



ST. CATHERINE'S MONTESSORI
HOUSTON, TEXAS

2011-2016 Strategic Plan

September 2011

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Introduction

This Strategic Plan is the work product of the Strategic Planning Committee of St. Catherine's Montessori. The Board of Directors formed the committee in early 2011 from a diverse group within the community, including faculty, administration, staff, parents of alumni and active parents:

Cynthia Blessman, parent of alumni, faculty
Paulette Chavez, parent of alumni, grandparent
Chris DeMeo, parent
Laurie Farris, parent of alumni, Director of Admissions
Dione Gaspar, parent, parent of alumni, grandparent, Controller
Jonathon Godfrey, parent
Deborah Gremillion, parent, grandparent, Board of Directors
Angela Henry, parent
Kathy Hijazi, parent of alumni, faculty
Martha Laird, parent, parent of alumni
Greg Marino, parent, Board of Directors
Mike Morris, parent of alumni, Board of Directors
Jennifer Reeves, parent, Director of Advancement
Eric Rodriguez, parent, Board of Directors
Carrie Toffoletto, parent, parent of alumni, faculty
Susan Tracy, Head of School
Carmen Watrin, parent
Claire Yabriain, alumna, parent, faculty

This plan has been researched, discussed and agreed upon by the Strategic Planning Committee and approved by the Board of Directors. As Head of School, I am confident that the implementation of this plan will serve the highest interests of the total community of St. Catherine's Montessori for years to come.

Susan Tracy
Head of School

Executive Summary

The Strategic Plan for St. Catherine's Montessori reflects the vision and strategies the Board of Directors will use in executing the Mission and achieving the goals of our community. It reflects a respect for our school history and our vision for the future.

The overall Strategic Plan is organized in the following Focus Areas.

- Enhance St. Catherine's Catholic Montessori Culture
- Enhance St. Catherine's as a Model Montessori Educational Experience
- Strengthen St. Catherine's Governance
- Maintain a Physical Plant that Furthers the Mission of St. Catherine's
- Enhance St. Catherine's Advancement Program

There are several key goals for the upcoming year, which address the school's immediate and long-term objectives:

In order to strengthen the Catholic Montessori culture of St. Catherine's, the school will seek to enhance communications and build stronger relationships within and beyond the school community.

To provide the model in Montessori education, St. Catherine's will continue to value and place emphasis upon its Association Montessori Internationale membership and foster continuing education of its faculty and staff.

St. Catherine's will install the Primary Outdoor Learning Environment during the fall of 2011, and the Building and Grounds Committee will proceed with investigating and preparing for the expansion of the school to accommodate increased enrollment in the upper grade levels in the near future.

St. Catherine's will shift its Development Office to a focus on Advancement. Broadening the focus will enhance its efforts in marketing, recruitment and retention, alumni relations and fundraising. Additionally, the school will implement an endowment fund during the current school year.

The use of information technology (IT) at St. Catherine's will be studied and a long range plan for the IT system of the school will be developed.

The Mission

As a Catholic Montessori school, St. Catherine's is dedicated to an educational experience which awakens in our students the awareness of their gifts and responsibilities as individuals in relationship with Jesus Christ and as stewards of the global community.

Philosophy

The ministry of Catholic Education in general is the fulfillment of the educational mission of the Catholic Church and has as its primary goal the continuous formation of the Christian person.

St. Catherine's Montessori is an environment in which students can experience the presence of God in a unique way. Its focus is on the individual person's spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, cultural, and physical development. In our school, students and teachers proclaim the gospel message, unite in worship, respond to the needs of the community through fellowship and social justice, and serve others through the sharing of their spiritual gifts and temporal goods.

Our philosophy is an extension of Dr. Maria Montessori's educational dream, "To the young child we give guides to the world and the possibility to explore it through free activity; to the older child we give the cosmos and a clear vision of how the cosmic energies act in the creation and maintenance of our globe." Cosmic education relates children and adolescents to the universe, enabling them to understand the law and order underlying its existence and to realize in themselves all the developmental potential that is their particular birthright.

Goals

Educational Goal: To adhere to the best practices of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) curriculum and training.

Spiritual Goal: To foster Catholic study and experiences in all elements of life within the educational setting.

Environmental Goal: To practice sustainable living and good stewardship of the earth.

Supporting Mission

Dominican Family Mission Statement

We, members of the Dominican Family, are called to embody the Dominican charism to seek truth, preach the word of God, and promote the dignity of all persons. As part of the global Dominican Family, we commit ourselves to lives rooted in prayer, study, community and preaching. Through our gifts of diversity, we strive to grow together as co-creators of justice and peace.

School Profile

St. Catherine's Montessori is a private, Catholic, non-profit school located at 9821 Timberside, near Loop 610 South between Stella Link and S. Main. The school is easily accessible from the Medical Center, Galleria Area, West University, Bellaire, and Downtown Houston.

St. Catherine's Montessori is affiliated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and accredited by the Texas Catholic Conference Education Department (TCCED), which is recognized by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). St. Catherine's Montessori is an Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) school and is a member of the North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA) and the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA).

The 7.4 acre campus of St. Catherine's includes a gymnasium and a sports field, gardens, and water and land areas for the study of plant and animal life. The school's design reflects the Montessori philosophy of integrating the indoor and outdoor environments in the curriculum. St. Catherine's Montessori was the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified K-12 school in the state of Texas.

St. Catherine's Montessori has a student population of approximately 240-250 students, ages 14 months to 15 years and is culturally, religiously, and economically diverse.

Toddler Community

Children ages 14 months up to age 3 who have established independent walking may begin their Montessori experience in our Toddler Community. This community consists of one classroom of 12 students with one Montessori guide and a full time assistant.

Primary

The Primary Program is designed for students ages 3-6. There are four Primary classrooms, each with one Montessori Guide, a full time assistant and approximately 30 students.

Elementary (Grades 1-6)

There are currently two Lower Elementary (grades 1-3) classrooms and one Upper Elementary (grades 4-6) classroom. Each classroom has one Montessori guide, a full time assistant and approximately 30 students.

Adolescent Community (Grades 7-9)

The Adolescent Community (AC) has four full time Guides and utilizes an extensive outdoor learning environment on a daily basis. There are approximately 25 students at the AC level.

School History

Founded in 1966 as Dominican Montessori by Sister Edna Ann Hebert, O.P. St. Catherine's Montessori is the third oldest Montessori school in Houston and the first Montessori school to include basic Catholic doctrine in its curriculum.

1966 – 1974

The school was initially located in downtown Houston, in the original St. Agnes Academy building. The school initially served Primary students and five first graders. In 1967, fellow Dominican, Sr. Shirley Owens, joined Sr. Edna Ann. They in turn, attribute the initial success and growth of the student body to the intensely dedicated parents who sent their children to them to learn. In 1972, the school added the next Montessori level, Lower Elementary. This class served students aged six to nine, (grades one through three). The school had an enrollment of approximately 100 students.

1974-1983

In 1974, the school formed a non-profit corporation to receive and maintain funds for educational purposes and was re-named, St. Catherine's Montessori, after St. Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church and Dominican Sister acclaimed for her preaching in the fourteenth century.

With the impending sale of the downtown location, plans were underway to identify a new building to house what then became, St. Catherine's Montessori School. It was moved to rented spaces at Holy Rosary Parish, in downtown Houston, in 1974. However, with only room for the youngest students, the school expanded to another building at Bering Memorial Methodist Church, eight blocks away, to accommodate the older students aged six to nine in the elementary program.

1983-1997

With the financial backing of five incredibly dedicated families, the school was finally able to purchase one building that could house all students on Westridge Street, near the Astrodome, in what had been an old arms museum. Because of the building's architecture, the community referred to this building as "the castle".

During this period the school's Primary and Lower Elementary classes grew, and the Upper Elementary level (grades 4-6) was added. The school could now educate students ages three through twelve for a total population of 150.

1997-2006

During the 1997-1998 school year, a middle school class was added with seventh grade students, and grew to add eighth grade the following year. In 2002, the ninth grade was added and the middle school grade levels were named the Adolescent Community. The school now followed the model of Montessori offering education to students in three year cycles from ages three through fifteen. The student enrollment reached 205 during this period.

Also, during 1999, Sr. Edna Ann Hebert established a community outreach reading center as a separate entity from the school. The reading center services were offered at an off campus location during “the castle” years.

2006-Present

In June of 2005, ground was broken on seven and a half acres of land (on Timberside) just one mile from the Westridge location. In July of 2006, the contents of the 22,000 square foot building were moved and life began anew at the first Leadership in Educational and Engineering Design, (LEED) certified school building in Texas. The space, totaling 39,000 square feet, was designed to add two new classrooms, a gymnasium and a room for the Reading Center. At this time, the school added a Toddler program for twelve students ages fourteen months to three years. The school population has grown since the move to Timberside and typically ranges between 240-250 students.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 1
Enhance St. Catherine's Catholic, Montessori Culture

Overview: St. Catherine's Montessori has an exceptionally strong spiritual Montessori culture which is fundamental to its Mission. This culture must be nurtured and developed as the school evolves and faces new challenges. In that regard, St. Catherine's must rely on strong unity of purpose among parents, faculty, administration, Board, current students, alumni and external supporters.

Results Objective 1

REVIEW MISSION

Review the school's Mission, Philosophy and Goals to confirm that they capture the school's Catholic Montessori identity and reflect the Dominican influence within the St. Catherine's community.

Results Objective 2

ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

Define and enhance a process for ongoing communication and collaboration along the Montessori triangle (school – parents – children) to include parent education and identification of parent and school expectations.

Results Objective 3

ENHANCE VOLUNTEERISM

Identify and communicate the respective roles and responsibilities of the school's community members (parents, teachers, administration, current students, alumni and the Board) in fostering the school's Mission.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 2

Enhance St. Catherine's as a Model Montessori Educational Experience

Overview: St. Catherine's Montessori serves the child from 14 months to age fifteen in a faith-based environment under the principles of Catholic stewardship and in accordance with the philosophy and methodology pioneered by Dr. Maria Montessori. St. Catherine's is a unique school that wants to preserve its distinctive character even as it evolves and grows.

Results Objective 1 AMI STATUS

St. Catherine's Montessori seeks to continue to maintain its AMI Accreditation Status.

AMI Accreditation provides an assurance to parents and prospective guides that St. Catherine's follows Dr. Montessori's principles and practices in their original integrity and completeness.

Results Objective 2 FACULTY & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

St. Catherine's Montessori recognizes that exceptional educational experience is rooted in the excellence of its faculty and staff. As such, the school will support the continuing education of its faculty and staff, to preserve and further the school's unique spiritual, ethical, academic and cultural environment that draws upon its Catholic foundations to honor and foster its Montessori principles.

Results Objective 3 EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMMING

Evaluate the extracurricular activities offered at the school to ensure that, in their execution, the core principles of the school's Mission are reflected.

Results Objective 4 MONTESSORI HIGH SCHOOL

Investigate and define St. Catherine's vision for a Montessori high school.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 3
Strengthen St. Catherine's Governance

Overview: St. Catherine's began as the dream and inspiration of two Dominican Sisters of Houston, Sr. Edna Ann Hebert, O.P. and Sr. Shirley Owens, O.P. Their vision informed the School's creation and has guided it ever since. For St. Catherine's to maintain and build on their legacy, the School must transition from being the creation of those two pioneering individuals to an institution reliant on no one individual for its health and welfare. This transition will be especially critical in the area of school governance.

- Results Objective 1 MAXIMIZE EFFECTIVENESS**
Fully utilize the governance structure and bylaws over the next three years to determine if any long-term changes are required to maintain the school's Mission. As the school's needs have evolved over time through growth and changes in leadership it is important the school is managed in a consistent fashion.
- Results Objective 2 REVIEW POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES**
Confirm, enhance and maintain the existing procedures, practices and policies of the Board of Directors and Administration. The procedures, practices and policies should have enough flexibility to enable the work of the school to be done efficiently, and clarity for consistent decision making and guidance for the community.
- Results Objective 3 FINALIZE STRATEGIC PLANNING CHARTER**
The Board of Directors will finalize the Strategic Planning Committee Charter to facilitate the implementation of the Plan.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 4

Maintain a Physical Plant That Furthers the Mission of St. Catherine's

Overview: The physical plant for St. Catherine's should embody the school's principles and philosophy in its design and facilitate the implementation of our education goals within its confines. Our facilities will strive to maintain a national model for education. In maintaining this educational environment we provide ourselves the opportunity to stay connected to our wider community both locally and beyond.

Results Objective 1 OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

One of the central tenets of the Montessori philosophy is the connection between the child and the natural world around him. To support this vision, provide the necessary outdoor facilities that support the goals of the school and bring together the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Complete the Outdoor Learning Environment Project.

Results Objective 2 FACILITIES MAINTENANCE PLAN

Maintain our facilities over the long-term so they continue to support our school's philosophy and goals for many generations. Develop and implement a multi-year maintenance and infrastructure plan. This plan will include:

- expected timing, scope and cost for the normal replacement of capital assets and systems
- an overview of the requirements to maintain LEED certification
- an overview of the annual maintenance plan for each of the buildings systems such as HVAC, security, grounds, etc.

Results Objective 3 SCHOOL EXPANSION

Ensure facilities are available to accommodate future siblings of current students and all those students who desire to continue their education at St. Catherine's. Develop the plan and design of a facility expansion that will accommodate projected long-term enrollment. Enrollment projections will be based on maintaining four Primary classrooms. This plan should include facilities for the administration and auxiliary functions required to support St. Catherine's education philosophy. Future expansions or updates to the school will include LEED certification.

Results Objective 4 CHARTER IT COMMITTEE

The Head of School and Board of Directors will charter an ad hoc committee for the purpose of developing and documenting a long term plan (3-5 year) for the use of Information Technology at St. Catherine's.

Results Objective 5 IT PLAN

The IT Committee, in accordance with its charter, will develop and prepare a long range IT plan for presentation to the Board of Directors and the Head of School for approval and for incorporation into the school's Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 5
Enhance St. Catherine's Advancement Program

Overview: Traditionally, St. Catherine's has had a Development Program with a primary focus of fundraising. Moving to an advancement model offers greater opportunities for ongoing communications and relationship building within the wider community. The Advancement Program will sustain and strengthen its ability to advance the Mission of St. Catherine's Montessori.

- Results Objective 1 ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE**
The Board of Directors and the Advancement Director will collaborate, to establish an Advancement Committee.
- Results Objective 2 WIDER COMMUNITY OUTREACH**
Develop a comprehensive strategy of service through genuine outreach to the wider community. St. Catherine's Montessori is dedicated to service in the world beyond our school community. External service enhances the external development of St. Catherine's reputation, and helps to bring our Montessori and Catholic values to the world.
- Results Objective 3 ALUMNI RELATIONS**
Develop a strategy to strengthen the alumni community of St. Catherine's and a plan for tracking and promoting the alumni and their accomplishments.
- Results Objective 4 FOSTER DIVERSITY**
Enhance recruitment and retention practices to target a diverse applicant pool and to foster a sense of community and inclusion with all new families.
- Results Objective 5 EFFECTIVE FUNDRAISING**
Develop a comprehensive plan to approach individuals, foundations and other organizations to provide ongoing financial support.
- The Advancement Director will develop and recommend to the Board of Directors a program of planned giving.
- Results Objective 6 LAUNCH ENDOWMENT FUND**
The Finance Committee and Board of Directors will collaborate in the implementation of an Endowment Fund for the benefit of St. Catherine's Montessori.