



**CHILD CENTERED
LEARNING**



WISE BITS



**PARENT ASSOCIATION
OF VOLUNTEERS (PAV)**

MHFC Fall Newsletter



ECO ACTION TEAM



NATURE/ GARDENING



COMING UP.....



**FAMILY OUTING
IDEAS**

BUILDING INSPECTION

Some of our elementary students donned hardhats and visited the elementary building last week. The first words said upon entering the classroom, were: “This is **Ginormous!**”

Walking through the building, the students saw skilled workers finishing up electrical connections, doing window installations, priming walls, spreading stucco and laying bricks. They stopped at the drawing table and pointed out the rooms: “What? There is a shower??...”

Coming up this week is painting, HVAC installation and dehumidifying the building. After that floors can be installed, cabinetry and final clean-up last week of September. As the end gets closer, we'll issue more updates.



PVA

PARENT VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION



[Welcome back](#) to our new and returning families! We hope you and your children had a restful and fun summer break.

Every time we drive into the school campus, our children comment on the progress of the new Elementary School building. “It’s almost done!”, they blurt excitedly. In September, all students will have the opportunity to have their artwork (or handprint for younger ones), permanently displayed at our school as part of two new [“Legacy Walls”](#) being created. This artwork will be on ceramic tile and will adorn the walls of either Montessori House for Children, and/or Montessori House Elementary School. We have a tight deadline to meet before the mid-October Grand Opening, so don’t miss the opportunity to leave this memory of your child! Order forms will be due by Friday, September 9th.

The Legacy Walls would not be possible without our awesome volunteers. We are so ever grateful to those who stepped up and gave their time to help with the Legacy Wall fundraiser! This is the first of three [fundraisers](#) the PAV will endeavor this fall. In October, the 2nd Annual MEFI Campaign will begin, and in November, the 3rd Annual Book Fair will take place. Read your emails regularly to stay tuned!

In other news, please join us in congratulating our new Vice President Hanna Ottosson, and Secretary Amira Plasencia. We would like to acknowledge outgoing VP Maria Carolina Mainieri and thank her for her hard work and leadership in planning for the year. It is never too late to sign up in one of the various [PAV Committees](#). For more information, please contact Norma at norma@mhfcschool.com.

We can’t wait to re-connect with familiar faces and meet new ones! All are welcome and we encourage you to join us and participate in the following events:

September 8th, 8:30-9:30am	Parent Coffee Kick Off
September 10th, 10am	Exploration Park Meetup
September 13th, 5-6pm	Parents Association monthly meeting

For more information about the PAV, please contact the PAV Officers at pav@mhfcschool.com.

NATURE/GARDENING

We don't look at the Clouds!

By Angela P.

This Monday, the Outside Classroom reopened for another exciting school year of adventure and discovery. Usually I start the first week off with the tried and true work from the previous year so that I can focus on acclimating our new friends into the outdoor classroom. This year however I added one new piece of work - - "Cloud Work".

When doing " Cloud Work," the children observe clouds and then recreate them with cotton balls and construction paper. The first part of the work is observation of clouds. While giving the lesson, I asked the children to look at the clouds. To my amazement, not one child looked up. They all looked at me with confusion. I quickly realized that I had struck gold!



This is the kind of nature connection I wait for.... the unexpected, out of the norm activity that can be done at any age. The simple act of looking up to see the clouds transported us out of the school yard and into a whole new space. We looked for shapes and "pictures". We noticed how the sky was filled with many different cloud shapes simultaneously. We found the shapes on cloud "name cards" and learned their names. Then, and only then, the children began stretching their cotton balls into the different shapes which they saw.



It was one of those precious, innocent moments of childhood discovery that Montessori House for Children provides for our children. I am so blessed to have been the witness.

I guarantee, tomorrow we will have a blanket just for cloud watching!

CHILD-CENTERED LEARNING

By Barbara Nelson

Through recent study of child development, researchers and scientists have identified a number of key practices necessary for optimal student development and learning. These practices are coined “Best Practices” and they outline ways in which teaching, or learning ought to be experienced, in alignment with the student’s innate purpose for learning. These practices are found within child-centered classrooms which embrace learning that is experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, collaborative, social, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, psycholinguistic and challenging. The wonderful news is that all of these elements are incorporated into the Montessori practice of education – the first child-centered program!

To help parents recognize the value of a Montessori program, I would first like to acknowledge that there is a difference between theory and practice of child-centered educational programs. Most all learning programs are designed with the objective “to enhance a student’s learning and development”, which many assume equates to having a child-centered environment. However, this assumption has been proven incorrect. Through examination of typical classroom structures and practices, findings show that while the goal is centered on the child (outcome focused on student learning), practices in which to reach this goal are not; in fact, most educational environments are adult-centered, which in turn acts to undermine the goal of student centered learning. Therefore, there lies a general misunderstanding between theory and practice of child-centered classrooms. So what does a child-centered classroom mean? In simple terms, it is a classroom that has been purposely designed with the child at the center – every aspect of the classroom is focused on the child, fostering development of the student’s emotional, cognitive and physical self. How is this implemented? It is implemented through Best Practices – practice, not theory, is what defines a school program. Unfortunately, teacher-directed classrooms are more commonly created, and genuine, child-centered programs are often referred to as “alternative” methods of education. The first school to recognize the vital importance of a child-centered program was Montessori, founded in 1907. Reggio Emilia and Waldorf schools also follow a child-centered approach.

A child-centered classroom is recognized by the following practices: student initiated learning, active and inquiry based learning, freedom of movement, freedom of choice, greater blocks of uninterrupted work time, emphasis on the process of learning (over product), mastery through understanding and individually paced. Design of a child-centered classroom is founded on research; research that supports brain-based learning as well as physical, emotional and social stages of development. Learning environments that implement scientifically proven practices, designed with the sole intention of fostering whole-child's development, are child-centered programs.

One of the most recognizable qualities of a child-centered classroom is found in the emotional tone of the classroom. This may best be described through a student's feelings. How would a student feel within a child-centered classroom as compared to a teacher-centered classroom? The significant difference would be either one of "This is my classroom. I belong here!" or "This is my teachers classroom. How can I fit in here?" The student may either feel an overwhelming sense of belonging and ownership of their learning, or they will feel that they have entered a domain in which they will need to adapt, conform or comply in order to succeed. What sets this tone? The teacher sets the tone. For the teacher to create an environment in which the student feels his or her thoughts, feelings and opinions are valued requires flexibility and an open mind. Offering choices, encouraging student participation and following student interests, are signs of flexibility. An open mind requires a view in which the teacher recognizes the class as a whole, is a community of learners. When a teacher understands that the source of wisdom does not lie solely in the lesson plan, facts or information, but rather is found through interests of the students and their active participation in the process of learning, this sets the tone for students to feel a sense of ownership in their learning. Self-initiated learning helps to make the information meaningful, which in turn, increases understanding, mastery and instills a true sense of accomplishment. The underlying theme of child-centered classroom is to follow the interests of the student, in alignment with their level of development and ability.

The cognitive aspects of child-centered classrooms are guided by the principles of brain-based learning. Research proves that students learn best through active and hands-on participation. One way to achieve this is through inquiry based learning. The process for inquiry based learning follows this sequence: ask questions, explore by observing and investigating, analyze and describe findings, communicate and share by writing and discussing, and reflect on what has been learned, with the role of the teacher as a facilitator, guide and partner. The process of trial and error eventually results in discovery - a discovery recognized by the students as a personal victory. The overwhelming sense of accomplishment, obtained through the process, is a self-owned accomplishment and doesn't require recognition through a letter grade or stamp of approval. This

is the beauty of classrooms centered on cognition *through* the student, and not *from* the teacher, where process matters at least as much as the product.

The physical elements of a child-centered classroom would include freedom of movement, concrete materials (curriculum), thoughtful arrangement of furnishings (to place the student, not the teacher, at the center of learning), a flexible schedule (that allows for longer periods of concentration), and a design that fosters the student's independence. Physical movement is a fundamental component of child development - movement, emotion and learning work in unison with each other. Immobilizing students through assigned seating, confining desks, and long periods of sitting through teacher-directed instruction (passive learning), act to hamper learning and development. A child-centered classroom allows students the freedom to move, sit or stand comfortably, while also incorporating plenty of time outdoors for exploration and physical activity. The physical environment should also support a student's independence. Child sized furniture, well prepared materials and opportunities for students to care for themselves and the classroom (with limited dependence on the teacher) serves to foster independence and creates a sense of ownership. Finally, a flexible schedule, which offers longer periods of uninterrupted work time, provides opportunities for more authentic learning experiences. Routines are important but the schedule should not supersede the focused concentration of a student. Flexibility in the schedule sends an important message to the student – that their concentration is valuable and deeply respected.

Best Practices have been identified through years of research and specifically outline how to implement child-centered learning environments. These practices yield excellent results, not only with regard to academic achievement but even more importantly, to the social and emotional development young students. It is the most practical, most respectful, and most effective way to work with students in their education. The primary reason child-centered classrooms are so effective, is that they work with the grain of human development. Old school, teacher-centered practices often work against, not with, the student's innate physical, emotional and intellectual developmental stages. When this occurs, it is much more difficult to achieve personal success. In contrast, child-centered practices, bringing together what we now know about how children learn best, will yield the best results in the long run. It is essential for all learning programs to shift emphasis – from a focus on the outcome to a focus on the process (or practices), where the joy of learning is achieved.



WISE BITS

Excerpts from Pam Nelson's Blog 'Wise Bits' on subjects of interest to families with children of all ages

Turning Down the Heat on your Child's School Day

Ah! Back-to-School time takes many of us back to our youth with bittersweet memories of saying goodbye to summer and saying hello again to friends, teachers and school activities.

For this Blogger, these memories span 60 plus years and the changes in education that have occurred over that time remind me of the little frog in the stew pot story. This frog jumped into a pot of water that was starting to heat up over a campfire. At first the water felt fine and the little frog didn't notice the small but ever increasing temperature rise until it was too late!

So how has our educational stew pot changed over the years? Let's count some of the ways: the school year has been increased by 24 days, each day is longer, the arts (performing, visual, music) have been diminished or eliminated. Recess is gone, reduced or morphed from free play to structured time. Teaching to the Test is the boiling pot in our National Education System.

Cooling down this stew pot must be done at ground level, since it is the parents who are closest to and care the most about their children and their family life. Young students will be happier, less stressed and do better in their studies if they have a fully rounded experience of education that gives time and space to their creative, physical, social and emotional needs.

This school year, wherever your child goes for his education, be an involved parent and lobby to bring back some activities into the school day that have crept into 'extra-curricular' activities that infringe on dinner time, family time and bed time.

If you are lucky to already be in a school that includes arts, creative time and outdoor time with the math, science and other basic academics, you will find more time to do the things with your family that matter most. This is my wish for all families.

Stay Wise!



OUTING IDEAS



The Original Greek Festival

October 6-9, 2016

www.greekfestival.org



Texian Market Days

A Festival of Living History

October 22, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Light the fire and sound the cannons! The 33rd annual Texian Market Days festival is set for Saturday, October 22, 2016 at the George Ranch Historical Park in Richmond, Texas. Discover more than 150 years of Texas history with hands-on activities, battle re-enactments, music and entertainment, historic home tours, cowboys, food, artisan vendors and more!



LEGO Kids Fest

LEGO® KidsFest Texas stops at Houston's NRG Center from Oct. 21-23, 2016. The show brings all of the creative hands-on, minds-on fun of LEGO building and experiences together in this three-acre activity- and entertainment-packed family event. LEGO KidsFest is for children of all ages and builders of all skills and interests. www.legokidsfest.com

ECO ACTION TEAM

Greetings,

On behalf of the Eco Action Team we would like to welcome the MHFC community to a new and more greener semester.

MHFC has been an Eco School since 2015, which is part of the oldest and largest green schools program in the world. There are 62 countries and over 50,000 schools, who participate in Eco-Schools.

As an Eco school, we help enrich your children's lives by developing responsible environmental attitudes and commitments in the home and the wider community. The Eco Action Team consists of teachers, students, staff and parent volunteers. MHFC has already achieved a bronze medal, by working on waste and consumption in the school and actively recycling and composting in all the classrooms.

The goal of an Eco Schools is to guide our children to prioritize environmental needs of the school by focusing on one or many of the following eco school pathways: education and sustainability, energy, water, schoolyard habitats, consumption and waste, climate change, biodiversity, healthy schools, sustainable food, healthy living and transportation. Upcoming projects consist of contributing to the book fair, the gardening committee and actively engaging in the eco school pathways. We will have the exciting opportunity to work on one or many eco school pathways in the new year and systematically monitor our progress.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions, concerns or suggestions. It does take a village to raise children who are responsible, environmentally conscious and contribute to our planet.

Meeting dates and times can be found in the “coming up” section of the newsletter

Thank You,

Dipa Brahmhatt VMD, MPH, MS (Raaj Mohan's mum in Toddler 2)
dbrahmbh@yahoo.com, 832-477-8427

Resources:

- 1) If you are interested in being part of the Eco Action Team, please contact Ms. Norma Ortega: norma@mhfcschool.com
- 2) Eco Schools USA: <http://www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools-USA.aspx>

COMING UP.....

Sep 5	Labor Day / Full School Closure	
Sep 8	Parent Coffee followed by information on Positive Parenting	8:30 - 9:30 am
Sep 10	"Meet Up" in Exploration Park (PAV event)	10 am
Sep 13	PAV (Parent Association of Volunteers) Meeting (childcare provided for enrolled students)	5 - 6 pm
Sep 13	Introduction to the Positive Parenting Class	6:15 - 7 pm
Sep 17	Montessori in the Home (Toddler Parent Workshop)	9 - 11 am
Sep 21	Peace Day	10 am
Sep 24	Positive Parenting Class	8 am - noon
Sep 30	Early Release / Toddler (extended day) Community Early Release / EC and Elementary (extended day)	11:30 12:00
Sep 30	Eco-School Action Team Meeting (Pizza provided for Eco -Team Students)	12:00
Oct 10	Montessori Holiday / Teacher In Service (full day students only)	
Oct 11	PAV (Parent Association of Volunteers) Meeting (childcare provided for enrolled students)	5 - 6 pm
Oct 11	Positive Parenting Class	6 - 7 pm
Oct 13	Parent Coffee	8:30 - 9:30 am
Oct 21	Elementary Grand Opening (Tentative)	7 - 9 pm
Oct 28	Early Release / Toddler (extended day) Community Early Release / EC and Elementary (extended day)	11:30 12:00
Oct 28	Eco-School Action Team Meeting (Pizza provided for Eco -Team Students)	12:00
Nov 1	Positive Parenting Class	5 - 7 pm
Nov 4	All Stars Family dinner (PAV event)	4:30 - 7:30 pm
Nov 7-11	Book Fair	
Nov 8	PAV (Parent Association of Volunteers) Meeting (childcare provided for enrolled students)	5 - 6 pm
Nov 11	School Closed for Parent/Teacher Conferences	
Nov 18	Early Release / Toddler (extended day) Community Early Release / EC and Elementary (extended day)	11:30 12:00
Nov 21 - 23	Montessori Holiday, Full Day students only	
Nov 24-25	Full School Closure for Thanksgiving	
Nov 30	EC "Final Year" Informational Session	6:00 - 7:00 pm
Dec 8	Parent Coffee	8:30 - 9:30 am
Dec 10	MHFC Parent Coffee and Open House	9-10 am
Dec 13	PAV (Parent Association of Volunteers) Meeting (childcare provided for enrolled students)	5 - 6 pm
Dec 13	Positive Parenting Class	6 - 7 pm
Dec 19 - 30	Full School Closure for Winter Break	

***please note: classroom specific events can be found on MRX**

LOOKING BACK

