

"Daddy, I want more challenging work."

I was elated to hear my 6 year-old begin to express, in her own words, such a strong desire to learn. Our commitment to nurturing intellectual curiosity was the original reason we had been intrigued by a Montessori education when she was only an infant. It was 5 years ago that I attended a Friday morning parents' session on creating a prepared environment at home. After that session, lead by a teacher who was then on maternity leave (Ashley), I knew this was the school for my children - and me.

Fast-forward several years . . . Having completed the Primary cycle with Betsy and Mercy, we saw our daughter blossom socially, emotionally and academically, especially in her last year. There were many meaningful and memorable moments but one really made a lasting impression on me. After our daughter conceived the idea of a "Booc fair for charitee" (UNICEF), Betsy and Mary Zeman had her write a proposal and then steadfastly encouraged her and her classmates to turn the idea from concept to reality. I was able to watch the School and its staff develop - in a very tangible and practical manner - my daughter's capacity for self-expression, collaboration, and self-confidence through charitable and entrepreneurial success. I deeply value how the Montessori education makes learning experiential. I wish my own education had been so practical and relevant.

By this time, we knew that we had found a school that could be our partner in educating the whole child. As such, we enrolled our younger son in Primary, too. However, given a well-intentioned desire to save for longer-term educational goals, we made a financially-driven and gut-wrenching decision to enroll our daughter in our highly-regarded suburban public school for her elementary years. We knew there could be significant differences as even the best of conventional schools can be more teacher-centric and focused on standardized test achievement rather than nurturing a love of learning for its own sake.

Soon enough, our daughter began to say that her new school was "boring" and increasingly repeated her request for "more challenging work" (her words). Concerned that her carefully nurtured "love of learning" was at risk, we resolved to undertake a thorough reassessment of our local school, other independent alternatives, and The Montessori School. Sensitive to moving our daughter excessively, we

aimed to make a decision that would be sustainable for the long-term. In the end, we were reminded of three important conclusions:

- (1) our local public school was led and staffed by truly dedicated people delivering excellent results against conventional measures;
- (2) The Montessori pedagogy of educating the "whole child" in a child-centric and experiential model is fundamentally unique and structurally different; and
- (3) The Montessori School was the most likely environment to realize our goals of a personalized, first-rate academic experience and the continued development of the learning-loving, whole child.

Our deeper review of the alternatives and, of course, our daughter's words, made our next decision obvious. We concluded that the financial sacrifices we would have to make elsewhere in our lives were necessary and appropriate. For us, risking that voracious love of learning was the cost we could not afford. My wife wrote to Dana and Mary Z: "Karina is coming home." And that is very much how we feel about the School, that it is an extension and continuation of all that we try to teach - intellectually and holistically - at home.

A current Montessori dad of three girls once said to me: "Every morning when I drop them off at (The Montessori) school, I feel really happy." I instantly and viscerally understood what he meant because that is precisely how I had felt before . . . and now feel again when I drop my two children off every morning. Our daughter, Karina is now back at the School in Lower El being observed and challenged by Stephane and Trista and our son, Kiran continues to thrive under the wise tutelage of Ashley and Fabi in Primary. We believe in the aspirations of the Montessori School and are grateful to once again be "all in."

We'd be happy to further discuss our educational journey with any current or new families wrestling with similar decisions.

All my best to you and your children,  
Kishore Rao