Upper Elementary
Invention Fair
at The Post Oak School
Thurs., March 23, 2017
7 to 8 p.m. | Post Oak Gym

On the Cover
Middle School students work on a stained glass project using systems of inequalities.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for mid-week updates, photos, and more:

www.facebook.com/thepostoakschool/
www.facebook.com/postoakhighschool/

2016–2017
Post Oak
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WHAT DOES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LOOK LIKE?

As you read this, The Post Oak School will be in the midst of its Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS) (re)accreditation visit. This important event happens every 10 years. It can be a stressful process as an accreditation year is filled with reflection, strategic thinking, and writing a detailed report outlining programs and organizational strengths and recommendations for improvement. The self-study process is intense and takes input from all constituents—students, faculty, staff, administration, parents, and board.

As its mission states, ISAS promotes the highest professional and ethical standards of educational excellence for independent schools in the region and recognizes by formal ongoing accreditation those schools that demonstrate adherence to its standards. These standards span the entirety of the school operations. First and foremost is the program, curriculum, and student programs, which are the foundation of all we do.

In addition, ISAS looks at the school community, our mission, operations such as personnel, administration finance and facilities, and our governance structure. It is a comprehensive set of standards that Post Oak is held to, and we wouldn't have it any other way. We want to be accountable to the highest criteria for student achievement and school success.

Although it is the second ISAS accreditation process for Post Oak, this was my first experience with it, and I learned a lot about how Post Oak engages in school improvement. During the self-study process, I learned the answer to these questions: If our accreditation visit is only once every 10 years, what happens in between? In what ways do we “keep things moving” without the pressure of an accreditation visit?

Post Oak has always been interested in school improvement and takes a deliberate path by which to do it. There are a variety of ways in which the school creates a culture of learning. One of those is by prioritizing time to collaborate as a staff. I know those pesky in-service days can be inconvenient, but they are critical in allowing time for self-reflection and discussion of our work and what we want to change to make it better.

Throughout the school year, teachers take the time to observe each other in their classrooms. This is another step on our path. Observation allows Post Oak staff to harvest best practices from its internal resources—each other. Teachers with lots of experience can mentor ones who are just getting started, and those fresh out of training infuse the department with new lessons and innovations from the latest training courses.

Professional development is not just expected but required in schools that take learning seriously, and Post Oak is no exception. Each faculty member has dedicated professional development dollars to further their practice. All staff participates in workshops and training on site to extend their skills and learn about new and effective ways to engage children, or about trends in education.

School improvement begins at the top, and our Board of Trustees leads the charge in making sure we continue to grow. After all, it is their job to make sure that Post Oak is here for your children’s children. They are committed to this work by making sure to use data in their work and solicit feedback from the community. Annually, the board engages the services of Independent School Management (ISM) to survey faculty and evaluate the work of the Board and the performance of the school against stability markers. This process leads to goal setting and keeps the work of the board focused on improvement for the future.

continued on page 4
What Does School Improvement Look Like?  
continued from page 3

Last, but certainly not least, getting feedback from both you and your student is important to Post Oak, and we receive feedback in a variety of ways throughout the year. Student work samples, testing data, and the student culture surveys are a few of the ways we “hear” from students. And, as mentioned in the Board Brief on page 7, I plan to solicit feedback from parents annually through surveys. As with the teachers’ and division directors’, my door is always open, and I welcome your thoughts and comments. I have enjoyed hearing from many of you already!

We will be relieved when this week is over, as there is some healthy stress associated with an accreditation visit and having a group of 15 people analyze your work. However, the process goes on at Post Oak, where we have built school improvement into the fabric of what we do.

Class Pictures at the Bissonnet Campus
Wed., March 29

Lost & Found

Next time you’re at the Bissonnet Campus, stop by the lost and found chest in the Common Room.

Note: If clothing or lunch boxes have a name written on it, the item is placed in your child’s cubicle/locker. It’s a good idea to mark special items so they always find their way home!

Join Friends of the Library

Friends of the Library is a financial support group for the library. All funds raised go to support the Post Oak Library and book collections on both campuses. You can become a Friend of the Library (FOL) by making a donation online. FOL contributors’ children will be invited to attend a Stuffed Animal Sleepover Storytime later in the spring.

What is the Stuffed Animal Sleepover? Parents drop off young children for a pj storytime with their favorite stuffed animal friend who stays behind when the child is picked up. The stuffed animals have a fun-filled sleepover in the library. Mrs. Eckert will tell the animals stories and tuck them into bed, and when the children return for them in the morning, they will receive a photo of their animal friend’s adventure.

What does school improvement look like? continued from page 3
Welcome to Book Fair at Brazos 2017!
Mark your calendars for Sunday, April 2 for an afternoon of fun at our second annual Book Fair at Brazos Bookstore.

The faculty has selected beautiful books to purchase for your children’s classrooms and the school library. These will be organized in bins and labeled by class throughout the store. For your personal collections, browse Brazos’ extensive selection of interesting books. There is something for everyone on the shelves!

A big thank you to all of you who helped kick-off Book Fair by pre-ordering. All pre-orders will be ready for pick-up at Brazos on April 2.

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT BRAZOS
Brazos Bookstore is a Houston independent bookstore. With its carefully curated collection and commitment to Houston’s literary community, Brazos meaningfully aligns with Post Oak’s mission to provide our children with experiences that promote their curiosity, inquiry, and engagement. After all, what can alight a child’s imagination better than a good book? How about a good book read by its author?

BOOK FAIR ACTIVITIES
12:30–2:00 p.m. YCC/Primary
Characters from our children’s favorite books will be at Brazos to greet younger students! Enjoy Storytime with Librarian Cory Eckert and meet characters from “Llama, Llama” and “Where the Wild Things Are!”

2:30–4:00 p.m. Lower Elementary
Local author Cathey Graham Nickell will read and answer questions about her newly released book “Arthur Zarr’s Amazing Art Car.” Illustrator, Bill Megenhardt, will have his pen ready at an illustration station.

4:30–5:30 p.m. Upper Elementary
Remember that Book! Upper Elementary students can play a collaborative game testing their memory and reading comprehension of “Save Me a Seat” by Sarah Weeks and Git Varadarajan.

6:00–8:00 p.m. Middle/High School
Poetry Slam: Read your poetry and have two jazz musicians interpret each poem musically. Students will enjoy an evening comparing rhythms between words and music!

Food carts! Crepes and hot dogs, courtesy of Melange Creperie and Good Dog!

Got (old) books?! We will be collecting gently used books to support two local charities: Books Between Kids, and Casa de Esperanza. The 5th grade Girl Scouts Troop will assist in this effort as they work towards their Bronze award.

Sunday, April 2
Noon to 8 p.m.
FUN FOR EVERYONE!

We look forward to celebrating books with you on April 2!

Your Book Fair Chairs, Nikayla Thomas and Katie Padden
When Gala Chairs Jennifer Chavis and Stelli Parsapour got together for the first time back in January of 2016 to discuss gala, they emerged with two clear objectives: it was going to be a Great Gatsby theme, and this was going to be one fun party. A year later after many meetings, planning, creativity, and champagne, their Gatsby-themed party roared to life—and what a party it was!

Almost all of the 460 guests dressed to the theme with long strands of pearls, fringe and feathers, fedoras, flat caps, and tuxedos all around. Hotel ZaZa was an ideal backdrop for the festive feel of a 1920s soirée.

Guests entered the event and stopped to smile for a glamour shot. Sipping berry bubble champagne, they made their way through the Fine Art Gallery and into the silent auction salons. Dinner chimes called everyone into the semi-circular ballroom—an accommodating space with an intimate feel. Wine, salad, and dinner were all served, and then the fun really began.

Our gala chairs, Head of School Maura Joyce, and Board Chair Melissa Coleman addressed the crowd to remind one and all the importance of the evening. Afterwards, auctioneer Mark Thomas stepped up to energize the crowd into full bidding sport! Back and forth the bidding bounced as parents were determined to return home victorious with artwork in hand. The magnificent works of art created by the students of Post Oak brought in a record $183,500!

Raucous bidding continued with Big Board items and the Fun Committee’s Prohibition Tub. Gala guests also contributed a record-breaking amount to directly support Post Oak students in the Classroom Corner paddles-up portion of the evening—a whopping $49,000! Engrossed by the bidding activity, guests didn’t even flinch when the ballroom’s fire alarm started blaring for a few minutes after a fire exit door was opened elsewhere in the hotel! If the auction energy and fire alarm didn’t get everyone on their feet, the surprise transformation of the cocktail area into a full dance floor enticed even the most reserved parent to shake it up. For those who wanted to continue the evening with more conversation and laughter, the Speakeasy opened in another section of the party to welcome gala goers late into the night. What a party, indeed!

Early in 2016, in the midst of a sluggish economy and oil and gas woes, there was great concern and hand-wringing about how well this biennial fundraiser would do. At the end of this extraordinary evening, when all the underwriting, donations, and auction proceeds were counted, expectations were exceeded once again as the gala brought in a record $630,000, surpassing our last gala’s record-breaking total by over $60,000.

Heartfelt thanks to our incredible gala chairs, their amazing committees, and all volunteers who worked long hours to present such a grand event. Supreme thanks to all underwriters, donors, auction winners, and everyone who supported this biennial fundraising effort. Your generous support is a show of appreciation for the work that happens each day in the classroom by our dedicated faculty. We are honored by and grateful to the Post Oak parent community.

Hold on to your hats for 2019!

Christina Kopanidis-Cantu, Development Director
FALL SURVEY SUMMARY

As parents of children who have been a part of The Post Oak School community for more than nine years, we know that this is a special place to learn and grow. As trustees, we are tasked with ensuring that the school lives up to its mission not only for our children and the current students, but for generations of children to come. While the school has been through tremendous changes and growth over the last eighteen months, we have also remained committed to our mission and—most of all—to the children.

This year, the trustees were also tasked with assisting our new head of school in making a smooth and supported transition. In the December issue of The Post, Maura Joyce reported on her first 100 days at Post Oak. In that issue, we also included a link to a survey designed to get a snapshot of the sentiments surrounding the head of school transition, the new campus facilities and upgrades, community culture, and school communications.

We were asked to review the survey results and share the responses. Nearly 250 surveys were submitted from families with children in every level of program from Young Children’s Community through High School. The highest percentage of responses came from families who are new to the school and those that have been here for six years or more.

The theme throughout the written comments submitted was that the Post Oak community is strong, and that the school culture is valued. It is inclusive, diverse, and continually focused on improvement. We believe in and strive to deliver our school’s mission to create an environment for our children that “fosters collaboration, cooperation and peace, and to provide experiences that promote curiosity, inquiry and engagement.” While it may not come as a surprise to most, it is always reassuring to see that our aspirations are reflected in our actions.

Comments also reflected that the transition is going well, that the students are thriving, that Maura has been visible, available, and welcoming. Respondents also had differing experiences with communication and what frequency or mode was most effective for their family. Overall, the community was open and looking forward to seeing and hearing more from Maura and faculty.

These survey responses echoed the community’s responses to the 2015 survey that was part of our Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS) accreditation. At that time we were about to embark on tremendous change. We were developing a new high school campus and in the midst of a search for a new head of school. The 2015 results showed a community that was committed and ready to manage the uncertainty ahead. That resilience and dedication to Post Oak led us through those changes and were observed in this latest survey. Indeed, the new campus improvements and additions were well received, and forgiving of the growing pains associated with a new two-campus model.

Post Oak has been through so much change while the core of who we are has remained constant. Communication is key to ensuring our community stays strong. The desire to have increased and efficient communications between the school and families came through strongly in the survey results. Maura has made a commitment to ongoing communication with parents through an open door policy, regular parent education opportunities, various school events, and through an annual survey for the community’s input and feedback on a variety of strategic and timely topics. In the spring, parents will receive another survey that will “take the temperature” of our community. The Parent Partnership agreement is a foundational part of Post Oak. We look forward to participating in and reporting back on the upcoming survey. Together, we will ensure that the Post Oak Community remains strong.
Odyssey Champs

by Emily Weinstein, Post Oak parent

Congratulations to the Odyssey of the Mind Post Oak 5th grade team! The team placed first out of 25 teams in the regional competition and advanced to the state competition that will be held April 8! Team members are (top l–r): Megan, Aurora, Abby, Tabitha, Jules, Niko, and Wyatt.

Odyssey of the Mind (OM) is a worldwide creative problem solving and critical thinking competition. Teams solve problems that range from building mechanical devices to presenting their interpretation of literary classics, then bring their solutions to competitions at the local, state, and world level.

Although they didn’t advance, a big high-five to our other Post Oak team (bottom l–r): Alanis, Shyla, Aashna, Avery, Lola, Arjun, and Abrielle with LE Assistant Amanda Miller and Post Oak parent Michelle Luo!

Happy Spring Break!
March 13–17
Studying “Dramatic Change”

By Middle School students Gabriel Cidette and Sutton

For the past few weeks, the Middle School has been studying “Dramatic Change” in the world from 1400 to 1850, a period in history that encompassed the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, and the Age of Exploration. On the first day of our Dramatic Change unit, we chose regions of the world that we were most interested in studying, and we were then put into groups that we would work with for the rest of the unit. The five options were the Ottoman Empire, France and Russia, Asia (Japan, China, Mongol Empire, Persian Empire, and Mughal Empire), Northern Europe (England, Germany, and the Netherlands), and Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, and Italy). Each week, we studied a different topic within our region and gave a creative presentation of our topic. The topics were trade and government, science and technology, literature and philosophy, art and architecture, and religion. Presentations included skits, art galleries, 3D timelines, a TV talk show, a literary seminar, a puppet show, and two rap battles!

While each group presented their weekly research, the rest of the class would take notes on their presentation. After five weeks, all of the country groups had presented each topic. Each individual student then used their notes and created a book of what they had learned. With help from our art teacher, Ms. Vasquez, we used an awl to pierce holes, then needle and thread to bind our books. These books took a while to make, but we were all satisfied with our final result. It was interesting to see how each book turned out in its own unique way.

Making books wasn’t the only thing that was tricky in this humanities cycle. We also had to choose a historical figure from our country to act as. First, we researched a historical figure and learned about their lives and contributions to their time period. In addition to learning about this figure, we needed to write a monologue and memorize it, design a costume to wear, and make a prop that shows that person’s achievements. Parents were then invited on Thursday, February 16 to hear the students perform their monologues. Besides some minor upsets, it was extremely fun to participate in. Many kids went above and beyond with this assignment, like Sam who impersonated Victor Hugo and wrote an entire rap instead of a monologue. Andreas made a hand painted background map for his figure, the Spanish explorer Vasco Da Gama. Josey’s grandmother made a fabulous dress to represent the fashion designs of Europe in the late 1700s, Josey, who impersonated Marie-Antoinette, even made a small, working guillotine as her prop. Ellen as Catherine the Great of Russia, memorized her monologue, had an amazing costume, and was really living the part. In summary, everyone brought their own amazing qualities to their presentations. This humanities cycle required a lot of hard work, but was a unique and entertaining learning experience we will be sure to remember.
High School A-Term Courses

A-Term, a two-week intensive course, starts on March 20. Each High School student participates in a single class, some including travel. Here’s what’s happening later this month:

**Hispanic Culture in Houston:** Spanish Immersion course where the group will research and find places in Houston to have Hispanic experiences, such as restaurants from different Hispanic countries, Outreach Organizations, Hispanic Consulates, Hispanic TV stations and radio stations, theatres, galleries, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. Eating, visits, interviews, participation in events or activities in these institutions will be involved, all with the goal of being aware of the Hispanic culture in our community.

**Historical Game Design:** Students learn about history through game design, have fun, and possibly become millionaires. They play an assortment of historical games while reading a book about a period or aspect of history. They analyze the structural and design elements of the games they are playing while identifying the particular strategic decision aspects of the events they are reading about. They design their own historical game based on the history they have read, and build, play test, and refine their games. They will be assessed on quality of participation, depth of thought in their game design, quality of their criticism and feedback on other’s games, how well they incorporate others’ feedback, and finally on the historical features and playability of their finished game.

**Houston History:** This course is an opportunity to delve deeply into the rich history of Houston by doing research, working with local historians, visiting historically significant sites, and conducting oral history interviews. Students will begin with the histories of their own families and neighborhoods and will extend this inquiry to historic neighborhoods in Houston.

**Managua Field School—Ecology and Civic Engagement:** Experience the majestic countryside and diverse ecology on Ometepe island. Visit coffee plantations and hike in the rainforest. From there, we will take a step back in history and stay in the colonial city of Granada, exploring the old churches and architecture. Why does so much poverty exist in a country with such a rich cultural and agricultural history? Why do the majority of Nicaraguans live on only $1.25 a day? These and other questions will be explored during the second part of our trip just outside of Managua at the Center for Development in Central America. Here we will volunteer in an array of community development activities and participate in “charlas” by local experts. Spanish language experience is highly recommended, but not required.

**Paleontology Fieldwork on the Craddock Ranch:** The Paleontology Fieldwork in the Red Beds of Texas will give students a good overview of paleontology in the Permian Period. They will have the chance to participate in an actual dig for fossils from this period, learning both proper fieldwork skills and fossil preparation. This course has three parts: a reading and lecture period before we leave for Seymour, Texas; the fieldwork in the Red Beds; and fossil preparation and a presentation to the rest of the school after we return. Assessments are on participation, understanding the reading material, and on skills out in the field and in the prep lab. Assessments will be a combination of observation, self-assessment, and quizzes on the readings and lectures.

**Setting up a Post Oak Science Café:** Science Cafés are a set of informal talks with scientists in a casual setting. The Café Scientifique is a café created and run by teens. They interview and choose the scientists, and train them to speak to teens. This A-Term is to train students to set up and promote a series of talks for Post Oak. Students who take this course will learn how to interview scientists, choose them, and train them to speak to teens. They will learn marketing and how to promote the talks, and determine the direction of the series. If you like science, this is a great opportunity to learn more! Assessments are on participation, and improvement of interviewing, marketing, and training skills. Also on creativity of marketing materials and methods.

**Art + Technology = Video Games:** This course starts with a survey of visual art and philosophy of new media, art, and technology that introduces students to conceptual themes of contemporary digital art and important artists in the
College Acceptances

Auburn University, Columbia College Chicago, Guilford College, Ithaca College, Pratt Institute, University of South Carolina Honors College

Academy of Art University  Hendrix College  University of South Carolina
Baylor University  Lynn University  The University of Texas at Austin
Carleton College  Marlboro College  Saint Mary's College of California
Colorado School of Mines  Montserrat College of Art  Stephen F. Austin State University
Eckerd College  The University of Colorado Boulder  Texas Tech University
The Evergreen State College  University of Denver  Trinity University
Goucher College  University of Houston

We'll keep you updated throughout the year as they come in.

Ante up with Post Oak Dads for the annual

📍 Dads’ Club Poker Night📍
on Wed., March 29
Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

RSVP to postoakdadclub@gmail.com by Thurs., March 23!

Poker Night will be hosted at the BBVA Compass building on Post Oak Blvd thanks to the generosity of Manolo Sanchez. Tickets are $80, which includes buffet meal, adult beverages, an initial stack of poker chips, and lots of fun socializing with fellow Post Oak dads!

Whether a poker novice, or an experienced player, all are welcome—it’s all for the kids!

♠ ♣ ♥ ♦

High School A-Term Courses
continued from page 10

field. The rest of the course focuses on work in the Tinker Lab making interactive art pieces. The class uses BLENDER, an open source/free 3D molding program to make interactive games and create visual experiences. Students build their own controllers for these works using fabrication tools, 3D scanner, laser cutter, and 3D printer. Students use Arduino micro-controllers and do some computer programing and soldering. The goal of the course is to produce functional “games” that are interacted with through custom electronic sculptures.

Art Car: Students acquire the necessary skills to undertake fundamental roles in producing a Post Oak Art Car to be entered into the Houston Art Car Parade on April 8, 2017. (Note that this is the weekend of the ISAS Arts Festival.)

♠ ♣ ♥ ♦
A gift of appreciated securities that you have held for more than one year is frequently the most economical way to give. You will be eligible to take a federal income tax deduction equal to the fair market value of the stock on the date of the gift for up to 30 percent of your adjusted gross income and will not have to recognize the appreciation as capital gain. Contact christinacantu@postoakschool.org for more information.

We are getting closer! Please help us reach 100% parent participation!
Coffee **with the**
**ELEMENTARY DIRECTOR**

Wed., March 22 at 9 a.m.
in the Bissonnet Common Room

**Pathways to Independence**

presented by Lori Scovill, PhD, Post Oak Counselor

Wednesday, April 19
6:45 p.m. Mix & Mingle | 7:00 p.m. start, High School

Watch the Post Highlights email for topic information.

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**Spring Conference Days**

Friday, March 31 and April 7 are conference days. On March 31, only YCC is in session. All other classes are not in session: only students with expanded year contracts attend.

Register on our website to select a conference day and time: [www.postoakschool.org/postoak/Schedule_a_Parent-Teacher_Conference.asp](http://www.postoakschool.org/postoak/Schedule_a_Parent-Teacher_Conference.asp)

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**Afternoon Tea & Conversation with the YCC Teachers**

Thurs., March 30
2 p.m. in the Bissonnet Campus Parenting Center

All parents of young children are invited to these informal gatherings to hear and discuss topics about developmental milestones in their children.
1–6. Students in YCC and Primary showed their parents the wonderful work they do in the classrooms.

7. PHE students celebrated Mardi Gras with dancing.

8. A LE student uses clay to model parts of the ecosystem.

9. Another group of LE students use a bead chain to work on math.

10. Mr. Pinto’s UE class held a bake sale to benefit an animal shelter.

11. MMUN participants have been preparing for their presentations in NY. We’re wishing them good luck!

12. HS students gather in the East Commons to work.
NOTICE BOARD

2017–2018

IMPORTANT DATES

Aug. 14 Faculty/staff return
Aug. 22 Elementary, Middle, & High School students return
Aug. 28–Sept. 1 First week for all YCC, PRI students
Sept. 4 Labor Day—school closed
Sept. 22 Teacher in-service—school closed
Oct. 9 Columbus Day—employee retreat/in-service—school closed
Nov. 22–24 Thanksgiving Break—school closed
Dec. 21 Early dismissal
Dec. 22–Jan. 5 Winter Break—school closed
Jan. 8 Teacher in-service—school closed
Jan. 15 Martin Luther King Jr. Day—school closed
Feb. 19 Presidents’ Day—school closed
March 12–16 Spring Break—only students with expanded-year contracts attend
March 30 Good Friday—school closed
April 20 Teacher in-service—school closed
May 25 Last day of school/early dismissal
High School Commencement

STORY TIME

with Cory

March 28 at 2 p.m.
at The Post Oak School Bissonnet Campus

THEME: Ocean

For parents & their children in YCC & Half-Day Primary

NEXT YEAR!

POPA

COFFEE | WORK

Day

Wed., April 5, 8:45–noon

Parents, grandparents, & friends are invited!

Hosted by our POPA Chairs, this is a great way to meet other Post Oak parents and friends while helping our teachers accomplish a variety of easy-to-do projects for their classroom.

These gatherings generally fall on the first Wednesday of each month. Please join as often as you can!

ABOUT THE POST

The Post appears every first Monday of the month during 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 to Communications Coordinator Elaine Schweizer (elaineschweizer@postoakschool.org) by 5:00 p.m. on the Monday one week prior to publication.

The Post Oak School was founded in 1963 and accredited by both the International Baccalaureate® Programme (IBO) and the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)

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