

The

montessori messenger

Bloomington Montessori School: where young minds grow



Bloomington Montessori School
1835 S. Highland Avenue
Bloomington IN 47401

Expansion 2012 Special Edition

What's Inside

- ◆ how students will be divided between classrooms
- ◆ expansion staff changes, including an introduction to new 6-9 Assistant Teacher Alex Cookman
- ◆ the half day lunch program
- ◆ contingency plans if construction does not wrap up by the start of school

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Still growing, after all these years

history, photos & memories courtesy of Eric & Linda Mjolsnes, Guy & Connie Loftman, and Eve Cusack

1969

BMS forms as a one-room preschool with 50 students, in a downtown storefront formerly occupied by Le Magic Mirror beauty salon.

1977

BMS builds the very first building on College Mall Road south of Covenanter, currently Steele Chiropractic Center. Flies from the adjacent cow pasture pester children on the playground.



1982

The 6-9 program launches at St. Thomas Lutheran Church at 3rd and Smith Road. A fire inspection delays opening, so students are invited to use a family's home for the first six weeks of school, where they enjoy a limestone fireplace in the classroom-cum-family room, and grapevines for swinging in the woods just outside.



1989

The Highland building expands, funded largely by multi-year pledges from families. The architect gives BMS a two-for-one discount, as the design could also be used for BDLC.

1983

Still relatively unknown Bill Cook agrees to sell BMS land on Highland Avenue and finance the design and building of a four-classroom school by experienced school architect, Ken Wolverton, with the caveat that the facility be designed so that it can be broken down into condominiums if the Association goes bust. An alternating pattern of circles and rectangles are mounted above the entryway, a design rooted in both the Montessori metal insets and in the logo of the American Montessori Society.



2012: BMS is expanding again! Designed by Architect Christine Matheu, the nearly 6,000 square foot 6-9 wing to the north of the main Highland building, is being built by Strauser Construction. The expansion allows space in the main building for a new All-Day preschool and a larger 9-12 classroom. BMS will, over the next several years, grow from approximately 160 students to 220, and **this time, you're part of the history.**

On April 23rd, a community meeting was held to address questions parents might have about the changes to the 6-9 program, as well as other changes that will occur with the expansion, including the addition of a new All-Day preschool class. We have provided many of those questions and answers here so the entire community can stay informed.

→ How will the 6-9 program be different due to the expansion?

Jacob: The 6-9 class will actually work just about the same as it does now with some notable exceptions. It will remain one program but will move from a single room divided in half, to two separate homerooms. Additionally, teachers will no longer swap sides of the room halfway through the year. Instead, they will remain with the same group of children for three years. Sign-in teachers within the homeroom will switch off every two weeks as they do now. All in all, this new arrangement will put us in line with the traditional design of a pure Montessori 6-9 classroom.

The schedule will remain the same with the morning being focused on academics and the afternoon focused on recess, lunch, music and Spanish. As such, students will spend a majority of the morning in their homerooms (with the possible exception of Language Circle times), while the afternoons will be spent mixing with all the 6-9 students for recess and lunch, and with all the other children in a given grade level for music and Spanish. Students will return to their homerooms for the end of the day for silent reading and dismissal.

→ How will students be divided among classrooms?

Amy: Our goal in placing children in the classrooms is really all about creating the optimal learning environment. We consider each child individually and make great efforts to ensure that each student is placed in the best possible circumstances for him or her to thrive. As a general rule, unless requested by the parents, siblings will be placed in the same homeroom, to provide for continuity in the relationship between families and teachers.

Beyond those generalities, we typically begin to make an initial plan for classroom layout the day after school ends so our minds are fresh and we can consider all the appropriate information. That information includes our own insights and observations from incoming children's class visits, with input from their preschool teachers as to needs and fit. Our first step is to pair the incoming student with a third grader (sometimes second grader) who will serve as a "buddy" to guide, encourage and show the new student the ropes. Once that pairing has been made, we seek to create balanced sign-in groups by age, gender, and each student's level of independence so that all four teachers have similarly balanced groups. Second graders that are not assigned to be buddies will be seat partners with other second graders. These pairings are also seen as "buddies," and provide support and friendship for second graders. Moreover, students may share a four desk grouping with others not in their grade level. Thus, you may have a first grader, third grader and two second graders seated together. Jacob and I feel confident using this system to place children well.

Because families often make changes over the summer that are likely to affect our planning, we will make you aware of your child's classroom just prior to the Open House in August.

→ How will you ensure the classrooms move at a similar pace?

Amy: Jacob and Jessica will teach in the Walnut Room, and Alex Cookman (replacing Shaina) and I will teach in the Maple Room. (See the staffing question below for more information about Alex.) While the classrooms will be separate, the curriculum and spaces will be equivalent. Jacob and I have taught together for 10 years and are completely confident in our abilities to create equivalent, albeit not identical, experiences in the classroom. In fact, I think you'll find us both to be equally good teachers. We will move at the same pace, follow the same curriculum and subjects of study, and even put on plays from the same continent. Additionally, we will continue to meet daily as a team of teachers, just as we do now, to make sure we're all on the same page and up to date on student needs.

→ ***How do we see this new classroom set up benefitting the students?***

Jessica: I see this new set up as the best of both worlds. Students will have a quieter and more peaceful academic setting with the smaller group. At the same time, they will still have plenty of time together for the necessary social development in the afternoon.

The new arrangement will allow for student interest to drive project choices without being hampered by large group management concerns. Teachers, too, will be free to create projects that may not have been possible in a larger group setting.

→ ***Will my child interact with teachers outside their homeroom?***

Amy: Every child will see all four teachers every day, especially during recess and lunch. More importantly, every teacher will be looking out for the well-being of each child in the 6-9 program.

Beyond this, the most likely opportunity for a child to interact with a teacher outside the homeroom is through twice-a-week Language Circles. Language Circles, which are our framework for the study of literature, reading, and writing, will be assigned by ability level, drawing from both classrooms. Students may have any one of the four teachers as their Language Circle teacher for the year, and will have at least two different Language Circle teachers over the three years in the classroom. The work of these groups is often quite intensive, giving teachers an opportunity to have close relationships with each of the students in the circle. Of course, you may always seek out any of the 6-9 teachers as needed.

Jacob: As teachers, we feel very strongly that we know every child in the school, not because we have to, but because we want to. All four of us will be well-acquainted with each child, and will be involved in his or her daily academic and social life.

→ ***How many students will be in each 6-9 classroom and what will the teacher/student ratio be?***

Amy: Our fall enrollment is currently 21 first graders, 18 second graders, and 13 third graders. This number may shift over the summer, but at the present total of 52 students, 26 will be assigned to each class. This will provide a 13 to 1 ratio with 2 teachers in each classroom. BMS bylaws ensure that ratios must remain between 12:1 and 14:1. Beyond 14 to 1 will require the hiring of an additional staff person. In that case, one classroom could temporarily become the larger one to avoid having to hire an additional staff member for each room. Ultimately, each class will be capped at 36 students and three full-time teachers.

→ ***What staffing changes can we expect in the 6-9 program next fall?***

Amy: We are delighted to announce that we have hired a new 6-9 assistant who will be teaching with me. Alex Cookman is a graduate of BMS, BHSS, and Hampshire College. He taught for three years in a community school/Univ. of Penn. partnership program for grades K-6. He also has worked in internet publishing and blogging, and tutoring adult learners. He plays piano, bass and guitar, gardens, fosters dogs, and rides and repairs bikes. We are thrilled to welcome him to our teaching team.

If our enrollment numbers exceed the 14 to 1 maximum student to teacher ratio, we will hire an additional staff person.

→ ***When will my child get to be with the students in the other 6-9 classes?***

Jacob: Students will join together from both classes for recess and lunch, and then will be grouped by grade for Spanish and music. They will also join students from the other class for their language circles. The library in the 6-9 wing will be open to both classrooms and is another location to mix with the students from the other classroom.

→ **Will the 6-9 students be eating in the main building and if so, how will that be handled on rainy days?**

Amy: The 6-9 class will eat in the main building after returning from recess, washing hands, and collecting any bag lunches. On the rare occasion that it is pouring rain at lunch time, the Spanish/music room will have a door which will lead onto the covered walkway and through a door in the current 9-12 classroom. Students will quickly move through the all-day classroom to the common area. Newly placed hooks in the observation rooms will serve as coat racks.

→ **How will you ensure that the 6-9 students and families feel connected to the main building and community?**

Tavy: The 6-9 students are likely to feel very connected to the main building, as they will eat lunch in the commons area daily, will hold their class plays in the space, may host their bake sale in this space, and will continue their activities that involve other classrooms (e.g. interviewing other students and teachers for 6-9 newspaper articles). And, due to the fact that they have been part of a multi-age classroom, they will continue to have friendships with many of the children who remain in or return to the main building.

As for the parents, there will remain a single office in the main building so all administrative issues will be handled there which will help to facilitate a connection to the main building.

The Board is placing an emphasis on this for next year and welcomes ideas for strengthening our BMS community. We will continue and build on the great BMS community events such as the Fall Festival, class picnics, ice skating and roller skating events, and end-of-year picnic. But, as always, connections will be deepest if we each take responsibility for making them happen on a regular basis. Even the small "hellos" and taking time to chat with others you might not know will go a long way in fostering community.

→ **How do you see changes in the 6-9 program affecting the 9-12 program?**

Deirdre: Immediately, it will provide a more appropriately sized classroom for the 9-12 students, as they will be moving into the larger space of the current 6-9 class. Additionally, increased numbers in the 6-9 program will lead to a larger 9-12 program, increasing peer groups which are so important at that stage. The space is organized in a way that will allow dedicated space for specific curriculum areas and pull-out spaces for small and large group lessons. A broader school community will provide 9-12 students with greater leadership opportunities and all grades with more opportunities for student to student mentoring, teaching, and learning.

How will large events be handled with no additional large space?

→ **Tavy:** Most of our larger, school-wide events such as the Fall Festival, annual ice skating and roller skating outings, and end-of-year picnic, have always occurred off-site. However, there will be occasions in which a larger indoor space is needed, such as when the two 6-9 classes put on plays as part of one program on the same evening. To address this need, we are in discussions with the YMCA about the possible use of their new gymnasiums facility (currently under construction). We have let them know we would be very interested in using their facility for rainy day recesses, plays, and more. We will let you know what emerges from those discussions.



➔ ***With the addition of a new All-Day class room will there be any changes to the pre-school program?***

April: The current Half-Day and All-Day classrooms will operate the same as we do now. Mrs. Cusack and I will remain head teachers in our same classrooms, and the enrollment and student to teacher ratio in each room will remain the same. The new All-Day classroom will use the space that is currently the 9-12 room. Since we will need to order new furniture and materials to accommodate the new All-Day classroom, we are working on a plan to distribute the new and current materials throughout the three preschool rooms. The half-day preschool lunch program will still be offered - please see below for more information.

➔ ***How will students be divided among the two all-day preschool classes?***

April: We will make every attempt to balance the new classroom according to gender and age. There will be a maximum of eleven children to one teacher. The total will not exceed thirty-one, although a smaller number is more likely for the first year. This is consistent with the existing classrooms and our preschool program historically.

Children established in the current All-Day will remain in that classroom. Further, unless parents request otherwise, younger siblings will be placed in the same classroom as their elder siblings were in order that teachers, students and parents maintain those close relationships so integral to Montessori education.

➔ ***What new preschool teacher positions will be added with the expansion?***

April: We are currently searching for a lead teacher for the new all-day classroom. There will be a second teacher for up to 21 children and a third for up to 31. These positions may be split into two part time jobs.

➔ ***What will the half-day preschool lunch program look like after the expansion?***

Eve: We are currently planning to accommodate 20 students in the half-day lunch program during the 2012-13 school year and beyond. It is possible that we will have a few more spots in the coming school year only, depending on enrollment numbers for the new all-day classroom. The students will continue to be served Emily's remarkable hot lunches, but we will likely be eating in the current library. The AM and PM half-time assistants will supervise lunch.

➔ ***How will you ensure that the main building continues to appear fresh and appealing with the new 6-9 wing next door?***

April: Preparation of the environment is a critical component of Montessori teacher training and ongoing Montessori teacher responsibilities. Each classroom is continually updated and arranged to attract the child to the beauty of the materials and provide a sense of calm and order in the environment.

Deirdre: The current 9-12 enjoyed many physical changes last year that already gave the classroom a "new" feeling. Prior to moving into our new space, it will be painted using the color palette being used in the 6-9 wing. The current 5th graders, who will be next year's 6th grade class (and school) leaders, are working with teachers to envision the new space: from space allocation, to furniture arrangement, to color of specific walls.

Tavy: Moreover, to emphasize that this is *one* school, some of the colors from the color palette being introduced into the 6-9 wing will be brought into our main building. For example, there will be an accent wall in the common area, the new arts/break out space (currently the 9-12 library) will be painted, and as Deirdre mentions, several of the teachers have decided to incorporate accent colors into areas of their classrooms as well.

➔ **What will the outdoor space outside the new all-day classroom look like?**

April: We have observed many Montessori classrooms in many states and have seen many beautiful and creative uses of outdoors spaces. The concrete patio would make a lovely outdoor classroom for practical life work. There is a grassy area that could be a gardening or nature-scape area or both. We will happily support and collaborate with the new all-day teacher in developing a space that complements the playground facilities already in place. In addition, Eve and I have discussed many possible scenarios for sharing the current pre-school playground, we are confident we can work out a schedule that suits everyone's needs and allows for play and new friendships among the classes.

➔ **What will happen to the side yard?**

Tavy: In the fall, we foresee the side yard to the north of the 6-9 wing serving the same purposes as our former side yard. It will be used at the beginning of the school year for 6-9's additional morning recess, for occasional outdoor breaks, as a space for outdoor curricular activities, and for spontaneous after-school play. The picnic bench will be moved to a patio slab on the north of the 6-9 wing, so seating will continue to be available.

In addition, this summer we will begin to clean up the BMS woods adjacent to the side yard at the east end, which are currently unused. We hope this will become a new outdoor environment with a walking trail for BMS students and teachers to enjoy, and potentially offer new learning opportunities.

➔ **How will summer camps be affected by the construction?**

Jacob: There will not be any significant changes to summer camps except for the fact that the side yard will not be available for recess. As always, the lower playground will be used.

➔ **Will there be changes to the parking lot?**

Tavy: We will be increasing our parking to the maximum number of spaces allotted by the City for a school our size and population. While we are adding a new All-Day program, the drop-off and pick-up times for those children are staggered such that a problem with increased traffic is not foreseen. Further, the population of the 6-9 is not increasing significantly, though two classes will be created from the one class (48 to 52 students).



We are proposing that approximately five spaces be designated 5 minute pickup/drop off parking. These spaces would be for individuals who know they will be running in to the school and be only a few minutes. For those who wish, for example, to stay for after school play or meetings with teachers, we would encourage them to not park in those spaces. Parking will be revisited if issues arise, and as 6-9 reaches full capacity.

Changes to the parking lot also include more accessible ADA parking with two clearly identified handicapped spaces and a ramp to the sidewalk.

➔ ***What is the plan for the start of the school year, should construction not be done?***

Tavy: First, we can guarantee that school will be held for all registered students. There will be no late start to the school year for 6-9 if there were a delay in opening the classrooms in the 6-9 wing. We have several wonderful alternatives that we are working on including learning opportunities at Monroe County History Museum, Glenn Black Laboratory, IU Art Museum, Wonderlab, Leonard Springs, and WTIU.

We will not firm up any plans yet however, as we are on schedule with construction, and at this point framing is expected to occur by the first week of June. Once that is done and the building roofed, work will concentrate on interiors and there is not a concern about weather delays (though there could be other reasons for a delay). We will look at the progress on the expansion in another month, and reassess at that time about continuing to firm up plans.

➔ ***How will parents get to see the finished product of the expansion and changes to the main building?***

Tavy: We are planning to have an all-school Open House and Social to celebrate our community the first week of classes. All classrooms will be open for visitation, and we will follow this with a community gathering outside.

Stay tuned for more details through email and our expansion blog:
<http://bmexpansion2012.wordpress.com/>

Check out what is happening with the expansion on our new BLOG!

You can watch the progress unfold this month and over the summer. Just click on the link provided on the main page of school's website:

<http://montessori.k12.in.us/> or at
<http://bmexpansion2012.wordpress.com/>

Get BMS Expansion Blog updates in your inbox. Just enter your email address in the top right corner of the blog home page



BMS will be in the Herald Times

Keep a lookout in the Herald Times for an upcoming article about our expansion. Expansion Chair, Tavy Aherne and 6-9 Head Teacher, Amy Lifton were interviewed this week and were able to share how proud they are that Montessori education is strong in our community. The reporter expressed interest in our school and a desire to follow the story of the expansion through the summer. We hope to see more coverage of BMS in the Herald Times.

How You Can Get Involved

Not only are we building new classrooms and a shared music and language room, but we also have plans for renewing our current classrooms and the rest of our main building! Are you handy with a paintbrush? Is carpentry something you enjoy? How about gardening or basic yard work? Do you have skills, special expertise or knowledge that you would like to share? Please let us know!

We will be planning one or more Summer Spruce-Ups, asking volunteers to help our BMS teachers with refreshing their indoor and outdoor classroom spaces, and with other needed tasks. We hope these will be fun days where the whole family can get involved, be productive and socialize at the same time! Our teachers will be letting us know what help they need, and when. So watch for more info!

Further, before the school year begins, our teachers will be needing help moving into their new spaces. This will include not just the move into the expanded areas for 6-9, but 9-12 will be moving into a much needed larger classroom (the current 6-9), and our new All-Day class will be moving into the current 9-12 classroom. We will also be creating an art room/break out projects room in what is currently the 9-12's detached library space. This room will also serve as a new Half-Day lunch area, with great student artworks on display! We will also be working on improving our outside spaces, especially for our new All-Day class and the BMS woods.

Some of the tasks at hand (with more to come):

- Create a walking trail in the 'woods' adjacent to the 6-9 wing

- Paint library shelves

- Hang peg boards in main building observation rooms for coat hanging

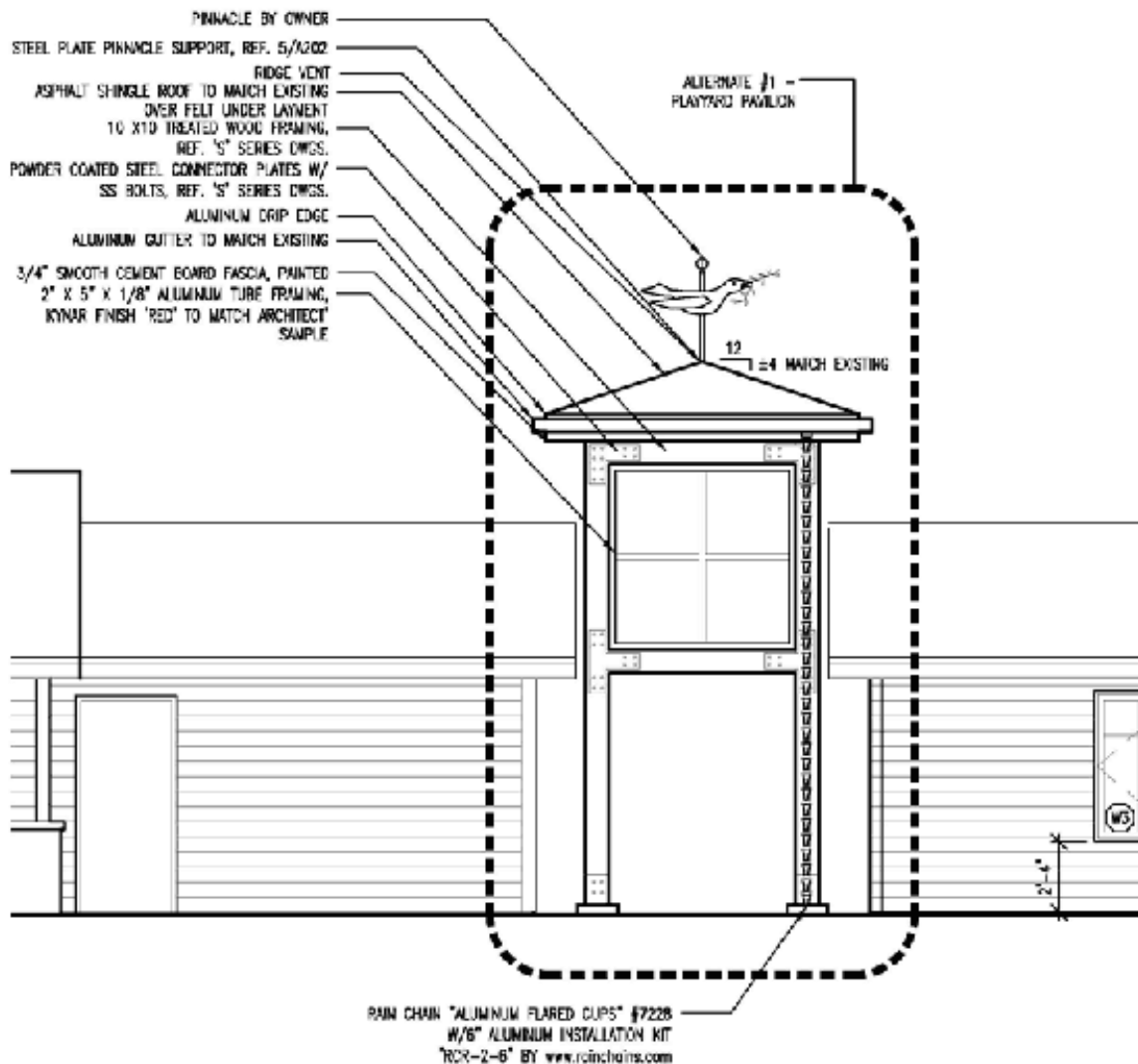
- Build a pass-through counter for new Half-Day lunch area

- Form small metal grates to block the 9-12 pet birds from the ceiling vents

- Move boxes and furniture!

We will send more information during the summer. If you have a willingness to contribute and would like to get connected before then, please feel free to express your interests to Tavy Aherne (Expansion Chair) at

taherne@indiana.edu.



NEW PEACE PAVILION WITH PEACE DOVE FINIAL BETWEEN THE 6-9 WING AND THE MAIN BUILDING

Have more questions?

If you have ideas, questions or concerns about the expansion, or the school in general, please share your ideas!

There will be a **QUESTION JAR** set up in the school entrance for you to jot down your idea or question – small or large. A member of the Expansion Committee will check the jar daily and get back to you as soon as they can.

Also feel free to email your ideas to Tavy at taherne@indiana.edu or speak to the teachers.

This issue of the newsletter was a collaborative effort, with contributions by: Tavy Aherne, Jacob Bailey, Sara Beggs, Eve Cusack, Jessica Davis, Tara Green, Amy Lifton, Eric Mjolsnes, Deirdre Sheets, Susan Yeley and April Waxler