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INTRODUCTION

Periodically, it is important for the Board of Directors of St. Catherine's Montessori to take time from the day-to-day business of the school, look ahead to the future, and create a new strategic plan. On behalf of Head of School - Susan Tracy, Strategic Plan Chair - Alison Jefferies, and the St. Catherine’s Montessori Board of Directors, we sincerely thank you for the time, enthusiasm, honesty and energy our community gave the past six months to this strategic plan process – it was extraordinary to watch!

We are grateful to all of you who participated in five Appreciative Inquiry Sessions, two all-school sessions, and we are proud to say that 84% of the current families took time to complete the parent survey. Your insight, guidance and recommendations were knowledgeable and thoughtful and demonstrated everyone’s love for the school, faculty and students.

This strategic planning process has been very informative and helpful as it allowed the committee, faculty and staff, Board of Directors and our families to coalesce around shared values for St. Catherine’s Montessori and also allowed us to reaffirm 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.

The Board of Directors is honored and proud today to share the goals and objectives of the 2018-2023 St. Catherine’s Strategic Plan. We believe that the plan includes the excellent information gathered from our school sessions and survey, and with great assistance of our faculty and staff and the leadership of the Board and Strategic Plan Committee we were able to prioritize and develop goals and the implementation steps to ensure we reach each objective.

But the work does not stop here – in fact, it is only the beginning! Many of you will be approached to play important roles in committees and task forces as the school starts implementing our plan and hope the support and spirit many of you graciously gave to this process continues.

For many years, St. Catherine’s Montessori has strived to address pressing needs in the community and advance the school’s mission. Through this new strategic plan, you will build on the good work you have been doing and pledge to maintain the philosophy to bring wisdom to light!

Again, we are grateful for your continued input and support as this work progresses and grows!

Blessings to you and your family,
Sterling Associates
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

St. Catherine’s Montessori upholds the values of our shared Montessori and Catholic heritages. As an AMI school, we follow the curriculum and traditions established by Dr. Maria Montessori more than 100 years ago. More than simply a method of education, the Montessori approach fosters the development of the whole child—intellectually, physically, socially, morally and spiritually. As a Catholic community, St. Catherine’s additionally nurtures children’s spiritual development so that each student may experience the presence of God both individually and in community.

Our complementary missions are perhaps most simply summarized by our guiding motto, “Bringing Wisdom to Light.” Maria Montessori frequently described the inner wisdom inherent in all human beings and envisioned education as a spiritual mission to unleash each child’s inner potential. In The Secret of Childhood, she writes, “Our care of the child should be governed, not by the desire to make him learn things, but by the endeavor always to keep burning within him that light which is called intelligence.” Montessori believed that properly nurtured, each child’s wisdom radiates outward to create a more peaceful world.

Our motto also resonates with our Catholic vocation to nurture and reveal the Spirit of God within each child. Revealing one’s inner light is an aspect of service to God outlined in the Gospel of Matthew. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:14-16)

GOALS

Educational Goal: To adhere to the best practices of the Association Montessori International (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.
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 of Bishops Education Department (TCCBED), 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 10.4 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 300 students, ages 14 months to 17 years and is culturally, religiously, and economically diverse.

**Infant Community**
Children ages 14 months up to age 3 who have established independent walking may begin their Montessori experience in our Infant 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 three Lower Elementary (grades 1-3) classrooms and two Upper Elementary (grades 4-6) classrooms. 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. There are approximately 35 students at the AC level.

**High School (Grades 10-11)**
The High School has two full time Guides and two part time Guides. There are 7 students at the High School level. Next year St. Catherine’s will add 12th grade.
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.

2006-2016
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 as 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 is typically around 250 students. St. Catherine's celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016.

2016-Present
St. Catherine’s acquired land on the East side of downtown that the adolescents are using for an environmental land experience.

In August of 2017 four pioneering students stayed for 10th grade. Inaugurating St. Catherine’s High School. An additional grade will be added until the first class graduates in 2020.
Goal 1: Expand St. Catherine’s programs while maintaining a spirit of community and growing our standing as a leader in Montessori education.

1. Fully develop the third plane for students ages 12-18.
2. Develop curriculum for all levels to maximize opportunities at the Japhet Creek campus.
3. Sustain programs to focus on guide retention, succession and professional development.
4. Explore after-school programs and build strategies for the future.
5. Remain steadfast in our mission to the importance of sustainability and the students' role to be stewards of the global community.

Goal 2: Create a master plan for St. Catherine’s facilities that is driven by its programmatic needs.

1. Establish a Master Plan Committee.
2. Conduct a needs assessment.
3. Develop phases of the master plan that reflect the school’s priorities, a timetable and cost projections.

Goal 3: Develop strategies to improve timely, transparent and educational communications to the school community and beyond.

1. Develop a comprehensive, school-wide effective communication plan that will allow faculty, staff, parents, students and alumni to be fully informed and encourage engagement at every level of the school.
2. Conduct annual survey to entire school community to continue to collect and understand parent perspectives, needs and goals for the St. Catherine’s community.
3. Explore resource options for parent education, using technology among other tools.

Goal 4: Align Governance policies and processes with best practices of nonprofit boards.

1. Build robust and effective board committees by surveying parent talents.
2. Establish documentation outlining reasonable expectations and goals for leading committees and activities.
3. Develop a plan to build the Board so it is the right size, comprised of the right people, and is led by people with potential for long-term service.
4. Communicate effectively to the St. Catherine’s community about the purpose of the Board.
5. Develop a succession plan for the Board and Head of School.
6. Develop a self-evaluation process for the Board to be conducted annually.
7. Develop a self-evaluation process separate from the diocesan review for Head of School that is specific to St. Catherine's.

Goal 5: Secure St. Catherine’s future by expanding funding and establishing strong relationships with current parents, former parents, alumni and others outside our school community.

1. Expand Advancement Committee – set meeting schedule and outline clear purpose, goals and division of responsibilities.
2. Develop an advancement plan for all areas (major gifts, planned giving)
3. Develop a five-year financial plan.
4. Review Parent Service Organization (PSO) goals and volunteer opportunities.
5. Create an Alumni Committee.
6. Develop strategy to fund an endowment.
7. Develop a capital campaign to fund the implementation of the master plan.