Oak will be 50 years old in 2013-2014!

We want the whole Post Oak extended family to attend the party! If you know anyone who was a part of Post Oak (students, parents, faculty, friends, alumni) in its 50-year history, we want to hear from them and invite them to our anniversary celebrations. Follow the link on our website to add names to the invitation lists.

Thank you from POPA

Dearest Post Oak Community,

Thank you for the incredible amount of support that you have given these past two years to us, to each other, and especially to our children. Working together with all of you has been an absolute pleasure and an unforgettable experience. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to our friend, Christina Kopanidis-Cantú, for her guidance, her grace, and for always supporting us every step of the way.

Warmest regards,

Melissa Cordero & Erin Stus
POPA Chairs, 2009–2011

The importance of libraries

A group of librarians, including Post Oak’s own B.R. Simon, gathered on Wednesday, April 14 at the capitol building in Austin to hear from legislators about the importance of keeping libraries open as they are a basis for knowledge and education for students as they grow and learn. The conference in Austin included many discussions of ebooks and eReaders and how those tools are becoming a part of libraries. Publishers are beginning to sell a limited number of check-outs for a fee in order to make the books available online. At Post Oak, it is preferred to have books students can touch for the younger children, but more and more time will be spent online as the students get older. One of the largest publishers told the Houston Area Independent Schools Library Network (HAISLN) that in the next five years or so textbooks will be available online (this will alleviate the students’ carrying so many heavy loads). The HAISLN book lists are out; they are available in the library as well as online.

Happy summer reading! —B.R. Simon, Librarian
Cinco de Mayo!

Thank you to Spanish Specialist Patricia Onofre and Primary Classroom Assistant Norma Paulin for their passionate work with the Primary classroom assistants in this year’s Cinco de Mayo performance. Additional thanks to Cinco de Mayo Chairs Elise McClain and Ann Lee and all their volunteers for pulling together the details and making it a fun event for all. Primary and Middle School students performed fancy footwork and sang festive songs at this celebratory event.
**CALENDAR**

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MAY 8–14</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun 5/8</td>
<td><em>Mother’s Day</em></td>
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<td>Mon-Fri 5/9-13</td>
<td>6th graders to Williamsburg Middle School visits D.C.</td>
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<td>Wed 5/11</td>
<td>POPA Volunteer Appreciation Event</td>
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<td>4:00 pm</td>
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<td>Parent/employee basketball</td>
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<td>Thu 5/12</td>
<td>New Primary parent gathering</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MAY 15–21</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 5/16</td>
<td>Emergency Release Forms due today</td>
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<td>Tue 5/17</td>
<td><em>Buddha Day</em></td>
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<td>Wed 5/18</td>
<td>Middle School theater</td>
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<td>Parent/employee basketball</td>
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<td>8:00–10:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thu 5/19</td>
<td>New Elementary parent gathering</td>
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<td>Lower El: 6:30–7:15 pm</td>
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<td>Upper El: 7:15–8:00 pm</td>
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<td>Fri 5/20</td>
<td>Spring ASEP ends</td>
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**NOTICE BOARD**

**POP A Volunteer Appreciation Ice Cream Social!**

Wednesday, May 11; 4–5 pm on the playground—everyone is invited!

**Becoming a Love & Logic Parent®**

Wednesday evenings, 6:30–8:00 pm,
March 28, 29, April 4, 13, 20, and May 4, 11
Cost: $150 pp for the series, plus $10 workbook. ($100 for spouse; discounts given if previously attended classes.) Drop-ins welcome, $30 per class.

**Receipts for reimbursement**

Dear parents,

If you have receipts for reimbursement (e.g. from the gala), please turn those receipts in by May 20. Check request forms are found online or at the front desk.

Thank you,
Christina Cantu
Development Director

**Answers for when children start to ask**

“Where Did I Come From Questions”

(fielding sensitive questions without increasing curiosity)

This conversation, facilitated by Counselor Phylis Tomlinson, is for parents of Lower Elementary students. (All Post Oak parents are welcome)

April 12, 2:15–3:15 pm in Middle School

Parents please park off campus to avoid afternoon dismissal congestion.

**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 Elaine Schweizer (elaineschweizer@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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