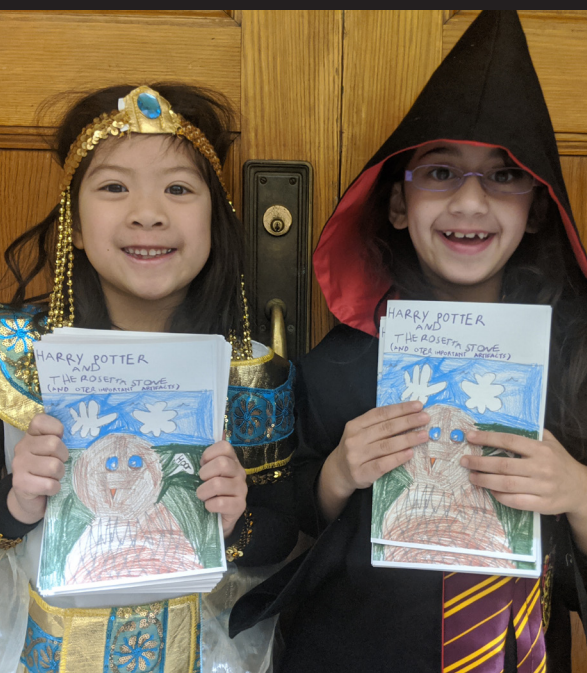


THE MONTESSORIAN

SPRING 2020



THE MONTESSORI
IMPACT

Three Generations 1
Our Ultimate Passion 3
How We Grow Together 4
The Montessaurus 5

THREE GENERATIONS AND THE QUEST FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

by Nicholas A. Love, NNM staff

Some memories are simply... special. Moments of fun filled with the sweet laughter of friends and family. As grownups, we want to bring our children into those same incredible spaces that just feel like home.

Long-time Near Northers Willie Cade and Bliss Browne will tell you that our school, in so many ways, elicits those special memories — powerful experiences of community, joy, respect, and belonging:

- Willie Cade, who is the parent of Sarah '96, Elise '99, Amy '00, and Paul '03, is also the grandparent of 3-6 student Grace '30.
- Bliss Browne, who is the parent of Justin '95, Caroline '97, and Elizabeth '99, is also the grandparent of toddler student Eliza '30 and 3-6 student Sophia '28.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN



Sarah '96 (top left), Elise '99 (top right), Amy '00 (bottom left), and Paul '03 (bottom right) in their NNM class photos from the 1992-93 school year.

Bliss employed a serious and measured selection process when it came to schooling for her little ones. So attendance at Near North was by no means an accident.

“Choosing the best educational context for a given child is one of the most important choices a parent can make,” Bliss explains. “I was eager to find a school where children loved to learn, and that educated students of varying abilities and interests in a way which benefited all students, encouraged participation by all, and ensured everyone was respected.”

For Willie and Carol, it was about giving their children the kind of opportunities Willie didn't get himself. “The rows and rows of desks” were not conducive to the kind of learning environment his children needed. Willie was initially reticent

“FOR ME, ESPECIALLY WITH GRACE, IT'S SO MUCH FUN TO ACTIVELY BE IN THE COMMUNITY.”

—WILLIE CADE, GRANDPARENT



Willie and his 3-6 granddaughter Grace laughing together one afternoon on the stairs near her classroom.

Justin '95 (top left), Caroline '97 (middle left), and Elizabeth '99 (bottom left) in their class photos from the 1992-93 school year. Bliss proudly displays a gingerbread house with her eldest NNM grandchild, Sophia.

about Montessori, and it was Carol who dragged him along, knowing the value that a Montessori education could provide their children. But Willie quickly became a convert.

"I remember very distinctly coming to a coffee," Willie recalls. "Yeah, the coffee and the conversation were fine, but when we went on a tour: I wish I could remember the name of the child, but he was explaining the work to me, explaining to a 30 year old man with poise and ease what he was doing — oh, I want that for my child."

Bliss remembers clearly the kind of work that young student was explaining to Willie, and was equally impressed with the "follow the child" philosophy so clearly displayed in the classrooms: "Life in its interesting diversity and depth was the focus of attention in the room, not the adults present. Children knew that classmates had different abilities, interests, personalities and work speeds. Those who had already learned a lesson increased their mastery by teaching it to others."

A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

The Montessori saying "follow the child," in this singular form is not intended to communicate uniformity among students. On the contrary, openness and affirming attitudes towards children with all kinds of backgrounds is foundational to the Montessori philosophy and the aspirations of the school.

"NNM excelled at cultivating curiosity, initiative, and a culture of respect. Building an inclusive culture of respect included teaching all children to see and affirm each other's unique strengths, interests, and abilities," Bliss shares.

Willie points to some of the learning challenges his grandfather faced in school and the workarounds and adaptations that he had to put into place in his own life in order to make it to the finish line of his education. Seeing the value that a Montessori environment has in children with learning differences, he is thrilled to see "generations of people who are nurtured" at our school. "For me, that's what's really happened for my kids here at Near North."

NEXT GENERATION IN TODAY'S COMMUNITY

"It's such fun to be able to see the work and investment we've put in to having our children here come to fruition," explains



"WHAT A BLESSING YOU HAVE BEEN AND ARE TO THREE GENERATIONS OF OUR FAMILY!"

—BLISS BROWNE, GRANDPARENT

Willie about his life as a Near North grandparent. "For me, especially with Grace, it's so much fun to actively be in the community. When our kids were growing up, I wasn't nearly as present in the school as I get to be now."

"It is small wonder that our three children credit NNM with forming in them a holistic understanding of human experience and a sense of ease in any community setting.... What a blessing you have been and are to three generations of our family!" Bliss says of the Near North community.

Willie takes a moment to reflect and dream about all the good he has seen come from Near North and the potential the school continues to carry within its walls: "A very exciting time in my future is when my great grandchildren get to go

here! —and, my God, can you imagine what it will look like?”

NEW HEIGHTS

Willie's excited dreams for the Near North of tomorrow are grounded firmly in the reality he and Bliss experienced as parents.

Bliss recalls how “the school successfully expanded from being a Montessori preschool and kindergarten to an 18-month through 14-year-old elementary school, and moved from a rented building on Chicago Avenue into its own permanent home on Division Street. We successfully led our first capital campaign and raised funds to establish the school's first endowment.”

Often growth can mean change and transformation, but for Near North it looks more like maturing and deepening our commitment to a consistent Montessori identity, guided by a devoted Montessori community.

“Is it as good as when we were there? Actually, it's better,” asserts Willie of the quality and character of the education at Near North. “The work that families have done, it's just made the school better and better and better. That holy grail of continuous improvement. People look and see what's the next thing to do, and its working. It's working marvelously here.”

In Bliss' estimation, Near North has maintained its course and flight path as the school has moved into a higher altitude.

“When our oldest granddaughter entered NNM four years ago I was thrilled at what a thriving, engaged school it was and how it had developed into such a stunning, thoughtfully designed campus. The level of parent and alumni support was so exciting! Yes, I was observing a new level of Montessoaring!”

OUR ULTIMATE PASSION AND LIFE-LONG TASK

by Nicholas A. Love, NNM staff



Interested in the nuances of baking, the joy of handmade sewing, encouraging your child's acting career, or diving into longform improv? At Near North, you now have the chance to participate in a community of co-learning with parent-led parent education sessions.

Here, we've always encouraged our students to take risks throughout the learning process on their way to mastery. The process of self-discovery, iteration, and experimentation all contribute to that sought-after love of learning.

This school culture was never intended to stop with our students, but include our parents ongoing growth. You've seen this in our commitment to providing teacher-based parent education. Now we've invited parents to step in to share with their peers from their areas of strength, cultivated by their own personal interest and investment.

For NNM parent Kathy Beymer of MerrimentDesign.com, it's about sharing generational skills with her extended Near North family: “I'm really excited to help teach sewing to the community. My mom taught me how to sew when I was little, and I like the idea of passing her skills along.”

Opportunities for growth guide all of us down the road of discovery, bit by bit, as we reach our own inner potential.

These new opportunities are now possible because of new spaces like a bright and open community room and professional teaching kitchen. Likewise, the resources



inherently life-long. And as the world we live in is constantly changing and evolving, navigating the world requires adaptability and a willingness to learn and change,” shares parent education volunteer Rachel Iannantuoni. “I love that NNM is supporting our entire community by encouraging life-long learning.”

provided by our recently launched Montessori Studio at 1510 W. Division has unlocked additional chances for Montessori-inspired continuous learning beyond the walls of Near North to friends, relatives, and those living in and around the neighborhoods surrounding our school.

Infant massage, prenatal classes, and childhood anxiety presentations allow for the sharing of our combined Near North knowledge and expertise with those who are not directly involved in our daily Montessori education. As parents share their mastery with other parents, we look to share our mastery with the broader community who are interested in pursuing continuous learning alongside us.

“If our ultimate task as humans is to grow — spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically — then the task is



LOOKING TO JUMPSTART YOUR OWN LIFELONG LEARNING CLASS AT NEAR NORTH? REACH OUT TO PROGRAMS DIRECTOR KANDYCE WOODS BY EMAILING [KWOODS@NNMS.ORG](mailto:kwoods@nnms.org)

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: GROWING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

by Nicholas A. Love & Lauren Collins, NNM staff

In just one quarter of a year, over 100 parents have been actively engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) education opportunities here at Near North.

A regular stream of NNM families have taken advantage of the many DEI education offerings these last several months. Among them were two sessions of Courageous Conversations — one for all ages, and one for preschoolers (a presentation on the research and evidence of bias and perceptions of difference in early childhood and how to have proactive, age-sensitive conversations with children ages 2 through 6 years old), the important discussions happening at regularly scheduled Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion meetings, and the AWARE parent weekend — and they are open to all parents, by the way!

Diversity Director Lauren Collins explains that she’s thrilled to see so many different faces leaning into these opportunities

to learn and grow in ways that encourage substantive changes in the lives of our families. She’s celebrating these conversation leaders in our community, and wants them to understand the significance of their active commitment. “I want those parents to feel seen and appreciated,” she explains, “because this work belongs to all of us, and each of us has a part to play in creating the equitable and inclusive community all of our children deserve.”

“I HAVE BEEN TELLING AS MANY PEOPLE AS I CAN TO ATTEND THE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MEETINGS. ANYONE WHO ATTENDS WILL WALK AWAY WITH A LOT TO THINK ABOUT AND WILL BE INSPIRED TO DO MORE...”

—LAUREN FISCHER, PARENT

Lauren Fischer, one of the parent attendees shares why it’s so important to encourage everyone who is stepping into these conversations: “There is so much to learn, and these conversations are not easy to have. People don’t know how to talk about race, and we need to force the issue and provide our community with tools to have these conversations and, importantly, to understand other people’s perspectives. We grow as a community by doing this.”

ONE WAY YOU CAN GROW INTO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

> Save the date for the One Book, One Near North Discussion on April 21.

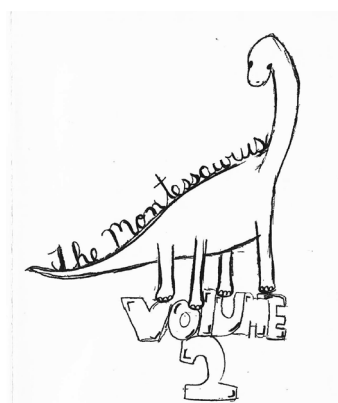
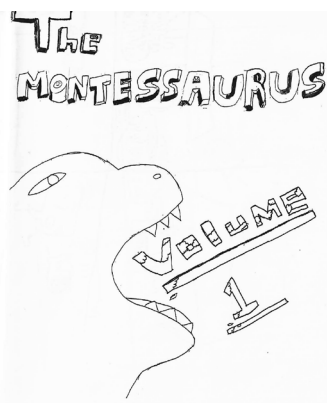
FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE: THE MONTESSAURUS

by Heba Kamel, NNM parent

A box covered in dinosaurs has made its way to the surface of Daniel's already active desktop in the Near North Library. With the constant flow of curious children seeking knowledge of the human skeletal system, typing away at their Cosmic Autobiographies, and escaping into the latest edition of their favorite graphic novel series, it might go unnoticed. But what ought not go unrecognized about its contents is the thoughtful and thought-provoking work of eight 9 to 12 students who make up the student magazine, *The Montessaurus*. With the help of Art Director, Annie Stone, and the donation of professional-quality magazine paper from the last holdout of now defunct printing presses at Printer's Row, the cohort of Omar Abughazaleh, Sophia Andron, Rheyia Ciesla, Julian Fischer, Jack Kolecke, Raffi Lawson, Amelia Power, and Jane Shapiro has taken it upon themselves to bring their fellow students "whatever we see that's worth commenting on, worth educating our community about."

Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, the group from among the four homerooms has been gathering on Thursday afternoons in an optional self-publishing class to create the magazine wholly from scratch. What originated last year as *The NNMS Times*, a newspaper that collected submissions across the student body and answered an advice column titled *The Wise Owl*, has evolved into a zine in an effort to better utilize the resources and abilities of its members and avoid the constraints of form and regular circulation put upon a newspaper. The students of *The Montessaurus* put their academic skills to work and exemplify this year's hot topic of Grace and Courtesy by delineating primary roles such as tracking attendance, reporting, editing, layout, horoscope writing, artwork, and opinion pieces, among others. And when it comes to writing YANA – short for You Are Not Alone – to replace *The Wise Owl*, the group teams up to offer thoughtful, empathetic words of advice. Through this, Annie claims to "see progress because I have less responsibility. They have slowly taken over, and are making more decisions as a group."

Drawing these diverse students together is a shared interest in the activity itself. "We have a structure; but it's not super tight: we can be more free with our work." They cite the interactions and collaboration in addition to the trust they give to and take from each other as the lynchpins of their success. As one student put it, "this is a choice... we're really interested in the things we do here, which raises the level



of what we create." Each new edition exemplifies the tenets of Montessori pedagogy that require meaningful work to balance self-motivation and community-centricity by using their individual talents and chosen forms to discuss the social issues, topics of conversation and concern, and the "life at Near North" that interest their readers. Self-publishing *The Montessaurus* has transformed itself into more of a project than a class because, as it was so aptly said, creating it "is, like, my job." And reading it is our pleasure.

"WE WRITE ABOUT BASICALLY WHATEVER WE SEE THAT'S WORTH COMMENTING ON, WORTH EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY ABOUT. THIS WHOLE THING IS REALLY COMMUNITY ORIENTED. WE WRITE WHAT WE WANT TO WRITE, BUT WE ALSO WRITE WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR."

—JANE, 9-12 MONTESSAURUS WRITER



*The student authors of *The Montessaurus*, who represent several different 9-12 classrooms, have bonded over their shared passion of self-publishing.*

Jackson Heinlein-Preseault is a breakout star swimmer and 8th grader at NNM. His latest accolades include winning multiple individual Illinois State Championships. This summer, Jackson would compete in the 200 Free, 200 Fly and 100 Fly, earning himself 7 individual medals at the state championships; 3 gold, 2 silver, 2 bronze.

Leading up to his recent wins, and over the past three years, Jackson has landed on the top ten podium at the Illinois Age Group State Championships 39 times, including eight individual gold medals — no small feat!

With so many races under his belt, we wonder what exactly keeps Jackson going, practice after practice and competition after competition and lead him to this place of dedication and victory?

According to Jackson, “I’m a member of the Chicago Wolfpack Aquatic Club now, but I found my love for competitive swimming at NNMS. There’s been a lot of stroke refining and countless meters swum since those Near North days, but I definitely remember plowing my way down the pool back then thinking: I gotta finish this race no matter what... and that crazy drive has really stuck with me.”

From the NNM Community and Nate Lyons, Athletics & PE Director, we are all so proud of Jackson’s accomplishments.

Nate adds on, “I know how hard he works and how dedicated he is to the sport, which makes us even more proud to have a student like Jackson as a part of our school!”

Jackson (bottom) readies himself for the start of one of his award-winning races, and (top) displays his Illinois State Championship medals.



NNM STUDENTS

Student feature by Micaeh Johnson, NNM parent

“I’M FORTUNATE TO STILL BE IN CONTACT WITH TEACHERS AND CLASSMATES FROM MY TIME AT NEAR NORTH.”

—ALEX LO ‘95

After over 30 years since its opening, Near North Montessori would graduate alumni Alex Lo in the class of 1995. It would be no surprise that a treasured alum like Alex would go on to work for an innovative and creative company like Google. After working in software for 15 years, Alex would equate working for Google to the liking of seeing what’s behind the curtain of a magic show.

Alex believes the “open-space approach” helped him develop self-starting and continuous-learning skills in technology that would support his successes with such projects like Google Assistant and the Google Cloud Platform. Even where the boundaries of the problem are uncertain, he found that the foundational learning of his Montessori education, like being exposed to computer programming with the likes of Lego robotics, help him solve even ill-defined problems.

Alex does not take for granted the extension of his own home to Near North Montessori and underscores the significance of growing up in such a supportive and open environment. “I’m fortunate to still be in contact with teachers and classmates from my time at NNM,” says Alex.

Recognizing how NNM evolved him, Alex’s son Kepler is now enrolled at a Montessori school in New York where he is growing in language and social skills and enjoys regular visits to the local community garden.

Alex enjoys family visits to Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY, with his spouse Hanah and children Ada and Kepler.



Alum feature by Micaeh Johnson, NNM parent

NNM ALUMNI

THE MONTESSORIAN

1434 WEST DIVISION STREET | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS | 60642-3778

Welcome home!



UPDATE YOUR CONTACT
INFORMATION BY VISITING
NNMS.ORG/ALUMNI

Our welcome mat has been out since 1963. So no matter what year you graduated, you can always call Near North home.

You'll be amazed by how much has changed. You'll be even more amazed by how much has stayed the same.

You'll find the same heart, same commitment, and many of the same helping hands that guided you toward your inherent potential.

NEAR NORTH
NM
MONTESSORI

A PUBLICATION OF NEAR NORTH MONTESSORI SCHOOL,
PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, STUDENTS, & FRIENDS OF NNM.
Thank you to all the hands that contributed to these stories.

writers & editors **MICAH JOHNSON & HEBA KAMEL, PARENTS** and **LAUREN COLLINS & NICHOLAS A. LOVE, STAFF**
designers **KYO YAMANAKA, PARENT** and **NICHOLAS A. LOVE, STAFF** | cover art **KYO YAMANAKAE, PARENT**