



# Little Star Montessori

Newsletter

November 2009

## General Updates

### From Our Director

*As you can imagine, I returned from our trip to Seattle with an over-stimulated and overwhelmed mind. Anna, Baylie, Keri and I spent three days visiting 6 schools in the Seattle/Bainbridge Island area. The purpose of our trip was to observe teachers in their classrooms, interview faculty and administrators, tour school grounds, and return to Little Star with new ideas and fresh enthusiasm. We spent our time between and after school visits processing and dissecting our observations and experiences. After we returned to the Valley and had time to put our thoughts in order, we reconvened to devise a presentation of our trip, including a proposal on how we could incorporate some ideas into our own classrooms and school-wide systems.*

*We returned to Little Star with fresh perspectives, invigorated, excited to immediately implement some our ideas. We broke our thoughts into 4 categories:*

- 1. School-Wide Organization*
- 2. Administrative Topics*
- 3. Staff Training*
- 4. Drop-Off/Pick-Up*

*At the end of our presentation, our staff discussed each of these categories, and made several key decisions.*

### **School-Wide Organization**

*Overall, Little Star is well organized and stimulating for our children. However, we continually strive to find a balance between maintaining captivating classrooms without accumulating too much STUFF. Our goal has been and continues to be to hold Little Star to the standards of a high quality Montessori school. One component of that is ensuring that our materials spark an interest in learning in the children, yet don't evoke aggression or encourage cliques within the classrooms. Therefore, we have decided that – moving forward – our materials should be Montessori-focused, and not general play toys. We will slowly sift through our materials to determine how to best furnish each space. In addition, we have committed to organizing our storage spaces, categorizing our bins, and ensuring that we are not purchasing items that we already have.*

### **Administrative Topics**

*I was surprised by several facts:*

- Tuition for every school we visited covered 100% of its operational budget. In comparison, Little Star must fundraise approximately 1/3 of its budget each year.*

*Tuition costs more at those schools, but the gap is primarily covered by their full afternoon programs.*

- *Each school holds an annual auction. Proceeds are applied toward their capital or (limited) scholarship funds.*
- *Each school provided limited tuition assistance, 0-8% of its budget. Little Star's assistance has reached 10% of its annual budget.*
- *None of the schools have ever applied for a grant. For the past 3 years, Little Star has counted on grants for its pet projects, which surmount to \$10,000-\$37,000 (on top of general fundraising efforts).*

*We have not made any decisions based on these points. As always, we will continue to look at options to ensure that we are working efficiently and effectively.*

### **Staff Training**

*The teachers at each of the Montessori schools were well trained and comfortable using the materials. Although we offer the basic Montessori certification to our teachers and provide monthly in-house Montessori workshops, we are lacking hands-on training. Now, we have committed to including a child in our monthly workshops, giving teachers the opportunity to truly practice manipulating the Montessori materials.*

### **Drop-Off/Pick Up**

*Each school had implemented its own process to ensure an efficient drop-off/pick-up, to keep parent flow to a minimum and ensure that their classrooms were child-centered. One school even required parents to drive one-way through the parking lot, stop to let the child out of the car, where s/he was met by a teacher and escorted into the classroom.*

*Little Star values its community of parents. For years, we have struggled with finding the right balance between promoting community but keeping the school child-centered. The flow of parents during drop-off and pick-up hours can be chaotic and disruptive, yet provides important time for connection and communication.*

*We have decided to change our daily schedules, to have children on the playground at the time of pick-up. This way, parents may enter the classrooms to pack up belongings and take time to engage with one another, and our class time will have already come to a close. We also ask that parents drop off your children on time, and leave the classroom by 9:00am so that children may move into their daily rituals and work.*

*To close, it is most important to note that Anna, Baylie, Keri and I came home with a renewed appreciation for our bright classrooms, quality facility, and tight-knit staff. We were struck with how supportive our parent community is in comparison to every other school. Our parents have consistently been the backbone of our school, which we found lacking everywhere else. We were eager to share our observations and ideas, but equally as enthusiastic to settle back into the spaces that we have grown to love.*

*We plan to continue this conversation amongst our staff and board. We are open to your feedback and suggestions. As always, thank you for your support of Little Star.*

Nicole

## Office News

### Conferences

*Parent-teacher conferences have begun. Teachers look forward to meeting with each of you to discuss how your child is doing socially, emotionally, and academically. This is a time for you to ask any questions or share concerns, and check out the classroom materials that your child is drawn to. Once you sign up for your conference date and time, be sure to mark your calendars. Your child is welcome to our Afternoon Program during your conference at no charge (but please do sign up for the Afternoon Program that morning so we know how many children to expect). If you can't make your conference date, please call as soon as possible so we can fill someone else in your spot or work on classroom prep.*

### November Days Off

*Little Star follows the Public School calendar. Tomorrow, November 11<sup>th</sup> is Veteran's Day. There will be no school. Note that school will also be closed on November 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> for Thanksgiving.*

### Car Seats

*If you need an extra car seat, please be sure to take only those marked with "Little Star" tape. Recently, several parents have reported missing car seats when they come to pick up their carpools. If you have any questions about which car seats belong to the school, stop by the office to inquire.*

### Parent Nights – Mark Your Calendars!

*In response to your feedback, we have scheduled 3 parent education/discussion nights:*

*Thursday, January 14<sup>th</sup> –Topic: Montessori 101*

*Time and details TBD*

*Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup> – Topic, time and details TBD*

*Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup> – Topic, time and details TBD*

### Methow Values Coupon Books

*The Methow Values coupon books are now available! They look fabulous. GO LOCAL and save over \$2,000!*

*Books can be purchased at the following locations:*

*Carlton General Store*

*Hank's Harvest Foods*

*Little Star Montessori School*

*The Mazama Store*

*Tenderfoot*

*Twisp Chevron*

*Winthrop Red Apple*

*Order forms have been placed in parent cubbies so that you can help us spread the word.*

*Thanks!*



### **Dinner and a Movie**

*Come enjoy...*

*WHAT:: Indian buffet created by Kim Claussen and showing of Academy Award Winner "Slumdog Millionaire"!*

*WHERE:: Twisp River Pub*

*WHEN:: Tuesday, November 17th*

*Doors open @ 5:30*

*Dinner @6*

*Movie @ 7*

*Funds raised will benefit the Little Star School teachers*

*Tickets cost \$25 (for full buffet and movie) available Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> @*

*Winthrop Mtn Sports*

*Winthrop Motors*

*Glover St. Market*

*Twisp Feed Store*

*Carlton General Store*

*Tickets are limited to ensure full bellies and good viewing sight lines!*



***Thank you!***