

WELCOME FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

On my first visit to Thacher Montessori School, I sat in the observation chair in a few classrooms over a range of age groups. Having headed other schools with similarly high values for experiential learning, I anticipated seeing lively individual engagement in learning, a certain buzz in the classroom, and a creative partnership between teachers and students. I saw all of that, and something more.

I witnessed our youngest students taking charge of their own learning by obtaining, using, and putting away materials in each classroom. I saw our oldest students working solo and in small groups on self-initiated projects that would stretch plenty of high schoolers. In all classes, I found lead guides and assistants alike observing students closely and subtly coaching children about next steps in their learning, whether they needed support through a stuck point or were ready for a next challenge. What amazes me still is the level of deep focus that students attain in their own learning while others around them are engaged in similar initiatives. In our first alumni panel about the transition to secondary school, for a series called “Thacher Lives,” one graduate said that a strength he carried away from here was the understanding that a school could be a community. He’s right. What I witness in Thacher’s classrooms is a learning community at work.

That learning community isn’t just for children. Staff members are hungry for their own growth: attending conferences; listening to outside speakers at a professional day or parent evening on site; hearing peers present breakthroughs and challenges in their work with children; learning from graduates and their parents in alumni panels how their efforts made a difference in others’ lives. Parents also learn along with their children: with 100 others at psychologist Larry Cohen’s playful parenting talk about his book, *The Opposite of Worry*; at a whole-school meeting, naming the qualities they want Thacher to nurture in their children as lead guides cite classroom practices that fuel those qualities; and reading school-supplied copies of Montessori parent Trevor Eissler’s book, *Montessori Madness*.



This, my first year as head of Thacher Montessori School, has been a learning year for me. I have been stretched to mesh my own great schooling experiences with this learning community’s inspired alignment of Montessori theory and practice. At times the exhilarating pace has rivaled the speed that our adolescent program students attain zooming down the Blue Hill Ski Area slopes across the street during their winter Friday class outings. I have never been more fully engaged in my work as a learning leader.

If you join this learning community, you can expect that your child, the staff, and you as parents will be challenged to learn in new ways. That is an exciting, sometimes daunting journey—but then, so is parenting these days! And what is the result of this intertwined learning? Another young graduate captured it in another panel this year: “At Thacher you are who you want to be, not who someone else wants you to be.” Come envision how community learning can unfold for you and your family at Thacher, and fasten those ski bindings. It’s going to be an exhilarating run.

Best,

Don Grace, Head of School