

# BHMS 2015 Strategic Plan

## Introduction

Nearly 50 years ago, an idealistic group of parents motivated by the teachings of Maria Montessori began a visionary experiment. They founded a school dedicated to placing a child's natural curiosity and love of learning at the center of the classroom. This humble school would go on to become a robust institution in the heart of a New York borough enjoying a remarkable renaissance. It would become a shining example of a self-sustaining and progressive institution committed to diversity and academic excellence.

Half a century later, Brooklyn Heights Montessori School maintains its core principles while continuing to grow, boasting attendance of over 250 students ranging from preschool through 8th grade. Meanwhile, the Montessori pedagogy is increasingly recognized as a model of innovative education in the 21st century.

A thriving school depends on an engaged community and ongoing commitment to self-reflection and planning for the future. The Strategic Plan is a crucial element of that commitment.

In late 2013, the BHMS Board of Trustees approved the formation of a Strategic Planning Task Force comprised of trustee, faculty, staff, and parent volunteers. Over the last year, the Task Force developed and implemented a deeply community-driven process that culminated in this document, the 2015 BHMS Strategic Plan.

After many meetings and discussions with BHMS stakeholders, three areas of focus emerged as goals for BHMS over the next five years:

- Evaluate and develop program excellence and support students, teachers, and families.
- Ensure that BHMS maintains financial sustainability for its families, employees, and other stakeholders, while maximizing its resources to support its programmatic goals.
- Raise the profile of BHMS and strengthen the school-parent partnership.

The Task Force formed subcommittees - made up of administrators, faculty, trustees and parents – for each area of focus. These subcommittees met throughout the fall of 2014 to articulate strategies for each area. In February 2015, the Board of Trustees adopted the following Strategic Plan for 2015–2020.

## **Developing Excellence**

Our foremost aim is to foster an environment in which children learn to love learning, aim high to reach their potential, and become caring members of their communities. To achieve this goal, we need to continually strive to maintain and improve the quality of the education our students receive. A strong academic program, an outstanding faculty, and a diversity of perspectives and experiences nurtured in the classroom are all vital elements of program excellence. We also recognize that our graduates enter a variety of educational environments, and so we must take a close look at how we evaluate, assess, and prepare our students, without straying from the basic tenets that lie at the core of our school's mission.

**GOAL: Evaluate and further develop program excellence and support students, teachers, and families.**

- I. Engage with the challenge of evaluating a Montessori education in a metric-driven world.**
  - A. Using a robust and transparent process, evaluate program effectiveness and student learning by examining evidence of learning, including Montessori observation, assessments, and testing.
  - B. Assess the effectiveness of our mission for diversity.
  - C. Continue work to evaluate and optimize the school schedule.
  - D. Study the successes of our graduates as they transition into high school.
  
- II. Assess, further develop, and clearly articulate benchmarks for all areas of the program, using the Montessori language of “introduce, practice, and mastery.”**
  - **for each program (PS, LE, UE, MS)**
  - **for each year**
  - **for each individual child**
  - A. Mining the School's Mission and Montessori philosophy and principles, including existing curriculum documents, establish a clear set of benchmarks, uniform in nature and sequential in complexity. This process will include all areas of the program — from math, science, language arts, and the arts, to our multicultural curriculum in support of equity and social justice.
  - B. Ensure that all benchmarks and learning goals are embedded programmatically at each level, and that programs are aligned to support successful transitions and optimal learning for students who are ready for more challenging work in the final year of a cycle.

- C. Help families to understand the educational value of transitions between programs in the context of Montessori education and the planes of development. Emphasize the value to students of their learning to persist in the face of challenge, and learning to challenge themselves and teach others when they have mastered a set of skills.
- D. Work with the Director of Communications to communicate our benchmarks to families in a clear and concise manner.

**III. Add to the breadth and depth of our staffing, program offerings, and program space in ways that enhance our Montessori mission, the quality of student learning, and the diversity of our community.**

- A. Explore learning experiences that will further enrich our existing program, such as new approaches to community service, social justice, and Montessori-based agricultural programs.
- B. Building on the successes of our Montessori-based math and science curriculum, consider additional and appropriate ways to enhance science, engineering, and math-based learning.
- C. Continue to provide leadership opportunities for students using the multi-age cohort as a framework.
- D. Enhance our ability to teach a multicultural curriculum within a diverse community.
- E. Consider completing the planned rooftop play space designed specifically for Middle Schoolers and update the Lower School rooftop as part of Phase II renovation plans.

**IV. Cultivate an excellent, diverse, and Montessori-trained faculty.**

- A. Recruit, retain, and support the best teachers, staff, and administration.
- B. Continue the implementation of a robust evaluation system, strongly linked to professional development, for faculty, administration, and staff.
- C. Help our faculty to receive excellent quality Montessori teacher training.
- D. Examine the classroom staffing model, as well as job roles and responsibilities, to ensure that teachers' and administrators' time is used most effectively, and that adequate time is allocated in their daily schedules.
- E. Support ongoing professional development in educational technology.
- F. Continue and enhance diversity work to support our students, staff, and families.
- G. Build in time for programs to work together, separate from all-staff meetings, to foster cross-program development and communications.
- H. Assess the feasibility of becoming a base for Montessori teacher training and parent education. Research what we need to do to use our campus

as a Montessori training facility or a New York City satellite site for a program already in existence.

## **Sustainable Resources**

Program excellence can only be achieved within a financially sound institution. Therefore, it is essential that we maintain financial sustainability for the families, staff members, and other important stakeholders in our community. A strong financial position for the school allows us to make aggressive and beneficial decisions in order to improve program excellence, attract and retain superior faculty and staff, and enhance socio-economic diversity in our school community, while maintaining institutional stability. Through a variety of methods, we aim to strengthen the financial position of the school and relieve cost burdens that are too often addressed unsustainably by raising tuition.

**Goal: Ensure that BHMS maintains financial sustainability for its families, employees, and other stakeholders, while maximizing its resources to support its programmatic goals.**

- I. Promote enrollment growth and enhance retention in order to optimize the number of students in all grade levels.**
  - A. Critically examine our tuition structure and its effect on enrollment and retention in the context of changing Brooklyn demographics.
  - B. Consider expanding or reconfiguring the preschool to provide a larger base of students who may continue into the upper grades.
  - C. Review and study our existing program structure to ensure that it maximizes our programmatic and revenue goals, and enhances enrollment, retention, and use of BHMS facilities.
  - D. Evaluate the effectiveness of our current student recruitment strategies.
  
- II. Broaden and enhance our financial base through creative approaches to securing alternative, non-tuition revenue sources.**
  - A. Work to align our fundraising with comparable schools by expanding and engaging our donor base and investigating and enacting the cultural shift necessary to encourage broader and greater giving.
  - B. Explore and adopt new revenue-generating uses of our facilities and classrooms, accompanied by transparency in the purpose and use of the space. Foster an awareness of and respect for the prepared classroom environment.
  - C. Investigate all variables, including facility enhancements and/or partnerships with other entities with complementary facilities, that would

support program goals and increased enrollment and revenue from school, camp, and non-tuition-based activities.

- D. Investigate the financial benefits and risks of becoming a Montessori training center.

**III. Continue to attract and retain talented, trained staff, faculty, and administrators by offering competitive compensation packages.**

- A. Secure the financial resources to provide appropriate and competitive compensation for our staff as compared to our peer schools.
- B. Investigate the pedagogical and reputational benefits of becoming a Montessori training center.
- C. Develop a staffing model that is integrated into the annual and rolling five year planning cycle to identify unmet needs.
- D. Ensure appropriate administrative support staff.

**IV. Enhance the socio-economic diversity of our school community, reflecting the demographics of our community.**

- A. Study the current socio-economic demographics of the school and the community.
- B. Study and assess the financial aid programs of our peer schools.
- C. Develop a financial aid mission statement reflecting the school's goals.

**V. Improve our ability to make informed mid- and long-term decisions regarding how pursuit of our programmatic and institutional goals affects our financial sustainability/model.**

## **Communications**

To strengthen the position of the school, we also need to share the rich learning process that goes on in our classrooms. Our goal is to update the methods and means by which the school communicates with its current community of families, as well as prospective families and peer institutions. To enhance parents' engagement with and commitment to the school we need to ensure that they understand the Montessori philosophy and pedagogy, are well-informed about the specifics of their children's learning process at BHMS, and find the school responsive to their concerns.

Furthermore, within a highly competitive private and public school environment, BHMS cannot afford to remain a "best kept secret" among independent schools in our part of New York City. As more people recognize the benefits of a Montessori education, BHMS can and must raise its profile as the premier preschool through 8th grade Montessori school in the country.

### **Internal Communications**

#### **Goal: Strengthen the School-Parent Partnership**

##### **I. Educate the parent community about the BHMS journey from the Twos through Middle School, addressing program specifics and parent expectations.**

- A. Ensure the curriculum guide best reflects the philosophy, materials and resources, academic benchmarks, experiences, and opportunities inherent in a BHMS education.
- B. Create a Parent Guide Book (or Golden Document) that will, in a concise and easily digestible manner, describe the Montessori journey, year by year, highlighting developmental milestones and explaining how the pedagogy supports and reflects the child's development.
- C. Create an annual Program-specific timeline for all regularly scheduled parent-teacher interactions that defines and differentiates the purpose of each event, outlines how they build upon one another, and presents opportunities for parental involvement.
- D. Offer speakers, workshops, and other programming including but not limited to a focus on the school's mission for diversity.

##### **II. Enhance direct communication from all BHMS constituencies to the parent community.**

- A. Streamline and integrate, across multiple platforms, all communication from the school to the BHMS parent community, and support the appropriate training of staff in standards of practice.
- B. Periodically review communication platforms utilized within the school with a focus on the purpose and effectiveness of each in reaching the parent community.
- C. Promote and feature the academic and creative work of the BHMS student body as a means to consistently engage the parent body in the unique value proposition that the school offers.

## **External Communications/Marketing**

### **Goal: Raise the Profile of Brooklyn Heights Montessori School**

- I. Connect to a broader audience through consistent and clear expression of the thought leadership and inspiration that lies at the core of the school's mission.**
  - A. Assess BHMS material and delivery with the goal of bringing continuity and confidence to conversations, presentations, and events.
  - B. Engage a broader audience by calibrating curriculum and conversations around local and world events. Invite the external community to be a part of the dialogue and share in the social responsibility efforts of the school.
  - C. Promote Montessori understanding and education through educational events, talks, book readings, speaker series, and shared event sponsorship with other innovative organizations.
  
- II. Evolve and improve digital presence, as well as marketing and PR efforts.**
  - A. Revise site architecture for clearer navigation targeting two unique audiences: prospective and current families.
  - B. Improve interface design in order to better promote and highlight the richness of the preschool – 8th grade education, the character of our community, the quality work of our students, and the 50 years of experience in Montessori education that BHMS has established.
  - C. Make the BHMS website a go-to place for learning about Montessori pedagogy.
  - D. Enhance the two-way communication throughout the community via social media applications and platforms.

- E. Consider costs and benefits of changing school name.
- F. Assess the viability of retaining a professional review of the BHMS brand, PR, and marketing strategies.

**III. Enhance existing partnerships with other organizations and establish new relationships with both local and nationally recognized institutions to create dialogue and capture attention.**

- A. Leverage relationships with national and international Montessori affiliations.
- B. Develop relationships with organizations engaged in the dialogue on education, colleges and universities, and peer schools.

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**BHMS Mission Statement**

Guided by the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, Brooklyn Heights Montessori School is a diverse community committed to educational excellence, serving students in preschool through grade 8. At our center is respect for the individual child's development and potential.

Our carefully designed environment encourages the student's natural curiosity. We inspire a love of independent learning and foster critical thinking by engaging students in a challenging and meaningful curriculum.

By encouraging personal responsibility, leadership, and respect for self and others, we teach children to be thoughtful and confident citizens of the School and the world.