Lexington Montessori School Mission Statement

The Lexington Montessori School community works to create an environment that inspires children to develop inner discipline, self-assurance, and a love of learning. We respect the uniqueness of each student by helping each child to develop skills at periods of greatest readiness and sensitivity.

Our program provides a creative and adaptive environment that responds to the needs of the children. We seek to balance academic and social development to foster responsibility and cooperation within a supportive learning community.

Our students learn to view themselves as contributing members of a diverse global community. We respect and value differences, and look with an open mind at all members of the community, seeking to understand and value them for who they are. The staff, the parents and the children communicate clearly and openly and treat each other with honesty and mutual respect.
This Long Range Plan (2011-2017) seeks to realize more fully the whole mission of Lexington Montessori School as we continue to honor and practice Montessori philosophy. We aspire through this Plan to:

Engage in the broader world
Engage our community
Engage the whole child

A word about the order (World, Community, Child) of this plan: Children explore first the elements of the physical earth, then other living creatures, and finally other humans and themselves... we are sensitive to the individual person with genuine respect for the community as a whole... Starting with the universe and spiraling inward, refining this large concept to the individual person, cosmic education, as does every other area of the Montessori curriculum begins with the large and moves to the small. From Montessori scholar and teacher Aline D. Wolf’s book, Nurturing the Spirit.

Background

This strategic plan, approved by the LMS Board of Directors in June 2011, is the work of over 40 members of the LMS Community. The two previous plans, in 1999 and 2004, laid the foundation for this visionary guide for our school. The accomplishments of the two previous plans - giving LMS a strong financial foundation and necessary personnel and infrastructure - allow us to move forward with innovation and creativity.

LMS operated without a strategic long range plan for 36 years, until the Board and then Head of School Jana Porter, in her second year as Head, determined that such a plan was necessary and desirable to guide the school. Our second strategic plan was written during the tenure of Head of School Bill Valentine in 2004. The Board, administration, teachers and staff of LMS accomplished a great deal since 1999.

Financial strength and facility expansion/enhancement were the backbone of these two previous plans: more competitive salaries and benefits for LMS faculty; generous financial aid for a wide range of families to have access to the school; an endowment as a result of the school’s first Capital Campaign; renovation of the Elementary building,
re-design of driveway and parking for safer pick-up and drop-off of children; wider outdoor space for early childhood play; and a new building for library, art, music and the middle school.

The LMS program’s administration and infrastructure, as well as the diversity of the community, were also strengthened by these plans, the results of which were: a community that is almost half students of color with 40% teachers of color; systematic curriculum review; the addition of a Director of Technology, an Elementary Literacy Specialist, and part-time art, music, PE, and Spanish teachers to respond to the needs of students and teachers; the addition of 7th and 8th grades; an improved before-and-after-school program to meet the needs of families; and updated technological infrastructure.

This third plan builds on these accomplishments, furthering the mission of the school. The plan clearly shows the lasting, if not increased, relevance of the Montessori philosophy and our commitment to providing the best education to toddlers through middle school students, well into this century. In 2013 we celebrate fifty years of LMS, and this plan marks that anniversary with a vision for the future: what children need to be curious, productive, and fulfilled people in that future.

In 2013 we celebrate fifty years of LMS, and this plan marks that anniversary with a vision for the future: what children need to be curious, productive, and fulfilled people in that future.
Engage in the Broader World

1. Move LMS toward living more harmoniously with nature.

The environment and economy of the future depend on working on a local as well as a global level. Our children’s future depends on this approach. Students and teachers will engage in research, analysis, and understanding as they make recommendations and influence LMS decision-making regarding sustaining the health of the earth and its people. Guided by the LMS Mission and Montessori philosophy, the Board of Directors regards this initiative as a “signature” priority for LMS.

Curricular emphasis on environmental and social sustainability provides LMS students the opportunity to understand how their research and action can benefit the health of their world - for the environmental, social and economic future of the planet. If they can see the impact they can have on their school, they will begin to see the impact they can have more broadly.

Environmental issues will be integrated into the science curriculum at all program levels as part of the study of, for example, energy and water. In cultural studies and the study of fundamental human needs, students and teachers will explore how global and local environmental actions affect families in other parts of the world, understanding the costs and benefits of sustainability in financial and human terms. Similarly, most areas of the curriculum (math, language, geography, art, physical education) will play a role in students’ understanding of sustainability.

In concert with the work of students and teachers, the Sustainability Committee of the Board of Directors will have as its goal to build community responsibility and conscience for the care of the planet. Their focus will be to make sound decisions regarding the school’s environmental impact. The committee will be informed by the work of students and teachers from an environmental and social perspective.

The Sustainability Committee of the Board will begin work by using the outline of a plan and a statement devised during the long range planning process, which includes an extensive list of resources, in an effort to begin this work immediately.

A Faculty/staff Sustainability Committee will work to integrate into the curriculum the impact the school has and will have on the world environmentally and socially. The work of students and teachers will respond to, as well as initiate, questions of sustainability. They will use these questions for research, analysis, understanding, and ultimately to influence long-term and short-term decisions for the school.

“The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the Earth.”

Maria Montessori

Responsibility:
Sustainability Committees, Head of School, Business Manager, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development
II. Deepen children’s understanding of people around the world through direct experience and ongoing personal communication.

We will seek meaningful connections with schools around the world to further students’ and teachers’ understanding of the human condition. We know that by developing personal and sustained relationships with people who live in different cultures and climates and who face challenges and experience triumphs the same and different from ours, students develop important skills of listening, observing, empathizing, and understanding. Like the meaningful use of a second (sometimes third) language, the earlier children learn and apply these skills, the better.

Through a variety of media including travel and visits, letters, artwork, video and photos, students will experience life in a range of schools, neighborhoods and families around the world.

LMS’ fledgling relationship with Nueva Escuela Juan Ponce de Leon in San Juan, Puerto Rico has begun to show the value of such a relationship. LMS will explore developing a mutually beneficial, and deeper relationship between our two schools. This will include all program levels at both schools, toddlers through middle school.

LMS families and teachers who have their roots all over the world will help to form other school connections. With the benefit of experience and contacts, classrooms will foster relationships with schools on other continents; LMS will broaden students’ exposure to a wide range of cultures while engaging our parents in meaningful work at the school. Technology will help promote and facilitate these relationships.

Upper elementary and middle school students will have opportunities to experience the complexities of international questions - politically, economically, culturally and socially - through programs such as the Montessori Model United Nations.

LMS students thrive in the diverse community of every classroom at LMS, and international connections will broaden as well as deepen their understanding of each other. Such understanding from a young age and sustained through their schooling will provide students the foundation they need for their inevitable and increased exposure as adults in the global economy.
III. Provide authentic learning for LMS students through a comprehensive service-learning program.

LMS children understand that in their classroom they participate responsibly in a community of learners. They are both self-reliant and quick to help their peers. Through service learning,* they will further develop their sense of personal efficacy and identity. This work will enhance their understanding of citizenship and social responsibility to show students of all ages the effect their work and the work of others’ has on the world.

Service learning will be evident at all levels, with teachers defining age-appropriate goals and activities. Training and education of teachers will ensure that service-learning projects are understood as the work of all school members. We will continue to help young children serve outside their classrooms, and we will partner with organizations where older children can serve communities beyond the school. Students will be engaged in their communities, as they become informed and active citizens.

Students and teachers have engaged locally with such organizations as Cradles to Crayons and Rosie’s Place and have responded internationally to disasters in Haiti and Japan. We see these activities as the beginning of a sustained and purposeful effort of community involvement.

“We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.”

*Service learning is a teaching and learning method that connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility...[It] unites classroom curriculum with identified community issues and needs....Students [learn] critical skills through project development, implementation and reflection....[and] the invaluable skill of being able to organize information, resources, and people in order to improve the community. It allows the students to take ownership of their learning by engaging them in their own education through experiential learning in course-related contexts, and fostering lifelong connections between students, their communities and the world outside the classroom. Source: Crew, Robin. “What is Service Learning?” University of Colorado at Boulder Service Learning Handbook. First Edition (1995)

Responsibility:
Head of School, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development

Maria Montessori
Establishing LMS as a leader in Montessori education and child development has benefits for children, families and teachers, within and outside the LMS community. When we share the research and outcomes of Montessori education with a broader audience, we commit the school more fully to Montessori values and philosophy; when we challenge the conventional approaches to educating children, we encourage dialogue about the ever-evolving educational needs of children; and when the work of educators from a range of schools and institutions is available at LMS, we engage our teachers and staff in the most potent and valuable work of educators. The effects of this professional discourse will be evident in still more effective teaching.

To this end, it is incumbent upon us to explore possibilities for heightened awareness in the educational community of the successful and effective practices of Montessori and LMS. Whether this expanded discourse is most effective through teacher workshops, lecture series, or guest residencies will be investigated. Not a term should go by, for example, without faculty discourse on who we are, what we do, how we do it, why we do it.

Children have benefited for years at LMS from the Montessori and child-centered approaches to learning and teaching. This initiative ensures and expands the school’s commitment to educational innovations and the broadening of this discussion beyond the LMS community.

The Lexington Montessori School community works to create an environment that inspires children to develop inner discipline, self-assurance, and a love of learning.”

LMS Mission

Engage our Community

I. Establish LMS as a resource for educational innovation and cutting edge ideas.

Responsibility:
Head of School, Director of Development, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development
II. Communicate clearly and powerfully about the exceptional whole-child education LMS offers.

This initiative is important to the long-term viability and financial stability of LMS, as well as a necessary step in education reform: Montessori as a proven approach to educating children for a better world.

For years, we at LMS have asked ourselves why the Montessori approach is not more widespread, why more families and educators are not more aware of the success of Montessori education, and how the effectiveness of the Montessori curriculum and philosophy should be better understood. The outcomes of this approach to educating children - independence, autonomy, internal motivation, creativity and peaceful resolutions - have never been more important. We see our alumni succeed in schools after LMS and in their chosen occupations.

LMS will strive to conceive of and communicate the message of the benefits and impact of a Lexington Montessori School education. We acknowledge a longstanding institutional discomfort in “bragging” about the work we do with children and so will be conscious of the tone the message conveys.

A Communications Task Force of the Board will create a plan, which will include developing the most effective message - words, terms, phrases - as well as the most effective means - electronic, print, interactive media - of getting the message to the community.

LMS wants our parents and new families to understand the meaningful work we do with children and, as a result, the meaningful work our students and alumni do. At the same time, it is important to “get the word out” so that educators understand the work we do and can see the benefits for their own schools.

“\nIf we truly believe that Montessori education is effective then we cannot be satisfied with serving small numbers of... children.”

Andre Roberfroid,
President,
Association Montessori Internationale

Responsibility:
Communications Task Force, Head of School, Director of Development, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development, Director of Admission
III. Enhance students’ experience with strong and broad adult involvement in the LMS community.

The LMS community thrives on the participation of current families and alumni in the life of the school, and children benefit from this participation. Overwhelming evidence shows, for example, that when parents are involved in meaningful ways in their child’s school, the child has “better social skills, show[s] improved behavior, and adapt[s] well to school.” *

For the good of our entire community, we will expand this involvement to alumni, their parents and grandparents, and past faculty. School personnel in conjunction with the Parents Association will build on past success with school involvement, as well as develop new opportunities and activities that provide meaningful opportunities for participation.

The school will improve parents’ access to opportunities for involvement at LMS - including participation in the classroom, work with the Parents’ Association, community events, and service on the Board of Directors. All parents will be able to find a way to participate that fits their talents, skills and time constraints. Parents will have easy access to information about the whole range of volunteer opportunities. LMS already has a rich culture of volunteering parents, and this initiative will make volunteering convenient and accessible to increased members of our community. We want all children to benefit from their family’s involvement in the school.

“We seek to balance academic and social development to foster responsibility and cooperation within a supportive learning community.”

LMS Mission

*Source: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Austin, TX, Annual Synthesis, 2002.
Engage the Whole Child

I. Increase students’ opportunities in movement/sports, performing arts/music, Spanish, and technology to advance whole-child learning.

Considerable research shows how these areas of learning are essential to the education of the whole child. Montessori education has always recognized how movement and thinking are linked; today neuroscience has proven the connection. Performing arts and music provide more opportunities for fostering creativity, imagination and self-confidence in all children. The earlier a child uses a foreign language for communication, the more likely the child is to express needs, ideas, and thoughts in that language. The understanding children have of technology assumes its important role in their lives; it is our job to make it a tool for deeper as well as broader understanding of ideas and the world.

Movement/sports: Movement plays a role in nearly all of a child’s endeavors at LMS; additional conscious consideration of movement opportunities and routines will enhance the experience. Teachers will investigate options for more in-classroom gross motor activities for children. LMS participation in the Montessori Athletic Conference provides an opportunity for team sports, and the well-subscribed after-school sports options will continue to develop.

Performing Arts/music: Performance is important to a child’s school experience as it instills confidence and relies on creativity and imagination. It can also bring excitement to the community, furthering the connectedness of families. LMS will identify the current performance traditions to be continued (e.g. Planet Play, Residency performance), and explore additional performance “traditions” to enhance the experience of students.

The creation of a “map” of a student’s opportunities for performance will help to identify the gaps and needs over a student’s years at LMS. What are we doing now? Does each child have ample opportunities for performance? While after-school offerings should continue and even grow (a cappella group, guitar, violin and piano lessons, drama, drumming), integration of music and drama into the classroom curriculum and as team-building activities will be explored, as well.
We will increase the frequency of singing in the school, and this will, when appropriate, include performance. Each program level will develop a “tradition” of singing.

**Spanish:** LMS offers Spanish as an important part of a child’s education starting in the toddler classroom. Further Spanish integration into the life of a child at LMS, as well as clearly articulated goals for each level, are necessary to enable students to use Spanish confidently and to continue their study and use of Spanish beyond LMS.

LMS will develop a plan for Spanish classroom integration. This will include teachers learning Spanish, hiring teachers who already know Spanish, and establishing an ongoing relationship with the Montessori school in San Juan, Puerto Rico at all levels.

**Technology:** The school will provide technology education that includes the teaching of specific skills as well as the understanding that technology can enhance thinking and productivity. All teachers at all program levels will be trained in the uses of technology to explore ways to further enhance the learning experience of the students in their classroom. In-house training and assistance will be available more readily with an added technology position beginning in 2011-12.

An age-appropriate core curriculum for technology at each program level will be developed; all teachers will understand the intentions and implementation of this curriculum. The new curriculum will be an integral part of our existing curriculum (vs. a computer class). It will include the use of technology as a tool for study, communication, research and creativity, and as a means for independent and collaborative work.

With the rapid advancement and changes in technology, the Technology Director and the Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development will review the curriculum and transition guidelines for technology at least biannually.

““The essential thing is to arouse such interest that it engages the child’s whole personality.””

*Maria Montessori*

Responsibility:
*Head of School, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development*
Maria Montessori’s remarkable observations of children from the early 1900’s and the effectiveness of her subsequent development of a whole-child approach to education have been borne out by scientific evidence in the past two decades. That children learn better when they can move around, when they can feel and manipulate materials, when they have some choice over their activities, and when they can learn from each other are among the conclusions Montessori reached in her observations. The understanding of the neurology, physiology, and psychology of how children learn has grown and continues to advance. Montessori-trained teachers have an advantage over conventionally trained teachers in their understanding of the synergy of these sciences in a child’s learning. In acknowledgement of this progress and its importance to whole-child education, LMS will increase the resources we already devote to this kind of teacher education as we strive to provide an ever more fitting environment for children to grow.

As LMS teachers grow as professionals, they will guide and teach children even more effectively. Teachers will expand their understanding of what affects learning through advanced education in speech and language acquisition, sensory integration, attention and focus, emotion and psychology, executive functioning, the gifted and talented, and technology. LMS will commit resources for all LMS teachers to expand their expertise and skills in understanding how individual children learn. Professional opportunities and growth for teachers also work as incentives for teachers as life-long learners.

To ensure that every classroom has expertise and experience in as many of these areas as possible, the school will keep records on the range and progress of teachers’ continuing education. The administration will investigate appropriate and effective workshops, conferences, seminars, and courses that will provide the kind of information and research that can be applied at LMS.

“\nBut we always ought to be asking ourselves, ‘Are we reaching every child, and, if not, are there other ways in which we can do it?’\n"\n
Howard Gardner
Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Responsibility:
Head of School, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development
III. Optimize the educational experience for each student with a newly formed LMS Learning Team.

LMS aims to provide optimal, effective learning for all students. We will formalize our Learning Team to facilitate regular access to professionals. This will enhance teachers’ ability to challenge and support every student. The Team will provide expertise to help teachers understand how to build on their own observations of children to understand how each child learns. Technology, science, advanced math, sensory integration, gross motor activity, social and emotional development, and executive functioning instruction can facilitate learning in multiple styles, and the Learning Team will educate teachers further in these areas.

LMS’ new Learning Team will be composed of existing staff and new staff/consultants who can advise faculty on optimal and balanced approaches that benefit all children individually and in groups. The Learning Team, which may include but not be limited to professionals in the fields of psychology, technology, executive functioning, advanced math and science, and sensory integration, will work with teachers and the administration to develop a clear process for observation, consultation, identification and implementation. While team protocol will likely be modified according to each student, the overall process will be clear, accessible and frequently communicated to school personnel and parents. The team approach from observation through implementation will ensure the most effective response to children in the classroom, making for optimal learning for all children.

“The key...is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.”

Sir Ken Robinson
Author, speaker and consultant on education, creativity, and innovation

Responsibility:
Head of School, Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development, Literacy Specialist
The initiatives of this Long Range Plan, so solidly rooted in the mission and philosophy of LMS, will require sound financial planning. Much of what we set out to do here relies in part on prudent investment and continued growth of the School’s newly established endowment, aptly called The Future Fund.

**Professional development expenditures for teachers and staff to understand, teach, integrate:** environmental sustainability, social sustainability, service learning, Spanish language, technology, performing arts, the “science” of learning.

**Re-assignment of current staff and/or hiring of staff for:** service learning coordination, facilities management for sustainability, coordination between Board committee for sustainability and faculty/curriculum, communications, Learning Team.

**Capital expenditures:** alternative energy resources, space for performance and gross motor activity, software and hardware for international communication, Spanish language software, materials for performing arts integration in classrooms, communications enhancements.
Summary

Engage in the broader world
*Sustainability, international connections, service learning*

I. Move LMS toward living more harmoniously with nature.
II. Deepen children’s understanding of people around the world through direct experience and ongoing personal communication.
III. Provide authentic learning for LMS students through a comprehensive service-learning program.

Engage our community
*Innovation leader, communication, involvement*

I. Establish LMS as a resource for educational innovation and cutting edge ideas.
II. Communicate clearly and powerfully about the exceptional whole-child education LMS offers.
III. Enhance students’ experience with strong and broad adult involvement in the LMS community.

Engage the whole child
*Enhanced curriculum, innovative teaching, Learning Team*

I. Increase students’ opportunities in movement/sports, performing arts/music, Spanish, and technology to advance whole-child learning.
II. Provide teachers with advanced education on current research, knowledge, and breakthroughs in how children learn.
III. Optimize the educational experience for each student with a newly formed LMS Learning Team.
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At the Lexington Montessori School, we are enriched, challenged and inspired by the diversity in our community and in the larger world. We recognize that building a multicultural school requires an ongoing commitment of time, energy and resources in both our curriculum and our school practices.

Our Montessori curriculum respects the individuality of each child, creates a cooperative community, and nurtures a sense of wonder about the interconnectedness of life. Implicit within the Montessori philosophy is the concept of a multicultural school. Through our curriculum, we work to acknowledge and explore differences among us and in the world. We want children to learn to understand and value multiple perspectives, identify and reject stereotypes and prejudices, and work for equity and justice within the school.

At an organizational level, we are committed to creating and maintaining a diverse student and staff population which shares differences of gender, race, religion, family structure, socioeconomic level, culture, age, sexual orientation, language and learning style. We want all parents, staff, and Board to share a commitment to build an inclusive community, and we support their ongoing education.

Our goal at LMS is to create an environment where each person freely brings his or her whole self to school each day, comfortable that every individual will be honored and protected. We hope our children will go on to their next educational experience feeling rooted in their individual identities, with a profound appreciation for both difference and interconnection.