Dear Parents and Families,

Typically I write to you through my newsletters and the information is all about the happenings here at Oak Grove; events in the classrooms, social events, fundraisers, and other newsy tid-bits that I love to share.

Today I want to update you all on things that we have been developing and implementing in the classrooms throughout this school year. These are incentives that are academically based and impact and compliment the curriculum.

Earlier this year at a PA meeting, I did a presentation on the fundamental differences between Montessori and Traditional education. If you go into our classrooms, there are many things that stand out as unique to Montessori. There is a fluidity to the classroom that is amazing to watch. There is a sense of excitement from the kids about learning. The lessons are unique. There is constant mentoring and supporting between the children. We welcome parents to make appointments to come and to observe in the classroom, it truly is amazing to be a part of (and difficult to explain and describe).

With that said, I want to update everyone on additions to the classrooms and the layering of different teachings that we do to ensure the success of your children. Although it does not match up completely to a Montessori strict curriculum, we have added what we feel is necessary to the curriculum and to the classrooms to prepare all of our students for life after Oak Grove.

There are many things that we currently do, and there are some things that are in the implementing process. Each week the classroom team of teachers meets. They spend that time reviewing the work that has happened in that particular classroom over the last stretch. They go over each of their notes and share all their information on the student’s academic progress and any other social or emotional issues that have shown up. It is a time for the classrooms to focus on the trends, the progress, the struggles and challenges that each child in that classroom is experiencing. They pool their resources and their knowledge and they determine any needed strategies that could or should be implemented into that child’s day. This is a very important meeting for each classroom and it happens every week. Also, our entire team of teachers and staff meet once a week. This is a time to build the bridges between the three classrooms. It is a time to focus on children that will be transitioning. It is also a time to share even more information and resources.

For the teachers and for the parents it is important that we have appropriate academic measuring sticks. We need to be able to accurately determine where a child is currently, to assure that they will be where they need to be when they leave here. This year we hired Bub as the full time Learning Support Coordinator. She spends her time in all three classrooms and is a part of all three team meetings that happen weekly. Early in this year, Bub was trained on the DRA2 (Developmental Reading Assessment). This is an assessment tool widely used to accurately determine at what level a child is reading. It measures fluency of reading, comprehension and accuracy. The results of this assessment then guide our teachers in determining how the child learns, what the teacher needs to focus on with that child, how to progress, and with what strategies to progress with. Every child in the school has been assessed by Bub and the DRA2 at least once this year. Each child will be assessed a second time before the year’s
end. In between the assessments, the teachers keep "running records" of the child's progress and determine when a strategy change is needed. Many, many reading tools are used in each classroom, some that can be done on-line, at home, when additional practice is needed.

If there is a struggle, one of the first things that the teacher will do is to rule out a vision or a hearing issue, or any other non academic issue that may be preventing the progress. Bub has worked with all the children in the school-not just with reading, but in any area that has become a road block for the child. It could be academic or it could also be a problem of time management and organization. Each classroom, based on age and grade, has materials in the rooms that take the child through the needed curriculum in a systematic manner. Whether it is math, reading or cultural studies, the material is designed in a very specific sequence. This is done to ensure that we are moving at the right pace with each child. The beauty of the Montessori model is that each child can move at his/her own pace.

The teachers in each classroom are very aware of what the common core standards are in each grade in the public schools. These core standards are used here as a guide and a check point for us. Again, we are very aware of the need to measure the child's progress. The Montessori model allows us to measure the progress without interfering with the growth and development of the whole child. Our measuring sticks are intended to make a child feel strong and successful, not judged and anxious.

In June the teachers and staff at Oak Grove will be trained on a new program that tracks and helps us to see the learning style of each child. It is called Montessori Records Express. This is a Montessori based software program that has been successfully used in schools similar to ours. The teacher has the ability to record information in real time, as the child navigates through each day. It will enable us to produce needed reports and share academic information easily. All of us are very excited for this change that will be fully implemented by our next school year.

The new technologies, that have come out in the recent past, in the world of education, are very exciting. We will continue to grow our current uses of technology (used by teachers and by students) and introduce new ones next year too. I will be purchasing many tablets that will be brought to use in the classrooms in many different ways. The tablet will never replace the "real materials" used in the Montessori classroom, but we are learning lots of ways that the tablet can compliment these materials. It is exciting. And we are embracing the potential.

I am working with a reading specialist from Mansfield who is proving to be incredibly helpful as we learn and train on the new tools and technologies that are emerging in education. I am thrilled to have her as a consultant and available to us when we need added support.

As with anything here at Oak Grove, if you have any questions about the curriculum or any academic strategy that you see or hear about, please do not hesitate to come and ask me. I will do my best to keep everyone up to date on any changes and new things that we are doing and using in the classrooms. It is an amazing time to be involved in the world of education. We have so many options to offer our children. This works so nicely with the Montessori model. We can truly respect the learning needs and styles of our individual students.