AN ‘OVERPARENTERING’ CRISIS?

by Anya Kamenetz, August 28, 2015, National Public Radio

Have you ever done your children’s homework for them? Have you driven to school to drop off an assignment that they forgot? Have you done a college student’s laundry? What about coming along to Junior’s first job interview?

These examples are drawn from two new books — How to Raise an Adult by Julie Lythcott-Haims and The Gift of Failure by Jessica Lahey. Both are by women writing from their experience as parents and as educators. Lahey is a middle school teacher and a writer for The New York Times and The Atlantic; Lythcott-Haims was the longtime freshman dean at Stanford.

“I may parent two children, but I am raising two adults.”
He books make strikingly similar claims about today’s youth and their parents: Parents are “too worried about [their children’s] future achievements to allow [them] to work through the obstacles in their path” (Lahey) and “students who seemed increasingly reliant on their parents in ways that felt, simply, off” (Lythcott-Haims).

I asked them to join me for a conversation about the problem — and what parents and schools can do about it.

What is the core of what’s happening with kids and parents today?

Lahey: After three years of research and a lot of soul-searching, here’s where I’ve ended up: Kids are anxious, afraid and risk-averse because parents are more focused on keeping their children safe, content and happy in the moment than on parenting for competence. Furthermore, we as a society so obsessed with learning as a product — grades, scores and other evidence of academic and athletic success — that we have sacrificed learning in favor of these false idols.

Lythcott-Haims: We parents are overprotecting, overdirecting and doing a lot of hand-holding, ostensibly in furtherance of kids’ safety — physical, emotional — and security — emotional, academic, professional, financial. But also in furtherance of our own ego. Our kid becomes chronologically adult but still expects us to tell them what to do and how to do it, and is bewildered by the prospect of having to fend for themselves as an actual independent human. God help them when we are gone.

Lahey: We really need to stop looking to our kids for validation. They are not extensions of us, nor indicators of our performance, and it’s unfair to saddle them with that responsibility.

Lythcott-Haims: Yeah. And our need for validation needs to be taken up with a therapist, not imposed on our kids’ existence. As Carl Jung said, “The greatest harm to a child is the unlived life of the parent.”

How are schools playing into this dynamic?

Lahey: Teachers and administrators complain about parents, but we helped create this frenzy.

One mother told me she was willing to step back, but felt like she could not because the standards have moved for what constitutes an A on a science project. Teachers have come to accept that parents interfere and co-opt school projects, and have begun to take that for granted when grading.

Lythcott-Haims: The other way in which high schools in particular play into the dynamic is during the college admission process, where they feel judged based on the brand names of the colleges their seniors get into, and their incentive is to brag about that.

Can parents help reverse the tide when it comes to their kids’ experience in school?

Lahey: Watch what happens when you go to a teacher and say, “I’d like to give my child some increased autonomy this year, so I won’t be meddling in his homework and I’d like for you to hold him accountable for the consequences of his mistakes.” You will have an admirer for life.

And what can schools (Jessica) and colleges (Julie) do differently to promote a culture of independence and achievement?

Lahey: Schools and parents need to stop blaming each other, and work together to show children that we value learning. We can talk about the importance of education all we want, but our kids are too smart to fall for that hypocrisy. As long as we continue to worship grades over learning, scores over intellectual bravery and testable facts over the application of knowledge, kids will never believe us when we tell them that learning is valuable in and of itself.

Lythcott-Haims: Some schools have an explicit policy against parents doing kids’ homework and in favor of kids raising issues and concerns themselves rather than relying on their parents to do so. These schools are part of the solution.

Some colleges kowtow to this overinvolvement of parents in the lives of college students, but they’re the exception. Some schools are taking a proactive approach to this problem by trying to normalize struggle, such as the “Resilience Project” at Stanford that shows videos of professors, students and alumni talking...
about their own failures. Some legitimize these matters further by embedding it into the curriculum through classes and workshops on positive psychology, such as Stanford’s course “The Science of Well-Being” or Harvard’s mindfulness workshops offered in small groups in the residences.

What are the worst-case scenarios here? What’s so bad about a little coddling before our kids hit the cold, cruel world?

Lahey: Absolutely nothing. As I write this, my younger son has been sick for about a week. As an adult, he will have to forge ahead, taking care of his family, work and other aspects of the cold, cruel adult world. But for now, he’s 11, so I feed him soup and buy him popsicles, kiss his hot, feverish forehead, and love him up. However, I try to keep in mind that I have an incredibly short period of time to teach him the things he needs to know in order to be a competent, secure and emotionally healthy adult. To steal a line from Julie, I may parent two children, but I’m raising two adults.

Lythcott-Haims: I’m all for love between parent and child from now until forever. What I’m concerned about is when coddling means a kid doesn’t acquire the skills they’re going to need out in the real world.

Lahey: Just last week, I was sitting in a Department of Motor Vehicles watching my son fill out an application for his learner’s permit, while the woman on the other side of me was filling out her 17-year-old daughter’s application for her, asking for vital information such as height and weight, while her daughter texted on her phone. It seemed like such a lost opportunity to me.

I get the sense from reading the reactions to your books that parents want to find a way out of this but they don’t always know how — and you both have shared that you feel that you yourselves have been implicated in this kind of “overparenting” at times. What do you tell other parents?

Lahey: I simply wrote the book I needed but could not find on bookstore shelves. I read everything — all the books, academic articles, dramatic headlines, and while they all clarified that I was going about this whole parenting thing wrong, no one offered a strategy. I felt called to action but had no way forward. That’s the book I wrote, one third research, two thirds strategy, and I hope it gives other parents a way forward, too.

Lythcott-Haims: Look, once upon a time I was a finger-wagging dean tut-tutting parents for being so involved in the lives of their college freshmen. I thought, What’s the matter, folks? Don’t you trust your kid can do this, just like you were able to do? Then when my own kids were 8 and 10 I realized I was still cutting their meat. I got the connection between overinvolved parenting in childhood and not being able to let go at 18.

Three things parents can do right away:

1. Stop saying “we” when you mean your kid. “We” aren’t on the travel soccer team, “we” aren’t doing the science project and “we” aren’t applying to college. Our kid is. These are their efforts and achievements. We need to go get our own hobbies to brag about.

2. Stop arguing with all of the adults in our kids’ lives. As Jess well knows, teachers are under siege from overinvolved parents insistent upon engineering the perfect outcomes for their kids. Principals, coaches and referees see the same thing. If there’s an issue that needs to be raised with these folks, we do best for our kids in the long run if we’ve taught them how to raise concerns on their own.

3. Stop doing their homework. Teachers end up not knowing what their students actually know, it’s highly unethical, and worst of all it teaches kids, “Hey kid, you’re not actually capable of doing any of this on your own.”

Lahey: Julie made me giggle a little there. I’m forever asking parents to stop saying “we” when it comes to the college-application process. I was talking to a former student’s mother about her son’s essay on the phone (I know, I know, Exhibit A, but I was invested in educating that mother) and I reminded her about adopting a “he” versus “we” and “his” versus “ours” mindset when it came to his college application. Not five minutes later, she told me she “just wanted to double-check our essay one last time before hitting ‘send’ on our application.” Oy vey. I had to concede defeat on that one.

How do you respond to the criticism that the problems you’re...
Special Thanks

Thank you to everyone who attended the Volunteer Coffee last Friday. Post Oak parent Paige Penchas hosted a lovely event at her home with over 40 parents attending and everyone signed up to help with events and activities throughout the year. If you were unable to attend and would still like to volunteer, please go to our homepage, left-side menu and select POPA Volunteer Sign-Up.

Lahey: Guilty... However, just because some kids are suffering more than others from a particular kind of trauma — whether that’s poverty or depression or anxiety — that does not mean that the trauma is not worth our time or our ink. The good news is that the effects of high anxiety and academic pressure are far easier to heal than poverty, violence and childhood trauma. If parents and teachers in high SEL schools would just calm down and value individual autonomy, learning, competence, and personal fulfillment more than grades and wish-fulfillment, we could fix the high-SEL problems pretty darn fast.

Lythcott-Haims: It’s a true statement and I don’t see it as criticism, actually. If the kids subjected to this type of parenting weren’t suffering greater rates of anxiety and depression than the general population, then maybe we could wave this off as not-a-real problem. But they are suffering; there’s no way around that fact. I certainly hope we won’t divert policy and resources away from those kids in order to help the elite; it doesn’t take policy or resources to fix the problem I’m writing about, after all — parents just need to back the hell off.

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The Post Oak Parents Association invites you to attend the annual Welcome Dinner

Tuesday, September 15, 2015
6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Pre-reception at 6:00 p.m. for new parents, faculty, board, & room parents

The Junior League of Houston
1811 Briar Oaks Lane, Houston, Texas 77027

POPA Dinner Chairs: Allison Hamilton and Regina Mellinger
POPA Chairs: Stacey Martin and Alison Wong

Business attire | Complimentary parking

Please reply with the response card or online at:
www.postoakschool.org/postoak/POPA_Dinner.asp
GET READY FOR FUN, 2015 FIELD DAY IS COMING IN OCTOBER

2015 FIELD DAY CHAIRS: NICOLE PEDESEN AND CLAUDIA MACIAS

Come one, come all to Post Oak Field Day on Saturday, October 17th! This event is a great way to meet the friends your children have been talking about. I still remember my first Field Day, 5 years ago. I had the chance to connect with families over food and conversation, those connections continue since that day. So, pack your picnic blanket, bug spray and sunblock...and get ready to “unplug” for good “old fashion” fun! ...and for the growling tummies...we have food trucks lined up!

- Claudia Macias

FIELD DAY TSHIRTS – ORDER NOW

YOU’LL WANT ONE FOR EACH MEMBER OF THE FAMILY

This annual event is a longstanding Post Oak tradition that’s fun for the whole family. Enjoy the company of your fellow Bearkats with an afternoon of great music, giant inflatables, a variety of activities, food trucks, and more! Field Day is a FREE event and will be held on Saturday, October 17 on The Post Oak School campus.

Get into the festivities by wearing the official 2015 Field Day T-shirt.

Order online by Friday, September 18 at: www.postoakschool.org/postoak/Field_Day.asp.

Shirts are $15 and come in sizes youth YXS (2-4) through adult XXL.

2015 FIELD DAY CHAIRS: NICOLE PEDESEN AND CLAUDIA MACIAS
Post Oak High School Construction Continues

Good work in Nicaragua.

Join us at the High School to meet Sarah Junkin Woodard
Center for Development in Central America
Enjoy short films, presentations, craft and coffee sales to support the work of the CDCA.

Learn about our High School’s A-Term Course and their work at The Managua Field School

Post Oak High School extends its campus beyond the Museum District and our partner organizations are cultivating meaningful work for our students that has a direct impact on community development in Nicaragua.

Thurs., Sept. 24 at 7:00 p.m.
COFFEE WITH THE ELEMENTARY DIRECTOR

September 21, 7:00–8:00 p.m. in the gym
September 23, 9:00–10:00 a.m. at the Bissonnet campus

Elementary Director Jeff Schneider will introduce the new computer based standardized test, Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) for grades 3rd through 8th.

All parents welcome regardless of the age of your child(ren).

DADS CLUB AT POST OAK

by Rick Evans, 2015 Dads Club Co-Chair

Dads Club had a great kick-off social hour on September 1st at the Brooklyn Athletic Club, with more than 40 dads in attendance over the course of a couple of hours. It was great to see several new faces along with some Dads Club stalwarts. Some great ideas for Dads Club activities were floated (albeit some more serious than others), including: assembling a group to participate in the MS 150; arranging a small golf outing; and adding a poker night this fall in addition to the currently scheduled poker night in February. Good ideas, keep them coming!

We look forward to seeing many of you at the Field Day on October 17, if not before, and will be reaching out in the next couple of weeks for volunteers to assist with the “Classic Games” events that day.
Triangle Associates has been retained by Post Oak’s Board of Trustees to guide them in the search process for the next head of school. Peter Davidson, a representative from Triangle Associates, visited both campuses Tuesday - Thursday, to meet with groups of faculty, staff, parents, and students. These meetings were an important opportunity to learn about the head search process and exchange thoughts about future leadership at Post Oak. Pictured here are the middle school students in their focus group discussion.
New Parent Welcome Coffee
THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR NEW POST OAK FAMILIES WHO WERE ABLE TO JOIN US AT THIS INFORMATIVE EVENT.
HIGH SCHOOL BEARKATS FLAG FOOTBALL

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>FIELD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>12:45pm</td>
<td>Esprit International @ Post Oak</td>
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<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>12:45pm</td>
<td>Post Oak @ St. Stephen's</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>3:15pm</td>
<td>Esprit International @ Post Oak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>4:30pm</td>
<td>Post Oak @ St. Stephen's</td>
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<tr>
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<td>St. Stephen's @ Post Oak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>6:00pm</td>
<td>Post Oak @ Esprit International</td>
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6TH, 7TH & 8TH GRADE BEARKATS CROSS COUNTRY

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<th>DAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>Chavez High School</td>
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<td>Sat</td>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>Second Baptist Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>St. Thomas - Willow Waterhole</td>
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<td>Wed</td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>Dolphin Dash</td>
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<td>Sat</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Faith West Academy</td>
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6TH, 7TH & 8TH GRADE BEARKATS FLAG FOOTBALL

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 22</td>
<td>vs St Stephens</td>
<td>4:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>vs St Stephens</td>
<td>4:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 13</td>
<td>vs St Stephens</td>
<td>4:30 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>vs St Stephens</td>
<td>4:30 pm</td>
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All Games at Feld Park - 6406 Avenue B, Bellaire, TX 77401

6TH, 7TH & 8TH GRADE BEARKATS VOLLEYBALL

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>GAME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 23</td>
<td>vs Briar Meadow</td>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 23</td>
<td>vs Rusk</td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 6</td>
<td>vs Briar Meadow</td>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 6</td>
<td>vs Briar Meadow</td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>vs Rusk</td>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>vs Yellowstone</td>
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<td>October 20</td>
<td>vs Yellowstone</td>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
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<td>October 20</td>
<td>vs Forge</td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>vs Agape</td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
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All Games will be at Post Oak School, Bissonnet campus

Bearkat SPIRIT DAYS are back! SPORT YOUR POST OAK GEAR EVERY FRIDAY!
MARK YOUR CALENDARS:
COLLEGES ARE VISITING POST OAK HIGH SCHOOL

1. 9/8/15 @ 9:00 a.m.  
   University of Tulsa
2. 9/9/15 @ 10:30 a.m.  
   The Evergreen State College
3. 9/10/15 @ 11:00 a.m.  
   Claremont McKenna College
4. 9/11/15 @ 11:45 a.m.  
   University of Chicago
5. 9/15/15 @ 9:00 a.m.  
   Willamette University
6. 9/15/15 @ 9:30 a.m.  
   Wesleyan University
7. 9/15/15 @ 11:30 a.m.  
   Rice University
8. 9/17/15 @ 9:00 a.m.  
   Champlain College
9. 9/17/15 @ 11:30 a.m.  
   Birmingham-Southern College
10. 9/21/15 @ 2:15 p.m.  
    Hult Int’l Business School
11. 9/24/15 @ 1:30 p.m.  
    Trinity University
12. 9/24/15 @ 2:15 p.m.  
    Colgate University
13. 10/1/15 @ 9:00 a.m.  
    Hendrix College
14. 10/1/15 @ 2:00 p.m.  
    Millsaps College
15. 10/6/15 @ 8:00 a.m.  
    Tulane University
16. 10/6/15 @ 10:00 a.m.  
    Baylor University
17. 10/6/15 @ 11:00 a.m.  
    St. Edward’s University
18. 10/6/15 @ 1:15 p.m.  
    Kalamazoo College
19. 10/6/15 @ 2:00 p.m.  
    Guilford College
20. 10/7/15 @ 8:00 a.m.  
    University of Colorado, Boulder
21. 10/7/15 @ 11:00 a.m.  
    Washington Univ. in St. Louis
22. 10/7/15 @ 2:30 p.m.  
    University of Denver
23. 10/13/15 @ 11:30 a.m.  
    Sam Houston State Univ.
24. 10/16/15 @ 9:00 a.m.  
    Rhodes College
25. 10/22/15 @ 11:45 a.m.  
    HARN College Fair @ POHS!  
    (20+ colleges)
26. 10/28/15 @ 11:45 a.m.  
    Sewanee: University of the South
27. 11/5/15 @ 11:45 a.m.  
    Penn State University
Post Oak parent and quilter extraordinaire, Karri Garza, working with volunteers in and out of state and the Houston Modern Quilt Guild, undertook a heartfelt project to create quilts for people severely affected by the Memorial Day flood. People from around the world sent quilt blocks (a single color slab) which were transformed into quilts to be donated to the flood victims. With an online hashtag created (#floodtexaswithlove), sewing groups and quilting communities came together to collect blocks, batting, quilters, and monetary donations to help defer the costs of shipping and supplies. In all, around 51 quilts are being distributed throughout the Austin/Houston area.

Each quilt is truly beautiful and filled with the kindness of many hearts and the talents of many hands. The children of two Post Oak School families affected by the flood have received quilts – five in all.

2015–2016 Important Dates

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 18</td>
<td>Early dismissal for all students</td>
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<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Columbus Day</td>
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<td>Nov. 25–27</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 11</td>
<td>Early dismissal for all students</td>
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<td>Dec. 18</td>
<td>Early dismissal for all students</td>
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<td>Dec. 21–Jan. 4</td>
<td>Winter Break</td>
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<td>Jan. 18</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</td>
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<td>Feb. 15</td>
<td>Presidents’ Day</td>
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<td>Mar. 14–18</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>Mar. 25</td>
<td>Good Friday</td>
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<td>Apr. 22</td>
<td>Early dismissal for all students</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>High School Commencement</td>
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<td>May 27</td>
<td>Last day of school (to be confirmed)</td>
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Quilting for Kindness
1. High School creative writing club plans the upcoming year.

2. Drawing with chalk - and a broken arm.

3. Upper Elementary students write in their learning journals - developing executive functioning skills.

4. Our librarian visits an Elementary classroom to read a story.

5. Adding fractions with like denominators.

6. Taking notes on post-it slips helps to develop research skills.

7. High School students inspect marine life samples collected on the high school Odyssey trip. Watch for an article next Post!

8. Working side by side in Upper Elementary.

9. Showing school spirit in style!

10. Working with cylinder blocks to train the sense of visual discrimination.
CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 13–19

Tue 9/15

POPA Welcome Dinner
6:30 p.m.

Fri 9/18

Early Dismissal for all students
Faculty Professional Dev.

SEPTEMBER 20–26

Mon 9/21

Elementary Director Session on new MAP test
7:00–8:00 p.m.

Tue 9/22

Intro to Redirecting Children’s Behavior
6:30 p.m.

Wed 9/23

Elementary Director Session on new MAP test
9 a.m.

Thu 9/24

All-school photo

Check out our calendar online at www.postoakschool.org

NOTICE BOARD

EARLY DISMISSAL REMINDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2015

All students will be released early with the following schedule:

YCC: 11:00 a.m.
Primary: 11:30 a.m.
EL, MS and HS: 12:00 p.m.

ABOUT THE POST

The Post appears every other Friday 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.

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