



WSMS

Great Beginnings

West Side Montessori School

2020 | WSMSNYC.ORG



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IN MIMI'S VOICE

Dear friends of WSMS,

As you know, only too well, 2020 turned into a very complicated year.

We send our deepest sympathy to members of the WSMS community who have suffered the loss of loved ones or who have been affected in any way by the COVID-19 virus.

I am happy to tell you that, thanks to the creative and energetic response of our teachers, staff and families, we were able to provide our children with remote learning opportunities, our families with community support via workshops and parent chats, and our employees with the resources they needed to interact with their classes every day.

Thanks to the incredible work of Loren DeNicola, Amy Stoney and Shawn Cumberbatch, we were able to “soft open” this summer for three weeks, with 8-10 children in 4 classrooms. This allowed us to fine tune things like drop-off/dismissal procedures, sanitizing/cleaning operations, and classroom protocols, so we could open the doors in mid-September for onsite learning. We even turned the gym into two classrooms, to facilitate the smaller class sizes required by the DOH and DOE. You will be amazed by the pictures included in this issue.



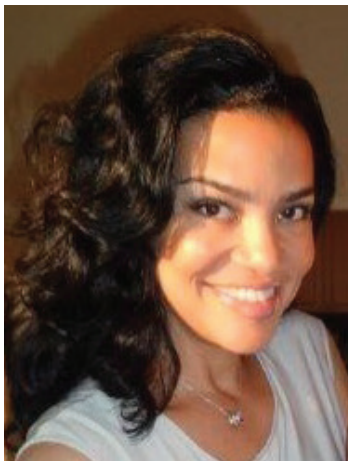
Included in this issue are articles on how we closed and then re-opened, as well as on the guidelines our faculty have prepared for dealing with remote learning in the future. There is also an article by 1W Head Teacher Maria Rosado and Judy Jablon, whose organization, Leading for Children, focuses on the importance of relationships as the foundation for learning.

And, since this is our Annual Report, I want to thank all of the WSMS community for their generous contributions to the Annual Fund, and participation in our PA events (we lucked out that the Auction took place in January!).

I wish you and your loved ones a safe and healthy 2020-2021.

Mimi Basso

Mimi Basso
Head of School



A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear members of the WSMS community,

When I joined the Board in 2014, I was co-president of the PA, and a member of the Admissions Committee, so I was fairly familiar with how the school operated and proud to serve in a new capacity. I discovered a highly motivated, skilled and dedicated group, whose highest priority was ensuring a “great beginning” for our children. I am honored to succeed Myles Amend as president of the Board this year, and want to express deep gratitude to him for his leadership.

My twins blossomed at WSMS and are flourishing at Trinity. Their years at WSMS provided a warm, stimulating and challenging educational environment, and definitely provided them with what they needed for their future success. And, I am committed to continue that legacy.

Last spring upended our normal school year, but the WSMS faculty and admin rose to the challenge and the Board was behind them 100%. On behalf of the Board, I want to express our admiration and gratitude, with special thanks to Head of School Mimi Basso, whose leadership was vital and tireless.

We also want to thank PA co-presidents, Mary Pat Dowhy and Gillian Weindling. They oversaw an active and energetic group of PA volunteers, who created a fantastic Auction (luckily in January) as well as the Fall Festival and other family activities that brought our community together (until we couldn't ...).

This is, of course, our Annual Report, and I am thrilled to report a major increase in donations to the Annual Fund, as well as to the Founders Fund for Financial Aid. I am so grateful to everyone for supporting our fundraising efforts, which allow us to operate without risk and provide financial aid to about 20% of our families.

With appreciation for all you have done and will do, and my best wishes for your health and safety,

Iva

Iva Mills
President, Board of Trustees
(Dashiel and Morgan, '16)

2020–2021 WSMS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The primary responsibility of the Board of Trustees is to see that the School operates in the best interests of its students, teachers, and parents. The Board sets the purpose and policies of the School, ensures its financial stability, plans for its future, and hires the Head of School, who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the School.



**Iva Mills,
President**

Iva Mills is the mother of twin WSMS alumni (2016). Iva served as co-president of the Parents Association for two years and assisted with the Annual Fund, Auction, Spring Fair and Admissions Committee. Iva grew up in San Diego, CA, and received her BA in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her JD from American University Washington College of Law. Iva practiced law for ten years, first at a law firm, primarily in the area of advertising and marketing litigation, and later in-house litigating intellectual property disputes. Iva is also a Trustee of Trinity School, serves on the Acquisition Committee of the Studio Museum in Harlem, and previously served as a Trustee of Safe Horizon.



**Myles Amend,
Vice President**

Myles Amend is Associate Head of School for Advancement at Trinity School, where he has worked since 2000. Prior to that he served as Director of Development and Finance at Rice High School in Harlem; as Principal of Tampa Catholic High School in Tampa, Florida; and as Associate Director for Institutional Advancement and Governance at the Museum of the City of New York. He is a graduate of Iona College and holds master's degrees in history from New York University and in independent school leadership from Columbia University Teachers College. He is also a trustee of De La Salle Academy and a past president of the New York City Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Myles and his husband, Marc Thomas, are parents of a WSMS alumna who completed her two-year career at WSMS in 2011.



**Tim Daileader,
Vice President**

Tim Daileader, the father of Declan and Madeleine Daileader (WSMS '14), and husband of Maggan Daileader, is a partner in Drivetrain, LLC, a fiduciary services firm. Prior to this, Tim enjoyed a twenty-four-year career in investment management and research, and banking. Tim holds a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation and serves as a director on several for-profit boards, and previously on the College Board of Advisors and in the Admission Ambassador program for Georgetown University. Tim graduated in 1992 from Georgetown University where he was a Baker Scholar.



**Mort Haque,
Treasurer**

Mort Haque is a portfolio manager at GoldenTree Asset Management, an investment management firm specializing in below-investment-grade corporate and structured credit markets. Prior to GoldenTree, Mort worked at Sound Point Capital as a portfolio manager and at Apollo Management in their capital markets group. He spent a number of years as an investment banker at Bank of America and J.P. Morgan in their leveraged finance and M&A departments. He is a graduate of Georgetown University (SFS) and Columbia Business School. Mort is married to Henna Khan, and they have two daughters who graduated from WSMS.



**Jennifer S. Conway,
Secretary**

Jennifer S. Conway is a partner at the law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore, where she is a member of the Executive

Compensation and Benefits Department. She regularly advises public and private companies on executive compensation and employee benefits matters, principally in connection with mergers and acquisitions, initial public offerings and other business transactions. Jennifer is a graduate of Georgetown University and Columbia Law School. She is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Kate Stoneman Project, an organization devoted to the advancement of women in the legal profession. Jennifer and her husband, Victor Manuel, have two daughters, one who is a current student at WSMS and one who graduated in 2018. Jennifer and Victor also served as co-chairs of the first annual Fall Festival.



Dana Bliss

Dana Bliss is Executive Editor at Oxford University Press, where he oversees a book publishing program in social work and counseling. Prior to joining OUP in 2012, Dana worked at Taylor & Francis, another scholarly publishing company in New York. Dana was born and raised in downtown Manhattan, and began his educational journey at a Montessori preschool in Tribeca, before attending Friends Seminary and then Colgate University, where he earned his BA in philosophy and classics. He is a Fellow of the Library of America, a non-profit organization dedicated to the publication and preservation of the nation's cultural heritage through America's greatest writing. At WSMS Dana has served as co-chair of the Fall Festival, Class Rep Coordinator, and class rep, and has pitched in at the Auction and Hooked on Books events. Dana and his wife, Saya, live on the Upper West Side and have two daughters: one a current WSMS student and the other a WSMS alum.



Nikki Chase-Levin

Nikki Chase-Levin is a returning board member and former parent who served as the WSMS Events Director for five years. A graduate of Michigan State University with a BA in Journalism, Nikki's 25-year marketing career started at an entertainment publicity firm in Los Angeles in 1995, and continues here in New York City presently. Nikki has worked for some of the most recognizable consumer brands in the marketplace, including Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum, Sony, Morgan Stanley, Discover Card and Miller Brewing Company. Her responsibilities included strategic planning for new and existing products, television advertising development, marketing communications, public relations programming and event planning. As the co-founder and president of Straight Line Marketing, Inc.—her independent consulting firm—she has counseled clients such as Pepsi, Smirnoff, Discovery Networks, and the lifestyle marketing agency, MKTG. Nikki and her husband Dave are the proud parents of Max (WSMS '14), Zach (WSMS '16), and two 70-pound labs ... Bubbles & Rocket!



Mary Pat Dowhy

Mary Pat Dowhy and her wife, Donna Canfield, are the proud parents of Pierce, a 2020 WSMS graduate! Mary Pat served for two years as co-president of the WSMS Parents Association, where she had the privilege of working alongside the dedicated families and administrators of this wonderful school on so many of its key initiatives, including the Auction, the Fall Festival and the Admissions Committee. Mary Pat received her BA from Fordham University and spent more than a decade working as a performer in theater, before moving to Los Angeles to continue her career in film and television. She returned to New York to accept a position with a strategic marketing firm, managing high profile clients such as Absolut Vodka and MillerCoors. Mary Pat served on the board of The Empire State Pride Agenda, a statewide political advocacy organization that championed LGBTQ rights, including marriage equality. Mary Pat is happy and grateful to continue serving WSMS as a trustee alongside such valued friends and community members.



Victoria Feltman

Victoria Feltman is a nutritionist who specializes in family and childhood nutrition. Before going into private practice, Vicky worked at the New York Children's Health Project in the South Bronx, where she counseled kids and adults and taught nutrition education classes. Prior to becoming a registered dietitian, Vicky spent four years as an editor at O, the Oprah magazine, and later worked as a restaurant publicist in New York and Los Angeles. Vicky has a BA from Cornell University and an MS in nutrition from NYU. Vicky and her husband Josh have three sons, one who is a current student at WSMS, and two who have graduated. She is a member of the WSMS Admissions Committee and is actively involved as a parent volunteer.



Joseph Gilbert

Joseph Gilbert is married to Damaris Hernandez and is the father of Mariana and Ollie, both proud WSMS alumni. He joined NYU Langone Health in 2015, after working in the Preventive Medicine department at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (ISMMS). He serves as a co-investigator for the NYU Children's Health and Environment Study (NYU CHES), a longitudinal study examining the environmental influences on growth and development of babies in utero, and the NYU Factors Influencing Reproductive Success and Time to Pregnancy Study (NYU FIRST), a prospective cohort study aimed at identifying environmental influences that lead to difficulties in attaining and sustaining a pregnancy to term. Joe graduated from Bridgewater State University with a BS in biology, and from ISMMS with an MPH.



Steven Han

Steven Han is a Portfolio Manager at Quent Capital, an equities fund focused on global, small cap investments, as well as a co-founder at Sypher Capital Management, a special purpose entity. Over the last 20 years, Steven has been an investor and advisor, primarily in the technology sector. Prior to his current roles, Steven worked across public equities, private equity, and management consulting. Steven holds a BA from Stanford University and an MBA from Northwestern University. Steven and his wife, Gee Young Lee, currently live on the Upper West Side. They have been active travelers over the

years and have lived in eight cities between the two of them. Their daughter, Lina Han, is a current WSMS student.



Natasha Kazmi

Prior to taking time off to raise her family, Natasha Kazmi spent fifteen years in a number of roles in the financial services industry, ranging from corporate banking to restructurings and asset management, across diverse geographies like Pakistan, Indonesia and the U.S. Natasha was a member of the 2014 WSMS Online Auction Committee, a member of the Admissions Committee, and chair of the Annual Fund. She is also involved in projects related to furthering girls' education in Pakistan's remote areas, and serves on Manhattan's Community Board 7. Natasha and her husband, Qaisar Hasan, are proud parents of two WSMS graduates. She earned a BBA and an MBA from the University of Karachi.



Nigel-Ann La Qua Williamson

Nigel-Ann La Qua Williamson was born and raised in Grenada, West Indies. She holds an MBA from Columbia University, and a BS and a BArch from the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York. Prior to taking time off to raise her family, Nigel-Ann spent nine years practicing architecture at HLW International and GKV Architects in New York City. She is currently working from the Columbia Startup Lab to develop her own tech company. Nigel-Ann serves at WSMS as a member of the Admissions Committee, was a class representative for two consecutive years, co-chaired the 2017 Sandsational, and is actively involved as an alumni parent volunteer. She also advises the ad hoc Real Estate Committee for Grand St. Settlement, and is an enthusiastic volunteer at the Hewitt School and Hillsong Church. Nigel-Ann and her husband, Marco Williamson, are proud parents of two WSMS alumni, Ayn and Adi Williamson, and Asa, who is excited to start at WSMS in 2022.



Scott Li

Scott Li is a managing director with CRG, a healthcare-focused investment firm that has committed over \$4 billion of assets. Scott has been dedicated to the healthcare industry as an investor, advisor, and executive for nearly 20 years. Prior to joining CRG in 2015, he

worked at Hammond Hanlon Camp and Lazard Freres as an investment banker focused on mergers and acquisitions. He was also previously the chief financial officer of pingmd, a venture-backed health IT company. Scott serves on the boards of several companies in the healthcare industry and is active in the community. He and his wife, Vernaliz, are committed WSMS volunteers; they co-chaired the WSMS Bulb Planting and Vern co-chaired the Fall Festival. A New Jersey native and long-time resident of New York, Scott lives on the Upper West Side with his family, which includes both an alum and a current student at WSMS. He received an AB in economics from Princeton University and an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.



Kelly Morrison Opdyke

Kelly Morrison Opdyke and her husband, Jonathan, are the proud parents of three WSMS alumni. She has served as a WSMS trustee since 2017. Kelly spent ten years as a senior technical advisor for Cicatelli Associates Inc., a public health non-profit headquartered in New York City, where she led projects providing technical assistance to community-based organizations on the collection and use of data for nationally recognized initiatives including the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and the Avon Foundation Breast Health Outreach Program. She previously interned as a research assistant with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and provided administrative support to continuing medical education programs at the School of Sleep Medicine in Palo Alto, CA. She spent her early career in digital marketing, co-leading an email marketing practice at online ad pioneer Beyond Interactive. At WSMS she served as a class rep, member of the Admissions Committee, two-time co-chair for the Fall Festival, and co-chair of the Annual Fund Committee. She also served on the PTA Executive Board for the Anderson School (PS 334) from 2014-2020, including two terms as co-president. She received her Master of Public Health from Columbia University (2005), and BA in psychology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1998). Kelly and Jonathan both serve on the Dean's Advisory Council at the University of Michigan's School of Education.



Tenille Skelton

Tenille Skelton and her husband, Travis Skelton, are the proud parents of two WSMS alumni. During her time at WSMS, she was an active

parent volunteer, serving on many committees, including two years as Parents Association co-president. Tenille received her BS in finance and accounting at Tulane University. She has ten years of experience in real estate finance and capital raising, having spent her career at The Carlyle Group, Goldman Sachs and TPG. Tenille is a member of the board of Grand Street Settlement, a non-profit organization that provides programs and services to over 10,000 under-served New York children, families and seniors, and serves on its Executive Committee and Ad Hoc Real Estate Committee. Tenille is also a member of the board, as treasurer, at GrandLo Cafe, a social enterprise of Grand Street Settlement, that provides meaningful job skills for at-risk youth.



Jing Wang

Jing Wang was born and grew up in China, and came to the states to pursue graduate study after getting his BS in physics from Peking University. After receiving his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2004, he joined Tricadia Capital LLC, a \$4.2B multi-strategy credit hedge fund, and has since worked there for fourteen years as a partner and portfolio manager, trading U.S. and European fixed income and equity derivatives. In 2018 he joined Millennium Partners L.P., a \$36B hedge fund, as a portfolio manager. Besides work, Jing would like to dedicate more time to philanthropic efforts and nonprofit organizations. He is married to Yi Zhang. They have two sons, Dillon, who graduated in 2019, and Aaron, who graduated in 2016.



Kelly West

Kelly West is currently the Director of Admission at The Browning School. Kelly first joined the Browning faculty in 2003, where she served as an Assistant Teacher, Head Teacher, and then Acting Head of Lower School, before moving to Admission. Kelly received her MA from the Steinhardt School of Education at NYU and a BA in psychology from George Washington University.



Liz Martorella, Parent Representative

Liz Martorella is currently serving as co-president of the Parents Association. Liz has been an active parent

volunteer over the years, most recently serving as a co-chair of the Auction and Fall Festival. Liz and her husband, Ben Swinburne, are the proud parents of Josephine ('16), Vivian ('19) and current WSMS student, Isabel. Liz has over ten years of experience in pharmaceutical marketing and advertising, working at agencies like Sudler & Hennessey and LM&P. Liz received her BA in Psychology from SUNY Geneseo, and her MA in Psychology with a focus on cognition, perception and neuroscience from NYU.



Gillian Weindling, Parent Representative

Gillian Weindling is currently serving as co-president of the Parents Association and has been an active parent volunteer since 2014. Gillian received her BA in Women's Studies from Barnard College. Prior to starting a family, she worked in advertising at McCann-Erickson in their New York office as an account manager, and then moved to Tokyo for three years to teach English. Upon returning to the United States, Gillian spent eight years as the Chief Operating Officer of a boutique corporate financial restructuring firm with offices in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Gillian and her husband Adrien are the parents of Sofia (class of 2017), Margaux (class of 2019), and current WSMS student, Elyse.



Cailyn DeBie, Faculty Representative

Cailyn DeBie (Faculty Representative) has been connected with WSMS for almost a decade. Starting in the teacher education program (TEP), she is now in her fifth year as a head teacher in the early childhood program, and mentors future Montessorians as a field consultant. She holds a bachelor's degree in legal studies and philosophy from Nova Southeastern University, a master's degree from Concordia College, and New York State certification in Early Childhood and Special Education. Cailyn is passionate about empowering and optimistic leadership principles, and hosted a personal development book club for teachers during the 2019-2020 academic year. Furthermore, she deeply values the power of children's literature. In 2017 she introduced and supported efforts to implement our library cataloguing system, Libib. She continues to be actively involved in recommending inspiring and diverse literature to meet the evolving needs of our community and enhance our collection.

CLOSING ... AND REOPENING

FIRST, WE CLOSED ...

Last winter, when the word began to get around that the drastic virus in China was cropping up around the world, and especially in the United States, WSMS administration started to float “what if” scenarios. As the reporting became more widespread and ominous, our planning began to have more urgency.

In early February, Head of School Mimi Basso advised families that we were adhering to CDC guidelines, and that anyone travelling from mainland China would need to quarantine, adding that, “the current risk to New Yorkers is low.”

A few weeks later the world had turned upside down.

In early March faculty had already set up Zoom accounts to use from their homes. The timing was spot on.

On Sunday, March 15, Mimi sent an email to parents telling them that we were closing for the next two days because of two suspected cases of Covid. Less than three hours later, she sent another email: the city had closed ALL public schools, effective immediately, and we were following their protocol.

The rest is history.

Luckily for us the timing coincided with Spring Break, so not all families were affected at first—though the impact was certainly felt on families who relied on us for childcare.

WSMS faculty and staff responded with alacrity and creativity. Teachers worked via Zoom with their classes every day, sometimes in small groups. They “met” regularly with parents, often individually, and supported them in dealing with issues their children might be facing. Carol Baird conducted Zoom movement classes. Teachers were provided with sup-

OUR MISSION

We prepare children to be resilient, creative and independent problem solvers. We are leaders in teaching Montessori principles and incorporate the best practices of modern early childhood education in our classrooms.

West Side Montessori School is a vibrant, collaborative community of passionate teachers, joyful children and engaged parents. Our diverse community is a reflection of the city in which we live.



port from Judy Jablon (founder of the nonprofit Leading for Children) and Becky Lewin (occupational therapist). Rebecca Hershberg (clinical psychologist and parenting coach) conducted Fireside Chats for parents. Mimi, Loren DeNicola and Judy Lyons held weekly meetings with parents. One of the first things teachers did was create and share a digital book, *WSMS is Closed Today*. Children and their families appreciated this simple, inclusive, and informative narrative. We developed—and updated regularly—a resource page, complete with online programs, book suggestions, and other activities to keep children entertained and stimulated when class was not in session. Former teacher, Cara Zelas, created a six-week online course with multiple daily activities—including creative projects and yoga—which we subscribed to for all families.

Meanwhile admin worked (remotely, for the most part) to stay on top of the DOHMH, DOE, CDC and other guidelines, which sometimes seemed to change daily. A 17-page document of Covid-19 protocols was written, submitted and implemented.

Though Zoom classrooms stopped in June, Carol’s movement Zooms, the weekly Fireside Chats and parent meetings with Mimi, Loren and Judy, and interactions with teachers continued through the summer.

And then we found out we could re-open, since we are licensed as an early childhood provider by the DOH.

THEN, WE HAD A SOFT REOPENING...

Mimi galvanized the group. Judy Lyons reached out to WSMS families for interest in up to three weeks of camp, making it clear that there would be health testing protocols, classroom size limitations and strict distancing. Amy Stoney and Sean Cumberbatch established cleaning and sanitizing practices, and sourced supplies like masks, plastic partitions for public spaces (like the front desk), and new cleaning equipment. We ended up with 4 classrooms of 8-10 children over three weeks, starting on July 20.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of a school-wide fall reopening, things got very busy.

Based on DOHMH rules, we realized we could have a max of 15 children per class ... below our usual norm. We knew that a substantial number of families had re-located for the spring and summer outside the city, and surveyed them to see what their fall plans were. We determined we needed space for 185 children in 309 and 302 ... and came up with a plan: add a PM class, and divide the gym into two classrooms. There were, of course, some logistical issues to be resolved—conducting a lottery for PM, getting DOHMH approval of a divided space—but we did it! We were able to accommodate our numbers without switching some children's programs to PM.

AND IN SEPTEMBER WE WERE BACK TO SCHOOL!

Teachers and most admin returned September 1 (after testing negative), learned the new norms (serving meals, sanitizing of materials, outdoor limitations, ...), held meetings, set up their classrooms, and participated in online workshops and professional development. New children had two individual visits to their classroom with a family member to meet the teaching team, and were invited to come again with two or three other new children. We also held two workshops for parents on how to support children's separation. We provided books—*I Am Going Back to West Side Montessori School* for returning students and *Welcome to West Side Montessori School* for children new to WSMS—so they could anticipate, and adjust to, the new arrival and classroom routines. On Monday, September 21, the doors opened to returning children, and new children started the next day.

Getting through these doors is a different experience than a year ago. Classrooms are assigned specific drop-off windows, so we don't have everyone arriving at once. The child and their accompanying adult (only one is permitted) have their temperatures taken by someone from admin, and the adult must complete an "attestation form" on their cell phone, using a posted bar code. They confirm that neither the child nor anyone in their family has Covid symptoms, or has been exposed to someone who does or has been diagnosed as having Covid.

Teachers take the children in small groups to their classrooms. Admin members bring children who arrive after their scheduled window. No adults other than employees (or repair personnel, if necessary) are allowed in the building. Pick-up is similarly staggered and conducted outdoors.

The good news is we received city permission to close 92nd Street between 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. We are utilizing this permit for arrival and dismissal times. Parents can wait in the street until their children go inside every morning, and come out later in the day, with plenty of room for social distancing.

We also received a permit to use the Crabapple Grove in Riverside Park. Children go outside every day. Teachers had professional development training from Leslie Day, author of *Field Guide to the Natural World of New York City*, which enabled them to enhance the curriculum to include more outdoor learning.

And—surprisingly to us—the children are unfazed about wearing masks!

WHAT COMES NEXT?

There are a lot of unknowns ... For example, how do you do outdoor drop-off and pick-up when it rains or snows or is bitterly cold?

If someone tests positive, we have to quarantine the class for two weeks; if this happens in two classrooms, we have to shut down. What if the city shuts down ALL schools again?

The good news is that our experience with remote learning last spring was codified into an impressive guidebook by key teachers this summer, so we won't be starting from scratch. The guidebook incorporates Montessori standards into best practices and specifics for creating online learning.

You can read their thoughtful introduction in the article entitled, "How We Did—and Will Do—Montessori Learning Online."

And fingers crossed we all stay healthy!



HOW WE DID—AND WILL DO—MONTESSORI LEARNING ONLINE

By: Gretchen Amberg Stack,
Cailyn DeBie, Loren DeNicola,
Melissa Freeman, Robyn Mernick,
and Katherine Schneider

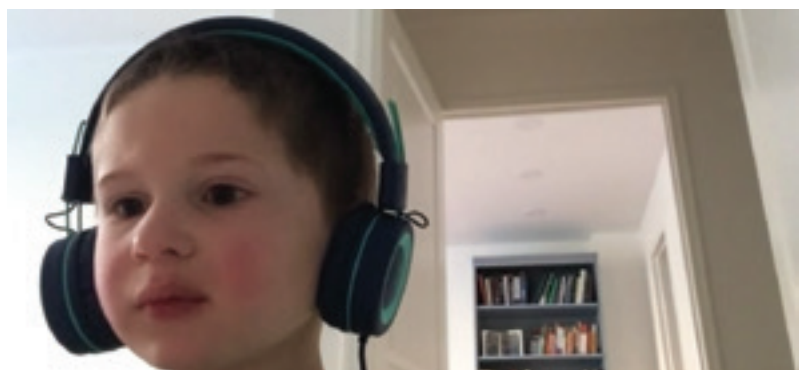
In March 2020, all schools in New York City were ordered closed due to the spread of COVID-19. Following this requirement, West Side Montessori School temporarily closed, with uncertain plans for re-opening. We found ourselves in a unique situation—one that would require a transition to online learning. This approach was new to us, as well as to the early childhood education field in general.

The WSMS community sprang into action, and quickly adapted to connecting using the online platform, *Zoom*. Children, families, and teachers participated in daily online meetings until the end of the school year, and on a more limited basis into the summer. The WSMS administration provided resources, served as a sounding board, encouraged our creative approaches, shared ideas across classrooms, and were there when we needed another point of view. This process once again proved that one of our faculty's best assets is the ability to be creative and flexible in the service of children.

• Our Transition to Online Learning

In our physical classrooms, the Montessori philosophy, methods and materials, collaboration with colleagues, and knowledge from research and early childhood best practices guide us to set up high quality learning environments and experiences for young children. While this primed us to take on the new world of online learning, we quickly found that the remote classroom is a very different place, requiring special planning and execution.

Teachers re-oriented themselves and their students to prepare for this new way of learning. From their homes to children's homes, teachers facilitated familiar routines, mimicking current classroom procedures, and encouraging belonging



and structure. Teachers led with Emotionally Responsive Practices (ERP), aiming to meet children where they were, and as a way to invite and contain children's feelings both at the onset and throughout our time online. Among our first collaborations was the creation and sharing of a digital book, *WSMS is Closed Today*. Children and their families appreciated this simple, inclusive, and informative narrative. Creating books that featured the children in our classrooms and broached important social-emotional topics became a mainstay of our work online.

While the material that teachers created and posted online was similar from classroom to classroom, each team offered unique experiences. Teachers incorporated music, movement, hands-on activities, literature, games, virtual materials, and academic learning in countless variations. Through this experimental process, teachers witnessed and experienced many moments of effective teaching and learning. In the end, teachers agreed: multi-sensory, interactive, and collaborative experiences translated best to an online environment and succeeded in helping children achieve learning outcomes.

• Incorporating the Montessori Approach

The healthy partnership between children, families, teachers, and administration was essential to the online teaching and learning environment. Through moment-to-moment situations, observed patterns, written and verbal communication between teachers and parents, and support from administration, we improved our practices with the cohesiveness of these different parts working together.

A particularly inspiring effect, and one we are proud of, was the innovation, flexibility, and adaptability that our teachers

brought to distance learning. One WSMS teacher said,

I got into this work of being a teacher because it requires flexibility and adaptation and we were stretched in this new way. Students got to see us stretching ourselves and there was so much learning in that ... observing grownups learning and being fallible in front of them is beautifully messy.

Dr. Montessori was an educator, an activist, a scientist, an innovator, and a woman who lived through multiple global crises. If Dr. Montessori was here today, how would she guide us? We took inspiration from her repeated efforts to deepen an educational plan through years of observation and study. We know Dr. Montessori's ideas about children, learning, and development evolved over time. Our teaching experiences, both in-person and online, reflect that evolution as well. Through Dr. Montessori's writings and teachings, we are provided with wisdom and direction. Her words on peace inspire us today:

An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking: it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live (Montessori 1949)

GOING FORWARD: ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT WSMS

The spring 2020 period of online learning was an opportunity

to examine our work and refine our practices. This is essential, given the likely event that we will return to online teaching and learning in the future. In fact, we have already scheduled a remote week after Winter Break in January, to facilitate quarantining for employees and families who have travelled, or been with people who have travelled, to/from the states requiring quarantining. During the summer of 2020 we created a Guidebook: a framework for our continuing development of quality distance learning experiences for children ages 2-6, with our Montessori philosophy, early childhood best practices, and knowledge gained from our recent online experiences at the forefront.

We used information gathered in the daily efforts of working online with children, lessons learned through trial and error, and big picture takeaways. Faculty participated in town meetings, sharing their challenges and how they addressed them. Families completed surveys to document how they and their children responded to online meetings and the various virtual classroom activities and materials offered to them. This feedback was included in the development of the Guidebook.

• Guideposts to the WSMS Philosophy on Remote Learning

To formulate a "Philosophy on Remote Learning," we began by asking questions and establishing important guideposts through meetings with teachers, as part of professional development, and in continued conversation and implementa-

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION EDUCATION IS AT THE CORE OF OUR WORK

When considering best practice in any early childhood education setting, one must consider the necessity of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) embedded into our work as educators. On June 1, 2020, Head of School Mimi Basso sent the following communication to the WSMS Community:

A Call to Action and Intention

If we want our children to embody justice and equity, we must model those values, every day in everything we do and say. We must strengthen our resolve to include diversity, equity and inclusion at the heart of all of our conversations. We must be optimistic and positive, and demonstrate confidence, unwavering willpower, and love for all humanity.

I ask you to personally re-commit to advancing equity and justice in our society. The trauma that black, brown and multiracial people are experiencing is a national crisis, built upon centuries of injustice. Racism and prejudice are evident not only in the violence, but also in the way people of color are experiencing this health pandemic.

As early childhood educators and parents, we are called to nurture a more inclusive and diverse generation of young children. Early childhood educators have deep faith in the principle

that all people deserve the opportunities and resources for a fulfilling life. Teachers and parents, working in concert, have a unique role in promoting every child's chances to thrive and to succeed in school, in work, and in life. A basic principle in early childhood work is that when educators treat children as if they are strong, intelligent, and kind, children are far more likely to behave in strong, intelligent, kind ways. They are more likely to learn and thrive and succeed.

At WSMS, we have a long-standing commitment to creating an environment where every child and adult celebrates human diversity, recognizes injustice, and has the skill set to address it. We are working together to build an anti-bias community, a world in which all children are able to blossom, and each child's particular abilities and gifts are able to flourish.

[...]

Let's work to challenge our own perspectives, to uncover and identify our biases, and to consider our participation in our current society. It is a humbling path to take, sometimes hopeful, sometimes despairing, and it is a deep commitment to learning. This work requires practice and a willingness to be uncomfortable. We owe this to our children.

tion by classroom teams, to guide the work of our faculty and administration:

- **Belonging and connection:** children and families should feel connected to their teachers, classrooms, and the WSMS community, whether in person or online.
- **Daily interaction:** connections can be established when children are in a daily community with their teachers and classmates, and learning is fortified when we engage children through multiple access points and in a variety of contexts.
- **Inspiring environments:** the benchmarks we use in our physical environments can be adapted to the online learning environment.
- **Opportunities for learning:** children need a range of learning experiences that address their development across domain areas, and respond to their unique learning styles and interests.
- **Conceptual learning:** quality learning experiences are developed with an emphasis on concept-based curriculum, and that learning should extend beyond the online meeting.
- **Commitment to anti-bias and anti-racism (ABAR) work:** we actively seek out ways to create inclusive environ-



ments, as well as identify, reflect upon, and dismiss practices that suppress or exclude.

• **Relevant Research**

WSMS teachers are curious, lifelong learners who seek evidence-based research when making decisions about best practices. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged educators across the globe. Research informs us that it is essential to keep children socially connected, maintain trusting partnerships with families, support children with special needs and their families, and emphasize continuity of conceptual learning, engagement, repetition, and independence.

• **The Impact of Community in Online Teaching and Learning**

There is a vital need for children to remain connected to their school communities when situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic take place. As Mimi Basso, Head of School, told parents and teachers by email last April:

None of us could have imagined the social, financial, medical, and educational dislocations the coronavirus emergency has created. There are surely going to be challenges of all kinds ahead—for our families, for our faculty and admin team, and for our community at large.

If we must continue virtually through the end of our planned school year, then we will be prepared to do that, making adjustments along the way to ensure that the program remains fresh and engaging. And if the answer lies somewhere in between, then we will be prepared for that eventuality also.

I believe that this community—this amazing collection of children and of adults—can exercise a togetherness and a purpose that is at once hopeful and healing. Thank you for all of your trust and support.

• **Social connections are key**

Maintaining social connection is one of the best ways to combat stress:

... while we are staying apart from each other physically, it's even more important to connect socially, to protect our emotional well-being. Keep up relationships and social contacts—while maintaining physical distance outside your own home. Responsive relationships—like those with lots of serve and return interactions between children and adults, adults and other adults, and children and other children all help buffer us against the effects of ongoing stress. (Harvard University 2020)

• **Trust holds all relationships**

Trust within our communities is essential if we are to achieve our core mission as early childhood educators. Consciously

spending time and effort to build mutual trust, respect and rapport within our classroom communities—teachers, children and families—as well as within the broader WSMS community, is now more necessary than ever:

Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.” (Covey 2008)

• **We strive to offer excellent learning opportunities for all children**

Online learning opportunities should emphasize Montessori’s aims of helping children to develop order, concentration, coordination, and independence. We further emphasize continuity of instruction, high levels of engagement, conceptual learning and repetition.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) encourages early childhood educators to commit themselves to:

- Provide children with opportunities for rich, engaging play and opportunities to make choices in planning and carrying out activities.
- Provide open-ended activities that encourage children to work together and solve problems to support learning across all areas of development and curriculum.
- Recognize and be prepared to provide different levels of support to different children depending on what they need.
- Differentiate support in a strengths-based way to meet each child’s needs. (NAEYC 2019)

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WINDY WELLINGTON



The WSMS community is saddened by the death of long-time WSMS teacher, Windy Wellington, who passed away on January 3, 2020, after a two-year fight with cancer.

Windy taught children—and their parents and her fellow teachers—at WSMS from 1983 to 2013, except for three years teaching second grade at Collegiate. She was a WSMS-TEP faculty member, serving as an instructor and a field visitor. Windy shared her Montessori expertise after she left WSMS at Lefferts Garden Montessori and Montessori’s Children’s Village in Brooklyn.

She was survived by her children, Mae and Jason, and eight grandchildren. Sadly, her daughter Denise passed away this fall. Her presence made our days brighter, and her legacy lives on in the impact she had on literally hundreds of children.



HOW PARENTS AND TEACHERS CAN BE OPTIMISTIC LEADERS FOR CHILDREN

By: Maria Rosado, Head Teacher 1W, and Judy Jablon, Founder and Executive Director, Leading for Children

We know that young children thrive in an environment of trusting relationships with their families, and with the adults who care for and educate them. All aspects of children's development—intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and moral—are shaped by the relationships they have with the adults in their lives.¹ Now, envision this environment of nurturing relationships, and then add to your vision the concept that all the adults in children's lives possess a clear sense of purpose, have strong voices, and listen and learn openly from diverse perspectives. These adults are intentional decision-makers who collaborate with others to make good things happen. They are optimistic, see a path forward, and have the grit to persevere even when the going gets tough—like during the current pandemic. Can you imagine the possibilities for all children if they could live and learn in an environment with such exemplary models of optimistic leadership surrounding them?

Optimism is an attitude—a state of mind—that allows us to see a path forward. Optimists move beyond disappointments and persist to find solutions. Optimism is being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. All children deserve the adults in their lives to be models of optimistic leadership.

Optimistic Leaders are committed. A commitment is a pledge, a promise, and a responsibility. To be an Optimistic Leader for children, we invite you to practice five commitments so that you can show up more effectively as a powerful model for children:

1. Think impact to make informed decisions. We are models for children when we pause to think about the implications of what might happen before we act or speak. For example:

- Sonia wakes Maxie up a little bit earlier each morning so that he has enough time to get ready without

having to rush. Sonia practices *think impact* because she knows that when Maxie has to rush, he has a much harder time adjusting to transitions throughout the day.

- Maria practices *think impact* as she plans for read-aloud before lunch on a rainy day. She creates a special experience to go along with the book, *Going on a Bear Hunt*, by creating an obstacle course and using flashlights to engage the children. By finding time in her busy day to take a moment and think about what impact she wants to have on the children during story time, Maria comes up with an idea that delights the children, furthers their experience of the story, and helps her remember how good she is at her job.

2. Cultivate self-awareness to guide thought, emotion, and behavior. We are models for children when we actively work to understand our moods, emotions, strengths, and challenges so that we can show up effectively at home and at work. For example:

- Rakia is exhausted after her last Zoom call of the day, and now she has to make dinner for the family. She practices *cultivate self-awareness* by taking a few minutes for self-care. Just a few minutes to wash her face and take a deep breath helps her to show up for

"Optimism is essential to achievement and it is also the foundation for courage and true progress."

~ Nicholas M. Butler



her family in a way that leads to a pleasant evening for everyone.

- Luiza realizes that the long delay on the subway means being late for work. As the tension in her body increases, she practices *cultivate self-awareness* by doing some self-talk. First, she acknowledges that the situation is out of her control. She knows that when things get out of control, it can upset her whole day. She sends a quick text to her team letting them know that she'll be late. She puts in her headphones and listens to some calming music for the remainder of the trip. When she arrives at school, she relaxes her face and gets herself together, so that she can walk into the classroom calm and collected.

3. Nurture relationships to support learning and collaboration. We are models for children when we are open and honest in relationships, and take the time to strengthen connections even when that is somewhat challenging. For example:

- Robert and Marcus are at it again. They are building with blocks, and all is well until they begin yet another squabble. Martha, the boys' mom, waits a few minutes to see if it resolves but, instead, the tension is escalating. Rather than trying to get them to stop arguing by telling them to do so, Martha practices *nurture relationships* by joining in the play. She distracts them from the disagreement by initiating a new problem for them to solve. In this way the boys get to continue their play, and also enjoy each other's company.
- At the water table, Ashley and Kianna suddenly begin to grab at the same toy. Karen practices *nurture relationships* by providing the girls with the language they need to communicate their feelings to one another.

Karen says, "Ashley, you can tell Kianna that you are using the blue cup right now. She can have a turn in a few minutes. Kianna, you can choose a different cup, and then have a turn with the blue cup when Ashley is finished."

4. Refine communication for mutual clarity and understanding. We are models for children when we engage in authentic back-and-forth conversations verbally and in writing. We demonstrate for them how communication strengthens relationships and encourages deeper thinking and learning. For example:

- Josie comes into the classroom and announces to her teacher, "I'm not a handful. My sister is." In a light-hearted conversation between Josie's teacher and her Dad, Roger, they agree that Roger will practice *refine communication* by being more careful about the language he uses at home when talking with his partner about the children.
- The teaching team in 3E practices *refine communication* by intentionally using the person's name when they speak with individuals. Whether talking with each other, colleagues who step into the room, children, or families, the team always begins the conversation with the person's name so that they are modeling intentional language for children.

5. Activate curiosity to find connections and continue learning. We are models for children when we ask questions, consider possibilities, seek opinions from others, and develop new solutions. For example:

- Laila reads to her children every evening, and Henry and Sophie look forward to the routine. From time to time, Laila practices *activate curiosity* by inviting the children to predict what might happen next or come up with their own ending to the story. They re-read favorite stories over and over again, with curiosity grabbing their attention and keeping them interested.
- Maria practices *activate curiosity* by using the word "curious" with children each day. As Cairo peers over Ryan's shoulder to see what he's doing, Maria says, "Cairo, you can say, 'Ryan, I'm curious. What are you making?'" In this way Maria models the power of curiosity as a way to learn, and uses language to promote interactions among children.

We believe that the more we model Optimistic Leadership for children, the more successful they will be now and in the future. We invite you to be a model of the change you want to see.

Resources

¹Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

ALUMNI NOTES

We'd love to hear from you! Please share your news with frontdesk@wsmsnyc.org.

'90
'94

Giulia & Abigail Pines

Giulia is a freelance writer who has published articles in the *New York Times*, *Real Simple*, and numerous travel magazines. Abigail is a small animal veterinarian in practice in New York City.

'91

Sean Fredricks

Sean lives in Los Angeles, where he is an educational adviser and filmmaker. His award-winning short film, *Cannonball*, is currently screening in festivals worldwide. He has also launched his own management company, Mad Rogue Films, which specializes in proof-of-concept short films for feature and TV development.

'92
'94

George & Kate Adams

George recently got married and is living with his wife, Annie, in San Francisco, where he is a senior associate at the law firm Shearman & Sterling LLP and she is a science teacher. Kate and her husband, Joe Milner, also live in San Francisco, where she teaches at the Sterne School and he is an associate at a law firm.

'05
'09

Julian & Alan Hornos Kohl

Alan is currently an 11th grade student at Trinity. He loves music, plays the guitar, and is into science, particularly physics. Julian is in his Junior year at Yale. He's a double major in philosophy and performance arts, and is part of the Yale Alley Cats acapella group. Julian loves the theater, languages, and games. Lisa Kohl, their mother, is a former WSMS teacher (1983–1989) and trustee (2002–2010).



'11

Ana Isabella España



We will always treasure our fond memories of Isabella's joyful years at WSMS (2009–2011). She started 9th grade this fall at the Special Music School High School. How time flies! And, for all of the music lovers in the WSMS community, Isabella is a classical violinist and was featured on NPR's *From the Top*. For more info, please check out the following link: <https://fromthetop.org/musician/ana-isabella-espana/>

'12

Lily Kurtz



Lily is now an 8th grader at Hewitt, where her favorite subjects are history and science. She excels at individual sports, especially those that take her outdoors, and loves to swim, horseback ride, ski and rock climb. Last spring, in response to the pandemic, she began a service project to promote literacy and a love of reading. Over the summer her project expanded, and she now reads to about a dozen very young children on Sunday mornings. The picture books from her WSMS years are once again in full rotation! In September we invited current WSMS families to join *Storytime with Lily*. You can follow her at <https://www.instagram.com/lilyreads2020/>.

'05
'09

Lily & Ethan Wood

Lily is a junior at Boston College. She had been planning on going to Greece this year in their study abroad program, but Covid happened, and she is back in Boston doing in-person classes in five of her six subjects this semester. Ethan is currently in his junior year at Professional Children's School, taking virtual classes and starting to figure out what colleges to apply to. The Wood family purchased a house in Woodbury, CT, a year ago June, and it's been a haven for them during these pressing times.

Annabel Barra

'14

In 2019 Annabel (now 11) published her first middle grade adventure novel. She co-wrote *Poppy Haviland & The Secret of the Lively Widow* with her dad, Michael Barra. The book launch was held at The Players Club on Gramercy Park, and several of her WSMS classmates attended in support.



Myla Friedman '15, Adina DiPolo '14, Annabel Barra '14, Sasha Friedman '15

Ohemaa Pratt

'18

Ohemaa is currently in Class 2 at Chapin. She still reminisces about her time at WSMS. In fact, last year each student published a book about something they were an expert on, and one of her chapters was focused on the WSMS Fall Festival, which she fondly remembers. Ohemaa became an Auntie when she was 5, and she very much enjoys speaking to and reading bedtime stories via Zoom to her now 2-year-old niece, Lailah. Ohemaa plays tennis and swims, and her goal is to be a member of Chapin's swim team. She spends her time away from school visiting places in her local neighborhoods, and enjoying outdoor urban art.



'17
'19

Vivienne & Lyla Hamilton

The Hamilton family moved to Paris at the end of the 2019 school year, and spent the summer driving more than 2,000 miles around the country from Normandy to Provence and beyond! Vivienne and Lyla quickly picked up French.



'17
'20

Jonathan & Joshua Tieng

Jonathan and Joshua Tieng miss their time at WSMS (1W and 3E!), but are back together again at Trinity School, along with their mommy. They still love their Legos, but now have a great time with chess and piano, too. Hugs from the Tiengs.



'19

Nathalia Alleyne

Nathalia left WSMS in 2019, excited to begin her new chapter, joining her sister at the Chapin School. She enjoyed Kindergarten and loved making new friends. She often made connections with what she learned at WSMS. Nathalia is now a proud first grader, and often begins her day by visiting the dog park on her way to school.



'19

Nelson Pender

What do you miss about WSMS? Everything.

What do you miss most?

- my teachers
- the toys
- the math projects
- cozy area

Message to my friends: I miss my friends!



'20

Brunello Fava

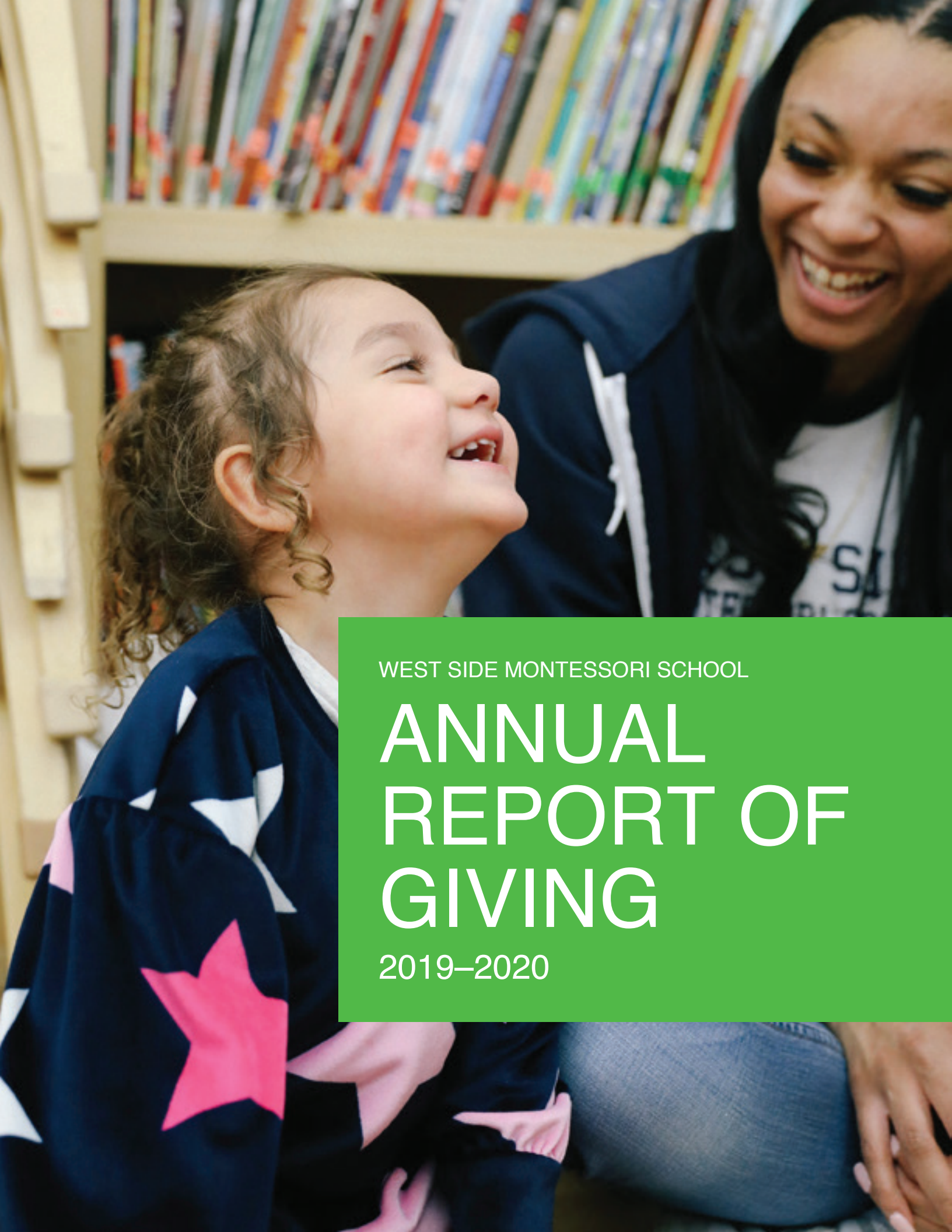
Brunello Fava, brother Santino and mom Michelle are living in Tampa, Florida. Brunello and Santino attend Corbett Preparatory of IDS and they are loving it! Their school seems like "camp" and is situated on a lake. Brunello has continued his love of sports, is playing basketball, and still climbing anything he can find to climb. We are adjusting to the beach life and enjoying boating. We are missing the old NYC, the seasons in the northeast and all of our friends.



'20

James Sweeney

The Sweeney family moved back to LA last spring and James enrolled in Developmental Kindergarten at Curtis. But he and his family missed New York too much, so they recently moved back east. James currently resides in Sag Harbor, and loves cooking, dancing, reading, and playing with his dog, Elaine.

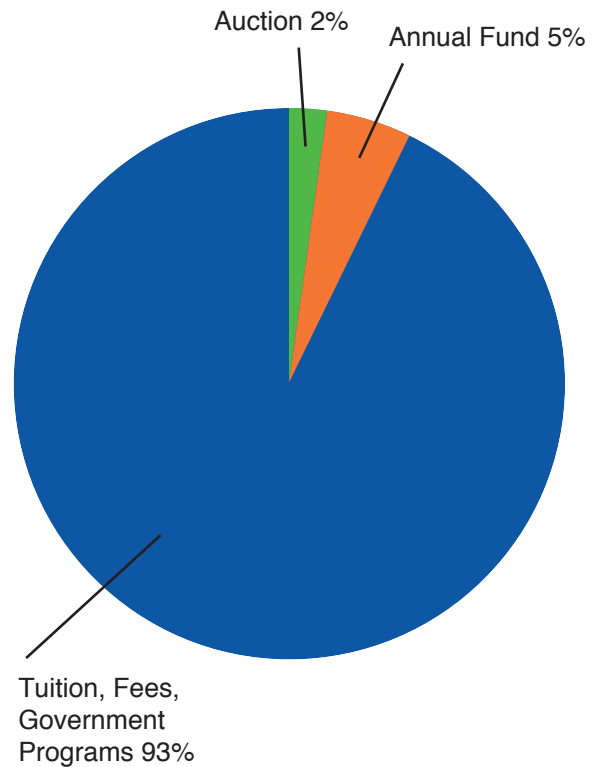


WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL

ANNUAL REPORT OF GIVING

2019–2020

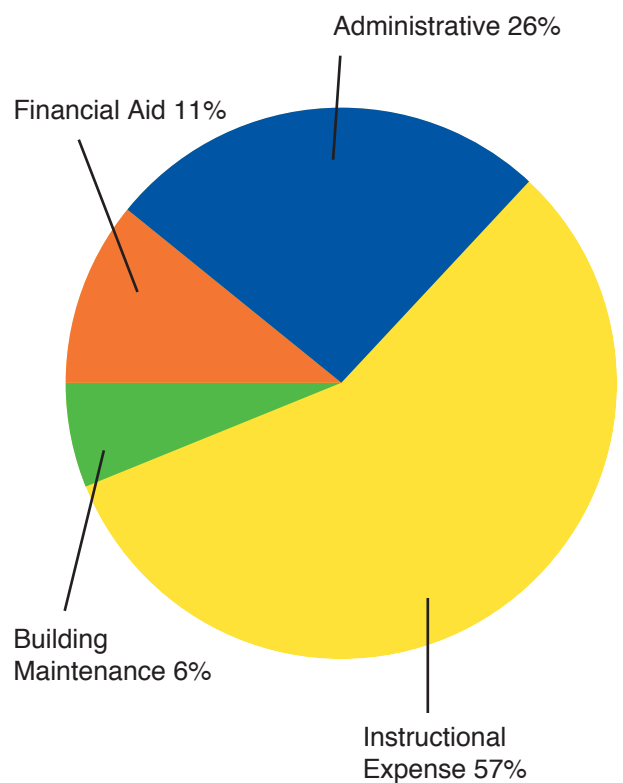
2019–2020 REVENUE



FUNDRAISING RESULTS 2019–2020

ANNUAL FUND	\$493,914
AUCTION	\$225,739
FALL FESTIVAL	\$9,697
<hr/>	
TOTAL RAISED	\$729,350

2019–2020 OPERATING EXPENSES



THE WSMS ANNUAL FUND

The 2019-2020 Annual Fund was an unprecedented accomplishment. We achieved the highest level of participation ever, with the support of over 94% of current families! Through the generosity of current and former parents, faculty and staff, grandparents and friends, foundations and matching gifts, we exceeded our goals. In a year that ended

in upheaval, and resulted in reduced enrollment beginning in the fall, that support has enabled us to continue to provide our superb education, and ensure the long-term stability of the school. We are deeply grateful for every contribution and the many ways our community supports us.



Our apologies if we have inadvertently left you off or mis-labeled your contribution ... this year has been tricky in many ways!

DONOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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WSMS The 80's: Forever Young—our 50th annual Auction—took place on Friday, January 31, 2020, and raised a whopping \$225,739 for the Financial Aid Fund. Over 350 WSMS teachers, staff, parents and friends came together, dressed as they might have 30+ years ago. Hair was high and the fashion was loud! The Edison Ballroom was taken back to a time when balloon arches dominated at prom, and Rubik's Cubes were all the rage. Guests were surprised with a flash mob performance, led by Katherine Schneider, to kick off the Live Auction portion of the program. The live band crushed it, covering music from the '80s, the DJ was rad, and the dance party was totally awesome! The live program was complemented by a Silent Mobile Auction on event night, and a weeklong Online Auction open to the WSMS community.

We are deeply grateful to our Auction co-chairs—Shaan Kandawalla, Lilian Kim, Liz Martorella, Kurt Miller and Christina Wang—and the talented and enthusiastic parent body who worked tirelessly to create this amazing event: from designing auction packages to making sure everything worked that night! We thank our teachers who worked with our children to come up with such special class projects. And, of course, we thank our generous donors and prize winners!

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A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Each fall our Parents Association (PA) hits the ground running! Returning parents take the lead and warmly encourage new families to get involved. The PA provides the best balance of tried-and-true activities with openness to creative new ideas. Some are just for fun, some are for fundraising and fun, and all are great ways to forge new and lasting friendships while making a difference.

Thank you to the 2019–2020 PA Co-Chairs Mary Pat Dowhy and Gillian Weindling for their inspirational leadership, and to each and every one of the names listed below who devoted precious time to make this a wonderful year for families and children. Seeing the WSMS community come together on so many occasions is a reminder of just how unique our school community is.

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2020

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