



## **Envisioning our Future: The Strategic Plan for Amherst Montessori School 2016-2020**

### **Our Mission Statement**

We provide a warm, safe, and supportive community that nurtures a lifelong love of learning. We honor each child's path as they become independent, confident, and compassionate individuals, while learning to care for themselves, others, and the world.

### **Our Strategic Vision Statement**

Amherst Montessori School is a progressive, inclusive school committed to diversity, innovative staff and program development, and an active, engaged community.

We uphold a vibrant approach to Montessori education, a welcoming facility and staff, and a commitment to a peaceful, healthy, growing world.

We are inspired to develop and materially support creative programs of personalized development that foster a joy of learning for the children we teach, the adults we train, and the Montessori-inspired community flourishing within us in mind, body, and spirit every day.

### **Priorities, Goals, and Strategies**

#### **Upholding and Strengthening Montessori Educational Excellence**

Amherst Montessori School holds itself to the highest educational standards. We believe in nurturing the whole child and are dedicated to consistently upholding the Montessori identity across all classes in our school. This is achieved by assessing the degree to which each classroom and guide are currently operating within the Montessori pedagogy, and supporting those classrooms as they seek to expand and strengthen the implementation of the Montessori curriculum.

As we strive to exceed the educational standards we've established for our school, it is now time to research and recommend the appropriate accreditation process to pursue. The school has already begun work towards accreditation with both the American Montessori Society and the Association of Independent Schools in New England. We will research these and other options and, if deemed paramount to achieving our educational goals, set the course for accreditation during the next four years.

Our staff and parents demonstrate an unfailing dedication to being the best that they can be for our children and community members. We acknowledge this collective personal growth mindset and will continue to cultivate this quality by developing educational opportunities for staff and parents that will allow them to grow personally, and in their understanding of and care for children.

With our Montessori philosophical emphasis on "following the child," we will embrace learning differences with a balanced approach that holistically supports our children, staff, and parents. We will accomplish this by establishing a learning support team to create and implement a framework for learning support services.

As an independent and non-traditional school, it is important to have a firm grasp of the benchmarks each child must meet socially, emotionally, and academically before they are encouraged to continue to the next level. We will develop a framework to better help identify each student's readiness for advancing along the curriculum, and work with the staff to gauge and identify each student's readiness for continuation.

In the tenth year of its existence, we remain dedicated to the success of our elementary program. While all classrooms will benefit from our strategic focus on upholding Montessori educational excellence, our elementary program will receive specific attention as we assess the needs of our oldest children and implement changes that will both enhance the elementary program and increase retention of existing younger students.

### **Embracing Diversity and Inclusion**

Dr. Maria Montessori began her work with underprivileged children, and saw her pedagogy as a means toward a more just and peaceful world. We affirm our commitment to her philosophy and practice. We embrace diversity in our curriculum, school culture, and community. We foster a peaceful learning environment that encourages respectful discourse and conflict resolution, and cultivates empathy amongst our students and staff.

To ensure that we are upholding this commitment to inclusivity, we will create a diversity committee with membership drawn from staff, parents, Board of Trustees, and if possible, alumni. The diversity committee will define and measure our own diversity, and review and recommend ways to uphold diversity values in staffing, curriculum, facilities, policies, and practices. We will also develop a structure to manage concerns, complaints, and grievances related to diversity issues.

We aspire to ensure a Montessori education is accessible to families of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and will research and develop new pathways of affordability.

### **Supporting and Retaining Staff**

We acknowledge the steadfast dedication of our staff and the care they provide to our students, our school, and each other. A teacher's work is demanding and we aspire to support our staff as whole people. We will continue to support an organizational culture

that creates work-life balance for all staff. We will offer transparent and fair compensation packages for staff at all levels. We will communicate and provide documentation for compensation and benefits ranges, the AMS process for compensation and benefits increases, and the criteria for promotion. Additionally, we will evaluate the training support, professional development, and collaboration opportunities for AMS staff by researching and determining best practices.

In looking to the more distant future, we will assess the feasibility of establishing a training institute at AMS, which could create compelling leadership opportunities for teachers and prepare certified Montessori guides.

### **Advancing Our School**

The school has made significant strides toward effective coordination of communications and advancement efforts. In the next four years we will work to make the AMS brand identity easily understood in a way that it meaningfully connects with community members, current and prospective students, alumni, and partners. We will ensure that the AMS identity incorporates the values of diversity, inclusion, and Montessori educational excellence. These goals will be achieved by creating and implementing a branding and messaging strategy that highlights our school's unique and distinguishing characteristics and values. Copy will be developed to be clear, concise, and consistent. Key positioning concepts will be refined. We will continue to work on identifying our true points of distinction and “headlines” that cut through the clutter in the market. Additionally, we will effectively position and regularly assess ourselves for each particular audience.

We will improve external community visibility and understanding of the Montessori philosophy. We will create education, visibility, and engagement activities to broaden community understanding of Montessori.

We acknowledge that our parents are under intense demands for their time and energy. We strive to improve and streamline our parent communication and enhance parent engagement with the school. We will also work to increase engagement amongst our parents by providing more opportunities for parents to interact with each other.

As a small nonprofit independent school with no endowment, AMS is dependent on tuition and charitable giving to cover necessary operating costs and financial aid. To ensure our vibrant future, and meet our revenue needs, it will be necessary to clarify our fundraising goals, strategies and tactics, as well as our philanthropic participation in the wider community. We will create a development plan that sets realistic and attainable revenue goals as well as creates a clear policy that differentiates between funding needs for school and the school's philanthropic activities for the community.

## **Enhancing Our Facility**

We are fortunate to be housed in a new building completed in 2013 and constructed with the child in mind. We are exceedingly grateful for our space and are compelled to address its ongoing needs, and anticipate future needs to ensure safe, balanced, and affordable environments for children, staff, and parents. Of particular focus are challenges to our walkways and parking arrangements. To attend to these issues, we will form a Facilities Task Force consisting of staff, board and community members to plan, prioritize, and oversee building and grounds issues for three different time horizons: immediate (2016-17), short-term (1-2 years), and long-term (3-5 years). We will evaluate emergency preparedness and create a comprehensive emergency plan. We will evaluate current walkways into the building and decide on the most effective way to create safe sidewalk/passage into the building during drop-off and pick-up times. We will also research our options and create a plan to improve parking.

We will consider best uses of existing internal spaces. We will conduct a cost/benefit analysis of creating an in-house maintenance and facility manager position. Additionally, we will review possible modifications to become a “greener” building.

Our current playgrounds are a point of distinction that should be maintained or enhanced. We will review and assess the current playground along with the needs of the children to determine what changes are needed, if any.

In thinking toward the future, our school is limited by the relatively small size of our campus. To understand the possibilities and limitations of future expansion, the Facilities Task Force shall evaluate the need for additional space in the future and assess the feasibility and financial backing for such growth.