



# The River Current

March/April 2015\*

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear River Montessori Families,

Mid-spring, already? March and April are such a busy time at a Montessori school! As we get closer to our state assessments in April (more about this on page 3), it can be helpful to remember that while we celebrate the academic strengths that arise in Montessori children, such prowess is the result of embracing a holistic and developmental approach to meeting each child's individual potential. Our children are flourishing in their work, asking bigger questions, diving more deeply into projects, taking on more responsibility, understanding themselves better and refining the keys to how they learn. Put simply, they are growing in leaps and bounds. This is the time of year when we see the older children at each level begin to show little signs that they are developmentally heading into their next level...

- During the last year in our Transitional Kindergarten/Kindergarten, primary children start to leave behind the concrete understanding of things and become curious about how other people view things and the possibilities in true collaboration.
- Our oldest lower elementary friends are internalizing a sense of order, becoming more and more abstract, and are eager to try to accomplish works "in their head" (of course, they learn there is still merit to materials in Upper El!) They begin to enjoy the application of their ideas with bigger more expansive, organized projects.
- Our Upper Elementary elders have a larger, more meaningful perspective on life and about themselves, and after integrating the six-year Montessori elementary program, begin to show signs of emotions trumping logic (thank you, amygdala!), look toward adolescence, and are eager to apply their confidence in who they are within a larger social scene as they mentally prepare for middle school.

It is a time to be a bit nostalgic as we can see that the children are not the same as they were when we began the school year. Do take time to observe your children in their classrooms this spring... you'll never see them this way again!

Peace, peace,

Kelly

*\*Due to our long Spring Break, this newsletter provides information for both March and April. Of course, please let us know if you have any questions!*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### March

- 6<sup>th</sup> **RMF Foundation meeting**  
**Playdate in the Park**
- 7<sup>th</sup> **River of Dreams Dinner & Auction** - 5:30 - 11 p.m.
- 9<sup>th</sup> **Prospective Parent Meeting** 6 p.m.
- 10<sup>th</sup> **"Lewis and Clark" at the Mystic Theatre** ~ Level 5  
**Board of Directors** 5:30 p.m.
- 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> **Parent/Guide conferences & Volunteer Appreciation** (School closed. River Crew open.)
- 16<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> **Spring Break** (School closed. River Crew open.)
- 31<sup>st</sup> **Community Conversation** 6 - 7 p.m.

### April

- 3<sup>rd</sup> **Playdate in the Park**
- 4<sup>th</sup> **International Day** 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- 8<sup>th</sup> **Dine and Donate** ~ Mary's Pizza Shack
- 9<sup>th</sup> **California Standards Test in Science** ~ Level 5  
**Parent University** 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
- 12<sup>th</sup> **RMF Variety Show**
- 13<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> **CAASPP testing** ~ Upper Elementary
- 14<sup>th</sup> **Board of Directors** 5:30 p.m.
- 17<sup>th</sup> **RMF Coffee**
- 20<sup>th</sup> **Teacher Work Day** (School closed. River Crew open.)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> **Earth Day Faire**
- 27<sup>th</sup> - May 1<sup>st</sup> - **CAASPP testing** ~ Lower Elementary
- 28<sup>th</sup> **Community Conversation** 6 - 7 p.m.
- 29<sup>th</sup> **CalSkate** ~ Skate & Donate



City of Petaluma Proclamation: Montessori Education Week

## ATTENDANCE

Colds and flus can make attendance tough during this time of year. Thank you for your mindfulness and practice of consistent on-time arrivals and attendance! Your continued focus and example to your children helps them to develop ritual, relax into routine, avail themselves of all that is possible in the Montessori classroom, and make the social connections at the beginning of the day which determine their work day projects and collaboration! Having a hard time with being on-time? Give us a call, we are glad to help!

## PROSPECTIVE PARENT MEETINGS

Thank you for sharing with others the benefits of an authentic Montessori Education at RMCS! We have heard that we are the best kept secret in town and want everyone to know about how much our children love their school and their learning. Please help us spread the word!

### Prospective Parent Meeting Schedule

March 9, 2015

6:00 p.m.

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

*Community Conversations* are monthly discussions for parents, guardians, staff, and the occasional expert to take time to talk candidly, reflect, and support each other with child development, Montessori philosophy, and supporting a child in growth and learning. For our adult-only meetings, we are piloting the option of child-care this year. Of course, RSVP required so we can arrange staffing and activities. We'll have a topic of interest and

also have time for questions about other subjects as they arise.

March 31<sup>st</sup> How Much is Enough? (Sleep, Nutrition, Down-time, Play, Media), 6 – 7 p.m.

April 28<sup>th</sup> Self-Esteem is Over-rated!, 6 – 7 p.m.

May 19<sup>th</sup> Wholehearted Parenting, 6 – 7 p.m.

*\*Registration (for the event and River Crew) must be received at least 24 hours in advance to reserve your space.*

## INTERNATIONAL DAY

You are invited to River's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual International Day on Saturday April 4<sup>th</sup> from 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Come share your culture and a delicious dish from your country.

This event is an opportunity to

learn about our heritages, share our food, and raise money for our school. Bring your friends for an afternoon of food and fun! Want to participate? For more information or to sign up, please contact the Office before March 11<sup>th</sup>.



**Having trouble explaining Montessori to family and friends?** You are not the only one! How do you digest such a profound educational philosophy in a nutshell? Try these winners from the Montessori Elevator Speech Contest for those of you who have asked how to briefly and best explain Montessori:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzq23IS5v-Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3LfVSL0oSs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcfUPXQ2fSg>



“It is necessary to give children the possibility of developing according to the laws of their nature, so that they can become strong, and, having become strong, can do even more than we dared hope for them.”

~ Maria Montessori



## PARENT UNIVERSITY

Join us for an invaluable parent series this year! We have tailored this list based on feedback from parents and look forward to working together and learning more about how to best serve our children in their growth!

April 9, 2015

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

**Cell phones, video games, and labels:**

*What Does a Child Really Need?*

*“Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment. The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference.*

*Human teachers can only help the great work that is being done, as servants help the master. Doing so, they will be witnesses to the unfolding of the human soul and to the rising of a New Man who will not be a victim of events, but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society. “*

*~ Maria Montessori, Education for a New World*



## CAASPP NEWS

### CAASPP testing is coming soon to a student near you!

During this annual testing time, we like to remind ourselves of the philosophy that governs our actions here at RMCS. While we know that we host our testing practice in a non-competitive, supportive, developmental way, we do like to take this time each year to reflect on the following...

Assessment is a valuable tool in Montessori practice and although we find that state testing is more limited in scope than a Montessorian usually wishes to know, the new state assessment program (CAASPP) is attempting

to increase the scope and meaningfulness, and serves in its own way...

First, keep in mind that for our students, assessment has been a pervasive component of their educational experience—self-reflection, peer-review, guide-observations and pre-/post-tests, etc. We support children in embracing the value in analyzing effort and work, progress and final products, and using said data (qualitative and quantitative) to drive decisions and future actions.

Testing itself is not inherently bad, Montessorians just come from a place where context and value is key. In educating children for life versus knowledge, Montessorians approach testing as a practical life skill. Our children will likely need to take some kind of formal test in their future- a driver’s license and to get into college or grad school, for example.

CAASPP is undoubtedly good practice for that. Never ones to set aside holistic development, we help children understand that this is simply one assessment that covers a specific amount of information. We prepare them well and help them keep it in context, certain in the facts that it is nothing to worry about, stress over, or fear. We take the test for what it is worth and use all of our information and data to get the whole picture for children and our school.

Second, while we focus on our beautiful Montessori pedagogy, let us not forget that we are, in fact, a public school. CAASPP is the method the state is now using to determine school success. It is, in many ways, the lifeline for our charter school. If we would like to continue on as a chartered, public school, with the freedoms of a charter school, we have responsibility to meet the needs of our authorizer and demonstrate our success by their measurement systems.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, I believe we have an obligation to demonstrate that Montessori public education works. The public system struggles so valiantly to address the needs of all of its students. The purpose of Charter Law is to





encourage and support responsible innovation in public education. How can we turn down an opportunity to show that Montessori is an effective method, a viable option worthy of investment and replication? How can we not help demonstrate that in Montessori, children

not only thrive academically, but emotionally, socially and physically as well? That the Montessori focus on the whole child ironically garners the cognitive growth that public education seeks?

So with this perspective we look forward to the opportunity of peacefully implementing the new CAASPP assessment and the information it will provide. We'll do the same thing we expect of the children: we'll acknowledge it for the gauge that it is and simply use the resulting information in context.

In February's newsletter, we provided the latest information from SCOE on our new state-wide testing system for our third through sixth level students. While we and our children will be well-prepared for the new assessment, this year is undoubtedly a baseline year. The state has made it clear that parents should be aware that scores may generally be lower based on the attempts to measure critical thinking and the new and complicated nature of the exam. As the first year of this far-reaching assessment tool, CAASPP will likely have some challenges and hiccups in delivery and results. We are well-informed, learning more every day, and well-prepared for whatever adaptations and adjustments that will be required for our students and school. As always, we prefer to do this in tandem with you, so if you have any questions about CAASPP testing and your child, please contact your child's Guide.



The Montessori approach facilitates targeted and personalized learning and development experiences for each child, the timing of individualized lessons determined by the detailed observations of each child by the teacher.

Children work in three year age cohorts, in specially prepared environments which contain materials specifically designed to foster the achievement of appropriate developmental milestones, and the sequential mastery of skills and concepts across the range of disciplines. The materials provide feedback to the child and teacher as to where the child is at any time on these developmental milestones and in mastery of skills and concepts. There is a strong emphasis on individual choice and individualized teaching, based on the understanding that children do not achieve those developmental goals, nor master those skills and concepts, in lockstep, but rather need to work at their own pace, benefiting from the opportunities the three year age range provides to learn from and to teach each other, to be inspired by others, and to value helping others.

Montessori education is specifically non-competitive, and eschews rewards and punishment in favour of encouraging the development in children of intrinsic motivation for learning. Activities are open-ended, encouraging exploration and creative thinking, and as such do not lend themselves to grading. Children take ownership of their own progress through their daily work journal, weekly individual conferences with their teacher, by requesting specific lessons as the need arises, and by maintaining portfolios of work completed. These materials, and detailed daily observations of each child by the teacher, form the basis of reporting to parents. Such reporting is individualised, highly detailed, and focused on the strengths of the child as well as areas where further development is needed. Using an A to E scale or an equivalent 5 point scale is less useful, and certainly less detailed. Nor is comparative reporting, which ranks a student's achievement against the performance of other members of the class, compatible with either Montessori philosophy or practice. Not only is comparative reporting often misleading for parents, and a cause of unwarranted anxiety, it is discouraging



## MONTESORRI MATTERS

Montessori Approach to Assessment and Reporting  
(The Montessori Australia Foundation)

The Montessori approach to assessment and reporting derives from the nature of Montessori philosophy and pedagogy. It is based on the belief that each child is a competent learner, born ready to learn from the people and the cultural and material environment around them.

for students who score “poorly”, detrimental to both their self-esteem and their willingness to persist, as well as potentially negative for those who do “well” by encouraging the valuing of high scores over the inherent satisfaction of learning.

In Montessori multi-aged classrooms, all students are aware of each others’ abilities and are comfortable with working at their own pace. The achievements of others are not seen as threatening, but rather as something to which to aspire. Children are able to see that it is normal for individuals to achieve mastery in certain areas at different times and in different ways. As a result, they are encouraged rather than discouraged, and ready to continue to tackle, rather than to avoid, learning challenges.

Moreover, comparative reporting is not achievable in practical terms in Montessori schools, given the three year age cohorts with which we work, and our often small class and school sizes. Comparing children for a particular year within that three year age range will, in most cases, be statistically insignificant as the numbers in each “year” are small (often less than 10) and children within each year are not all learning the same concepts at the same time.

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## BOARD BANTER

Dear River families, parents, students, and colleagues:

As you may know the River Montessori governing board recently met in early February for our full day retreat. We focused on our strategic plan with leadership as the central theme to guiding the priorities of River’s program, community outreach, and overall operation. As we look to the remainder of the school year, the exciting “River of Dream’s” upcoming event excites the community about contributing to whole life education!

The fall retreat guided the governing board to concentrate around discussion and planning concerning on going engagement of the student body and families contributions to the broader community of River and its influence in education across our region. Plans were made to theme the boards work across the school year. We are excited to share how these themes will increase our presence with the other education entities across the region as well. With regard to program, we will continue our emphasis around sustaining enrollment and retention



with on-going feedback, while retooling ourselves with an accrediting process that will better fit our needs. Please look for information in the months to come concerning ways that you can contribute to the survey as we develop new ways of addressing



our interests to enhance program development. Finally, with concern to our operation, we met with a charter schools consultant and held discussion around the idea of our building and facility. We have three years left on our lease and are looking into ways that we can both expand and address our facility needs. As these items materialize, we will keep you updated!

Once again, as we begin to draw this year to a close, the administration will begin releasing plans for next years enrollment. Please look for information and materials concerning fall registration and class configuration. Meanwhile, we are excited in anticipation to the upcoming March event, “River of Dreams”. Please be on the look-out for the invitation and I personally look forward to meeting you there. Thank you again for your sincere dedication to River Montessori Charter School. Please know that your governing board is constantly working on your behalf for your students in assisting and guiding our colleagues to provide the exemplary Montessori education we strive to offer.

Sincerely,

Dr. Norman Lorenz,  
Governing Board, Chair

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## WISH LIST

Thank you for all of your generosity! We hope that moving things on to RMCS helps with a bit of your repurposing and re-using, we are always grateful for hand me downs! Here’s what we are currently hoping will make it our way...

- Outdoor Shed/Storage
- Bookshelves
- Dining Hutches
- Child-sized tables and chairs
- Basketball Hoop
- Tree stumps
- Large Area rugs



## ROWING WITH RIVER CREW...

Because of low participation over the last three years, we will not be running a summer River Crew program. There are some many great programs that run outside of the school. We hope with this advance notice, you will be able to find a summer program tailored to your child's interests. As you begin your search, you may want to check out: <http://www.sonomafamilylife.com/petaluma-summer-camp-fair>.

## VOLUNTEERING

Thank you for helping our school with your talents, time, and donations! You assist the school in managing all that needs to be done to keep our learning environment beautiful and inviting for the children to continue on their path of learning with inspiration!

We are currently looking for:

### Gardeners

Someone to obtain free carpet samples as carpet stores change their stock

Craigslist "Stalkers"! (For bookshelves, kitchen cabinets, and dining room tables and hutches)

Someone to obtain free wallpaper sample books as designers/stores change their stock

Thanks, thanks, thanks!

## RIVER MONTESSORI FOUNDATION NEWS

Our deepest appreciation to Lacey Currie & Lisa Baird who, once again, did an amazing job on this year's Walk-a-thon. As always it was a blast! We want to thank everyone who also donated their time, energy and items for the event. Remember you have until Friday, March 6th to get your children's pledges in to the foundation box located in the front office!

Join us for the 3rd annual dinner and auction benefiting River. This year's River of Dreams event promises to be a night to remember - featuring delicious wines, craft beers from Lagunitas, wild salmon from TwoXSea, tasty fares from Tolay & an amazing array of Auction items. Last years event event not only netted over \$25,000 for River but also provided a great night out for River parents, families & friends!

**River of Dreams**

Tickets **\$50 in advance** at [rivermontessorifoundation.org](http://rivermontessorifoundation.org)  
**\$60 at the door**  
*Free drink included in price of ticket*

Raffle **WIN Either:**  
 • Principal for the Day (March 9, 2015)  
 • A Day at the Sonoma County Fair for four. (June 15-22)

REG Party Redwood Empire Gymnastics will be hosting a kid's night pizza party available to all enrolled River students for \$30.

**Saturday, March 7**  
**5:30-11 PM**  
**Sheraton Hotel**  
 745 Baywood Drive, Petaluma

**DINNER \* COCKTAILS \* AUCTION \* DANCING**

*Bring a friend, invite a neighbor!*

**i am RIVER** A benefit for River Montessori Charter School  
 To purchase tickets or for more information visit [www.rivermontessorifoundation.org](http://www.rivermontessorifoundation.org)

Sheraton Sonoma County

Tickets are available in advance for \$50 (includes after drink ticket) or, grab a group of friends & purchase a reserved table for 10 for \$600 (includes 5 bottles of wine for the table). Tickets will be sold Tuesdays & Thursday's in the carline during pick up or online at [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com).

Childcare will be provided by Redwood Empire Gymnastics from 5:30 to 10:30 for \$30 per child. Includes a pizza dinner, lots of jumping around, a movie & popcorn! Must be ages 4 to 13 and potty-trained. Siblings get \$5 off! Parents can call [707-763-5010](tel:707-763-5010) to register or online: <http://app.jackrabbitclass.com/eventcalendar.asp?id=&key=&clabel=&date=3%2F15%2F2015&orgid=509107>

Stay tuned for more information on our up-coming spring events:

International Day being held Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup> 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Our Annual Variety Show will be held from 3 to 5 on Saturday, April 12.

Join us for our Morning Coffee Friday, April 17 and catch a glimpse of Steve Cozza, professional cyclist with his amazing racing bike during morning assembly. He will join River to talk about the GranFondo being held Saturday, May 2!

## WITH GRATITUDE...

**Dana Adams, Josh Barnett, Elizabeth Baird, Elizabeth Berkowitz, Maureen Buckley, Dee Christiansen-McElroy, Julie Compton, Lacey Currie, Nancy Feldstein, Lorena Fernandez, Ping Flynn, Jen Friesen, Aja Gianola-Norris, Heather Hartley, Megin Hallinan, Elizabeth Huang, Ginny Hautau, Jana Leon, Rebecca Kreutz, Amy Loh, Rama Mejia, Karen Orlandi, Shamitri Perera, Liz Rantissi, Maria Rodriguez, Salma Santorineos, Kathryn Schmidt, Jessica Smith, Paulina Telderer, Karin Turner, and Courtney Wolfe** for volunteering in the classroom.

**Eden Belov** for posting chalkboard and letter-signs in the car-line to keep parents informed of upcoming events.

**Gary Guest** for facility repair, sun shade repair.

**Brian Holiday** for fencing Copper Creek's outside environment.

**Steve Twyman & Erin Ayers** for helping with insulation repair in the multi-purpose room.

