The following letter addressed to Rhonda Durham, Executive Director of ISAS (the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest), summarizes Post Oak’s accomplishments over the past three years, current challenges, and plans for the immediate future. This document accompanies our Interim II report, to be filed later this month at the start of the seventh year of our 10-year accreditation cycle with ISAS.

I’ve also shared this report with faculty, staff, and trustees. I invite your comments and questions.

continued on page 2
Read Me  
continued from page 1

ISAS Interim II report, Fall 2012

Dear Rhonda and Standards Commission:

Since the Standards Commission accepted our Interim I report (11-01-2009) and required no additional action on our part, you might think that we have little to report at this time. Not true. Here’s a summary of our accomplishments, challenges, and plans as they have unfolded over the past three years:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Opened a third Upper Elementary (grades 4, 5, 6) classroom and added one cohort of students per year to that class. It has the full three-year age span for the first time for the 2012–13 school year.

- Renovated several spaces within the existing building to accommodate the new classroom. The new class displaced the library, which has been relocated to the former atrium. The reality is much better than the preceding two sentences might suggest. The classroom is beautiful; and the library space, though tight, is adequate, and the light and aesthetics are great.

- Captured space for a beautiful, little meeting room during the renovation project. This room was quickly repurposed as an interim music studio by our part-time music teacher, which led to an expansion of the music schedule for elementary and middle school students, and to the part-time position becoming a full-time position.

- Accommodated growth in before school and after school programs, utilizing new areas and additional staff for the three-year olds and for Middle School students.

- Implemented a plan to expand and improve the physical fitness curriculum and the extracurricular sports program.

- Added specialist teachers (art, music, physical fitness, and Spanish) to the consultation/evaluation cycle in parallel to our tri-annual AMI consultation visits. AMI consultants visit every Montessori classroom at Post Oak on a three-year cycle. The school often brings the same consultants back in the intervening years for continuity in professional growth and development. This year we are adding consultations with specialist teachers for the first time. For example, a professor from Texas A&M department of physical education will consult with our physical fitness staff.

- Paid the full $350,000 cost for renovations from cash reserves – a definitive use for funds whose purpose is to “act on opportunity, to cover non-budgeted expenses or budget shortfalls.” Rebuilt cash reserves within two years (to 20% of annual operating budget) via operating surplus and fund raising (annual fund and gala revenues).

- Appointed a facilities technician to join the facilities manager on-campus during the school day. This became imperative with the opening of the second campus.

- Grew the endowment up to and beyond the $1,000,000 threshold, triggering the formation of a separate Endowment Committee to oversee it, as well as utilization of endowment income.

- Opened Post Oak High School August 2012 on a separate one-acre campus in the Houston Museum District.

- Recruited the first freshman class of 16 students.

continued on next page
• Financed High School start-up costs through a combination of borrowed money ($2 million), cash reserves, and income from capital campaign.

• Recruited and hired the High School director, and three full-time faculty plus three part-time/shared faculty.

• Purchased three lots; demolished buildings on two of them; designed, gutted, and renovated a 6000 square foot building on the third lot.

• Formalized partnership agreements with the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Glassell School of Art, the Contemporary Arts Museum, the Houston Zoo, Rice University (Gibbs Wellness Center), Main Street Theater, and The National Center for Human Performance.

• Gained initial accreditation from ISAS for the High School.

• Gained "candidate school" status from International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO).

• Planned and initiated "BigWORK" capital campaign with a goal of $6,000,000. The funds are targeted 1/3 for High School start-up costs and 2/3 for the renovation of the Bissonnet campus. Completed the board phase of the campaign with $1.7 million pledged.

• Gained approval from the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) to open the Houston Montessori Institute (HMI) at Post Oak to train Montessori teachers for the primary level (ages three to six). The first three-summer course will begin June 2013.

• Amended the school’s Articles of Incorporation to explicitly allow for teacher training and parent education.

• Agreed to a five-year contract with head of school (as of August 2010), before launching the current strategic plan.

CHALLENGES

• Keep focus on student experience and education in the face of compelling strategic initiatives.

• Manage the perception of Bissonnet parents and faculty that the school’s attention is disproportionately on the High School.

• Manage the perception of the High School parents and faculty that they are (not) a component part of the whole school.

• Develop a cohesive school culture with a two-campus model.

• Give attention to the whole-school student culture(s) as well.

• Give attention to the whole-school parent culture(s) as well: give particular attention to the interface between High School parents and Middle School parents.

• Build understanding and support for the big picture: The Post Oak School as the most comprehensive Montessori school, educating children and adolescents through the first 18 years of life, from birth to the threshold of adulthood, as well as training teachers and parents.

• Complete the silent and public phases of the BigWORK capital campaign.

• Manage the challenges of construction on the Bissonnet campus, maintaining programs, and minimizing disruptions.

• Build the High School program, enrollment, and culture over the next five years.

• Retain increasing numbers of Post Oak eighth graders for Post Oak High School enrollment.

• Manage the school finances during this dynamic period of expansion.

PLANS

• Kick off 50th anniversary celebration at our spring 2013 Gala.

• Complete BigWORK capital campaign.

• Complete design work and construction to renovate and expand the Bissonnet building. Programmatic elements include:

• Expand physical size of Middle School to accommodate projected enrollment growth as well as summer use by HMI for summertime teacher training courses.

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Read Me

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- Create music studio/black-box theater (in response to an ISAS recommendation).
- Create facility for Post Oak Parenting Center.
- Create nurse’s station/sick bay (in response to an ISAS recommendation).
- Cover outdoor basketball court with pavilion roof, doubling facility options for after school sports.
- Open the Post Oak Parenting Center on the Bissonnet campus.
- Add one class per year to the High School over the next three years.
- Recruit additional High School faculty as enrollment grows.
- Earn accreditation as an IB World School (High School).
- Purchase fourth lot on Autrey Street, consolidating land for the High School campus.
- Design and construct new High School building on Montrose at Autrey in the Museum District.
- Complete next ISAS accreditation cycle, including self-study.
- Recruit first class of trainees for HMI.
- Apply for partnership with Loyola University of Maryland enabling HMI graduates to earn a Master of Education (MEd) degree in conjunction with AMI credential.

Respectfully submitted by
John Long, Head of School

© John Long and The Post Oak School

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Gala and The Post Oak Fund? Yes!

This is a big year for Post Oak. We are preparing for our February 1st Gala, Friday Night Fever. This biennial event is one of two major fundraisers for Post Oak. You are about to receive a letter in the mail asking for Gala underwriting support. Underwriting is not the same as purchasing a Gala ticket from the December invitation. Underwriting is a way to support the event by purchasing a table or reserved seating while also making a contribution to the school. Underwriting is a major part of the funds raised from this event.

As we do every year, we will also start our Post Oak Fund campaign in October. Years ago, all small fundraisers such as selling giftwrap or magazines were streamlined into this yearly campaign. We hope that you will consider the impact Post Oak has on your family and give a gift in response.

Where do these funds go? Why do we ask you to give? Each level, from Infant Community to High School, receives benefits from these two fundraisers. Classroom renovations, cabinetry, new activity buses, new appliances, reworking the gardens – all of these items are paid for by the annual fund and the gala. In addition, part of these funds go toward the endowment and toward cash reserves. Cash reserves allowed us to cover two major renovations when we built our third Upper Elementary classroom and our fourth Lower Elementary classroom without starting a capital campaign. Financial Aid would be cut by 25% if we did not have our annual fund and the gala. Basic expenses (salaries, benefits, programming) are covered through tuition and earned income, but many of the extra items that help make this environment so unique have a discretionary quality to them. Those items could easily be cut without your generous support. The annual fund and gala are both important.

Two letters, two requests for support. I hope your answer to both will be yes.

—Christina Kopanidis-Cantu, Development Director
You are cordially invited to the

The POST OAK HIGH SCHOOL

Grand Opening

Tuesday, October 16, 2012
4:00–6:00 p.m.
1102 Autrey, Houston 77006
Montessori Journey

Nov. 2, 6–9 p.m. & Nov. 3, 8 a.m.–2 p.m.

Registration for the Montessori Journey is now available on our website. This two-day (adults only) workshop is a powerful, hands-on approach to understanding how and what your child is learning. We invite and encourage current Post Oak parents to attend, whether for the first time or for those desiring a chance to take the journey again. Space is limited, so sign up early to reserve a spot.

Cost: $30 per person.

What parents have said:

What was your most memorable experience of the day?

“The realization that learning can be fun and stepping out of your comfort zone can be so rewarding."

What value do you feel you have derived from this experience?

“A greater understanding of the environment and method behind Montessori and what my child’s day is like.”
Field Day T-shirts on Sale!

Order deadline is Wednesday, September 26

Get into the festivities on Saturday, October 20, by wearing the official 2012 Field Day T-shirt! Order your T-shirts early to get one of these awesome designs done by our very own Post Oak students! Order online via our website or by filling out the form below. Shirts are $15 each—get one for each member of the family!

COST: $15 each

Student’s name: ________________________________________________________

Phone: ________________________________________________________________

Class (of oldest child): __________________________________________________

Number of shirts ordered: ________ Total enclosed: $__________

Please return this form, with your check, to the front desk by Wednesday, September 26.

Please make checks payable to “The Post Oak School” and write on the memo line “Field Day t-shirt.”

Indicate T-shirt sizes

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Redirecting Children’s Behavior

The Gentle Art of Parenting

Tuesday evenings,
Sept. 25, October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, from 6:30–9 p.m.

This six week, 15-hour course is designed to guide parents to use discipline as a process of teaching children self-control and responsibility. Redirecting Children’s Behavior is a positive, powerful, informative, and fun training course which will give you a complete system for handling every situation in which adults interact with children, from infancy to adolescence. You will see it working and bringing positive changes to your parenting and your family from the first class onward.

The course will be taught by Deborah Fry, Ph.D. She is a certified instructor for the International Network for Children and Families.

Deborah gives talks and seminars for parents, teachers and people involved with children and families, as well as teaches three-year-olds at Westminster Weekday School. With her enthusiastic speaking style and her sense of humor, Deborah helps make the art of parenting and working with children enjoyable. To register, call Deborah at 713-840-8663 or visit www.deborah-fry.com.

Course fee: $235 for one; $335 per couple includes book, workbook, and 15 hours of class time.
The POST OAK HIGH SCHOOL

High School Admission
OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, October 9, 7 p.m.

Join us to learn more about what makes Post Oak High School an excellent choice. Bring a friend!
Why We Are Post Oak Parents

Below is the speech presented by Post Oak Parents’ Association Co-Chair Laura Citardi at the POPA Dinner on September 11, 2012.

Thank you, Jenny and Nikayla, and thanks for putting together such a fantastic and elegant evening for us.

I’d like to welcome everyone here tonight, our wonderful teachers and staff, and of course all our parents. I want to extend a special welcome to all of our new parents, and this includes, for the first time, the parents of our very first Post Oak High School students! What a perfect way to start the new year, to see the dream become a reality.

It has been an honor and a privilege this past year to serve as your Post Oak Parent Association Co-Chair with Whitney Walsh. Whitney has been a dream to work with. She is so full of great ideas, is such an enthusiastic supporter of Post Oak and Montessori philosophy, she is a gifted public speaker, and most importantly, she is probably the nicest person I have ever met. Whitney and I are so excited to now have a third POPA Co-Chair this year, Jessica Gregg. She’s a great addition to the team and brings her many Post Oak leadership skills with her…Jessica has been the Book Fair Chair twice, a room parent several times, and has volunteered in just about every event sponsored by the school. She’ll be well prepared to take over as the lead POPA Chair next year.

When my husband Martin and I decided to apply to Post Oak, we were living in Cleveland, Ohio and our children were only two and three years old. I was sold on a Montessori school mainly because my husband went to one when he was little and he told me what a profound and lasting effect it had on him. I thought, well, he turned out pretty good, so there must be something to it. We were moving to Houston, so I went online and searched for schools that would be in the area where we were going to live, and I found The Post Oak School. I thought, they have a nice website so they must be good! (Thank you, Lana Rigsby.) I was so naïve about the competitive school situation here in Houston, but I started to wonder when we were told that Martin would have to come in for an interview before they would even give him an application. Fortunately he passed and fortunately our kids got in. It didn’t take me too long to figure out though, that I had stumbled onto something so much bigger than I had ever expected. There is not a day that goes by that I am not thankful that my children are being educated in such an exceptional environment.

I have no doubt that they are not only getting the best education academically, but that they are doing so in an environment that inspires them to be comfortable with who they are, to respect and appreciate our differences, to reach for their full potential by working independently and in cooperation with others, and to think outside and beyond “the box”.

I think that belief in the “something above and beyond” is the essence of what binds us together, and why there is a different attitude at Post Oak. We are all here, taking this leap of faith together, in the belief that our children are getting something extra special besides a great education, something that is more intangible and harder to measure, something that they will be able to take through their lives, to make them stable, secure, and productive adults.

We see it in the way they confidently conduct themselves with other children.

We feel it when we talk to other parents.

We see it in their budding entrepreneurship and creativity, like when my children spent two days this summer at Grandma and Grandpa’s house making an origami product line and setting up “The All Store” in my old bedroom. (They gave us a discount.)

We see it when we read about Post Oak alumni or hear them speak, for example at Alumni Night or later this evening, and the way they conduct themselves in such a mature, confident way, something that I’m sure some of us didn’t achieve until much later.

We feel it when we hear about all of the “Montessori Moments” which we all love to share.

This is why we are Post Oak Parents.
1. Infant Community students add ingredients to bake a treat.
2. Building fine motor skills by scooping.
3. A lesson with the ten square chain.
4. Tracing a sandpaper letter while sounding the letter connects the head and hand.
5. Developing spatial awareness in PF.
7. Multiplication with the checker board.
8. Studying the parts of a stem.
9. A history project depicting an ancient civilization.
10. Middle School students visit a part of the Brays Project in order to learn about Texas Prairie regrowth as they are introduced to the watershed occupation.
11. High School students after a kayaking excursion on their Odyssey trip. Look for a report in an upcoming Weekly Post.
The Post Oak Parents Association

Annual Welcome Dinner

It was a grand start to the school year at the annual POPA Dinner. Post Oak parents, both old and new, as well as trustees, faculty, and staff gathered in the Cohen House Faculty Club at Rice University. Speakers this year included POPA Chair Laura Citardi, who highlighted the fostering of creativity which allows students to follow their interests. The evening ended with a speech by alumnus Nick Hetherington who experienced this first hand. “Post Oak taught us how to think, not how to memorize.” Many thanks to our event chairs, Jenny Mohr and Nikayla Thomas for creating such a amazing evening.
I’d like to share one last story with you. My point is not to criticize another school or teacher, but to illustrate the Montessori difference. I call this a “What Should Have Been a Montessori Moment.”

A good friend of mine in St. Louis has a darling little boy named Chris who aspires to be the next Steven Spielberg. He has been acting and singing since he was very small and is fascinated with movies and movie scripts.

When her little boy was in second grade, his teacher called my friend and was very upset with his behavior. The teacher told her that he was not doing his work correctly, he wouldn’t finish his work, and that all of the other students had finished their assignment in a timely manner and had moved on to other work. She insisted that my friend come in for a special conference. Of course my friend was very alarmed and couldn’t imagine what was going on. She met with the teacher who explained that all the children were given a creative writing assignment and the other students had no trouble at all finishing it. She showed her some examples of the other students’ work, which ended up being two or three nice pages of work. My friend told the teacher that she didn’t understand, her son should have had no problem at all finishing such a simple assignment. So the teacher showed her what she was so upset about. Chris’ “unfinished” work... it was a 60 page, single-spaced movie script titled “The Birdinator,” which apparently was about a giant superhero bird.

Something similar happened in my daughter’s class last year, but had quite a different ending. Little also in second grade at the time, was so impressed with the King Tut exhibit at the Art Museum after going there on a field trip, decided to write a play about ancient Egypt. She spent weeks writing the play after she had finished her homework each night. When it was ready, she brought it to class, discussed her play with the students, and was apparently assigning parts to her classmates when Maya Pinto noticed all of the clandestine activity. She asked what was going on and was told by the students that had written a play and they were all going to be in it. Wow, this was music to Mrs. Pinto’s ears. She embraced work enthusiastically, helped edit the play and assign parts to each student, and created costumes. And for Mother’s Day last spring, the moms in Maya Pinto’s class were treated to an outstanding performance by the entire class. We were blown away as usual.

And this is the Post Oak Montessori difference. Thank you and have a wonderful evening!
Houston Baby Yoga & Toddler Yoga

by Bernadette Verzosa, Post Oak parent
Reprinted from ParentsPost.com

“Toes to nose,” rhymes yoga instructor Waverly Evans to her bright-eyed students. She’s leading these youngest of yogis and yoginis through baby bridge, baby plank, baby cobra, baby flip, even flying baby.

Evans teaches free yoga classes for babies and toddlers at the Houston Public Library (HPL) Central Library branch. “There are lots of benefits to baby yoga. It’s relaxing as well as energizing,” says Evans. “It helps babies discover different parts of their bodies. It helps develop coordination. It builds the relationship between baby and parent. In a group setting like ours, children see each other and parents see each other. It reinforces and enhances the whole process.”

The Baby Yoga class is a Parent and Pre-Walker group. “I demonstrate with a teddy bear — the classic dolls’ knees don’t bend. So I show parents the movements with a teddy bear,” she explains. “You don’t force a child into a pose. You just jiggle and play with the range of motion. If you feel a child is not receptive — they get rigid and stiffen their arms and legs — you just do something else. You can tell they are receptive when they’re alert, they smile and they have soft arms and legs.”

Evans also incorporates baby massage and nurturing whispers into the practice. “I encourage phrases like ‘I love you,’ lots of sweet words in a soft voice,” she adds.

THE YOGA PHENOMENON: HISTORY & TRENDS

The HPL started offering the class last spring. “There are essential motor development skills that children need in conjunction with early literacy skills to learn to read and write,” says Michaela Watson, HPL’s Assistant Manager of Youth Programming. “Yoga is a fun activity that builds those skills while offering a bonding opportunity for parent and child.”

Yoga has exploded in popularity in the United States. This form of exercise that stretches the muscles and calms the mind originated in India more than 5,000 years ago. Today, about 15 million Americans practice yoga. Many doctors prescribe yoga to patients and many corporations host yoga classes for employees. In Houston, there are dozens of yoga studios and dozens of youth organizations that offer yoga classes. There are also teacher training workshops and seminars for instructors who want to specifically work with kids. Children who practice yoga are sometimes referred to as “mini yogis.”

HOUSTON PARENTS’ REVIEWS

Sheila Hall and her 4-month-old son, James, are regulars at HPL. “I love the class. It is very engaging for both James and me,” Hall says. “I appreciate Waverly’s efforts to create a good balance between keeping some structure to the class and adjusting based on the energy of the babies. James seems more relaxed there now that we’ve been a few times. Also, as he develops more movements are available to him. It’s neat to see the changes.”

Hall also experiences the benefits at home. “I learned some new ways to calm him down have been very valuable outside of class,” she says. “The class expands my repertoire of how we can play together at home, and my husband enjoys learning these moves from me, too.”

To continue reading, please visit www.parentspost.com and scroll to the bottom of the page for featured stories.

Photo submitted by Bernadette Verzosa
CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 16–22

Sun 9/16  
*Rosh Hashanah* begins at sundown

Mon 9/17  
Bearkats soccer at St. Catherine’s  
4:30 p.m.

Tue 9/18  
Bearkats soccer vs. St. Stephen’s (@ Feld Park)  
4:15 p.m.

Thur 9/20  
All-school photo  
No *Weekly Post* this week

Fri 9/21  
Teacher in-service  
Classes not in session: only students with expanded year contracts attend

Sat 9/22  
Fall Equinox

SEPTEMBER 23–29

Tue 9/25  
Redirecting Children’s Behavior ($ and reg. req’d)  
6:30–9:00 p.m.  
beginning of six-week course

*Yom Kippur* begins at sundown

Wed 9/26  
Coffee w/ Elementary Dir.  
9:00–10:00 a.m.

Bearkats soccer at St. Catherine’s  
4:30 p.m.

Field Day T-shirt orders due

Fri 9/21  
Bearkats rally & Spirit Day: wear your green!

NOTICE BOARD

Volunteers Wanted

We are still seeking volunteers for the committees, events, and activities below. You can sign up through a link on homepage or contact Kathryn Murphy (*kathymurphy@postoakschool.org*).

**50th Anniversary Committee**  
Book Fair • Grandparents’ Days • Biennial Gala • Library

POPAS Coffee/Work Day

Oct. 3, 2012  
8:45 a.m.–1 p.m.

Shop & Support Post Oak

There’s an easy way to help raise money for our school – when you go shopping! Whether buying groceries at Randalls, back-to-school items at Target, or catching a great deal on MamaSource, your purchases can benefit Post Oak! Grandparents, alumni, and friends are all welcome to participate in the programs.


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 p.m. 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 p.m. on the preceding Monday.

All photos in *The Weekly Post* are by Elaine Schweizer 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)

4600 Bissonnet, Bellaire, Texas 77401  •  Telephone: 713-661-6688  •  Fax: 713-661-4959  •  www.postoakschool.org