



Geist Montessori Academy  
*Public Charter School*

# Strategic Plan

## 2012-2017

*The Montessori Academy at Geist provides an academically and culturally rich educational environment that allows children to acquire knowledge in a non-competitive, individualized manner...and seeks to prepare a school environment that encourages joyful learning, and greater exploration of the community and the world.*

(Excerpt from the GMA charter mission statement)

Prepared by the Geist Montessori Academy Board of Directors

January 2012

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Academic Plans.....	03
Personnel Plans .....	05
Governance Plans.....	06
Enrollment Growth and Facility Expansion Plans.....	07
Community Impact Plans.....	08
Parent Survey Results.....	09
GMA Funding Realities.....	10
Enrollment Growth Plan Details.....	11
How Can Parents and PTO Help? .....	12

# ACADEMIC PLANS

As we embrace the Montessori educational philosophy and effectively implement a Montessori curriculum, our students will find joy in learning and will achieve academic excellence.

- **Protect students' uninterrupted work periods.** While ensuring our students have access to a well-rounded curriculum including art, music, physical education, technological training, and, when available, foreign language, we must ensure that students have plenty of opportunity for focused attention and self-directed learning that is meaningful and satisfying. Student academic growth requires such an environment.
- **Focus on, carefully monitor, and support student academic growth (in addition to academic proficiency).** GMA will aim beyond “proficiency.” Student proficiency (as measured by state assessment) is valuable and important, but GMA will assess 1) student *mastery* of concepts, and 2) students' achievement of academic growth targets (as measured by NWEA and state assessment). GMA will focus on moving its students up the academic curve, regardless of academic or social barriers.
- **Conduct school-wide evaluations of academic data to identify any systematic learning gaps and seek to address those gaps quickly.** The Board will continue to require the Head of School, as academic director, to review student academic performance on many measures and to report results to the Board and to teaching and support staff. The Head of School will be expected to develop, implement, and monitor solutions as needs are identified.
  - In particular, the Head of School has identified that GMA students are lagging in their 3rd-7<sup>th</sup> grade ISTEP+ scores for mathematics, when compared to their performance and growth in language arts. The Head of School has initiated several interventions (listed in the 2012 BSU OCS annual report) and will be expected to continue those interventions, monitor outcomes, and adjust as necessary.
- **Coordinate and integrate “specials” curriculum with classroom curriculum to enhance learning.** Montessori philosophy indicates, and traditional educational research confirms, that students retain information better when the student can make connections between pieces of information. In the coming years, GMA will work to coordinate the information introduced in “specials” with the information being studied in the classroom. Connections between history lessons, geography lessons, art lessons, music lessons, etc. will be encouraged.
- **Further develop a technology teaching plan to include measurable outcomes by grade level.** The Montessori methodology calls for students to practice and master essential life skills using “real” tools and methods as opposed to learning via “busywork.” In today's society, technology tools are essential to success in the community. As such, students at GMA are to be educated in the use of technology tools in the course of completing useful projects, and their mastery of such tools is to be evaluated.

- **Maintain “outdoor education” as a part of the curriculum for all learning levels.** Topics such as environmental awareness and protection, recycling, and agriculture will be established parts of student work. GMA will partner with local organizations to support the curriculum.
- **Incorporate career study into the Middle School program.** This addition supports the Montessori philosophy, stressing the need for young adults to explore the community, gain knowledge of their personal gifts, talents and abilities, and create a vision for their future in the world.

# PERSONNEL PLANS

GMA students will benefit as we ensure that school administrators and staff have necessary and appropriate training, particularly Montessori training, and as we assemble teams of professionals with diverse and complementary skill sets.

- **Hire a Director of Operations.** The Board has approved the addition of a Director of Operations to work with the Head of School to manage GMA (spring 2012). The change alleviates what has been an extreme workload for the Head of School and allows both administrators to focus on specific areas of organizational development.
- **Ensure the Head of School receives training in Montessori Administration.** The Board has approved funds for the HOS to complete a series of online courses in Montessori Administration.
- **Retain a Montessori Certified Instructional Leader.** This position is critical to the ongoing coaching and development of teaching staff, particularly while the number of certified teachers is relatively low. This position is to be maintained *at least* until the Head of School completes Montessori Administrative training and until the Board and Head of School agree that the staff and students can succeed in its absence.
- **Direct the Head of School to implement a compensation plan that rewards exemplary teaching, evident in part by outstanding student academic growth.** Planned salary increases in 2012-13 and 2013-14 (in step with growing enrollment revenue) will move GMA to a more marketable position.
- **Invest in Montessori certification training for teaching staff.** The initial goal is to ensure that GMA's kindergarten, lower elementary, and upper elementary each have at least one Montessori certified teacher. Teacher recruitment will focus on certified (and otherwise qualified) individuals. Appropriate comparable training at the MS level is to be accomplished as the middle school grows in enrollment and staffing. A realistic goal is for 50% of the teaching staff to be Montessori certified by the end of the 2016-2017 school year (when GMA is targeted to reach final staffing and enrollment levels.)
- **Instruct Head of School to pursue associate level membership with the American Montessori Society.**
- **Hire a part-time counselor and a part-time nurse.** The positions will be added for the 2015-16 school year as increased enrollment both allows and drives the need for the additional support staff.

# GOVERNANCE PLANS

The culture of Geist Montessori Academy will be a reflection of the work of the Board of Directors and the School Administrators. Together, we will foster an environment where staff and students love to work and learn.

- **Endeavor to recruit additional board members with specifically identified skill sets in order to alleviate undue stress on individual members, ensure continuity of governance, and bring joy into the governance process.**
- **Increase awareness of individual strengths amongst the governance team.**  
Annual assessments will be reviewed to inform role assignments.
- **Annually, one regular meeting of the Board will be held at the end of a school day, in lieu of a regular staff meeting.**
- **The board will establish a finance committee to assist in the oversight of the school's finances.**
- **The board and administrators will institute *Golden Bead Acknowledgments*.**  
Staff, parents and students will be invited to honor a staff member at any time for a *Golden Bead*, in recognition of a staff member's contribution to students' joyful learning. *Golden Beads* will be displayed at the school for all to celebrate.

# ENROLLMENT GROWTH AND FACILITY EXPANSION PLANS

We intend to grow GMA's enrollment to a maximum of about 400 students, allowing for long-term financial stability with a relatively small school culture. We are committed to adequate and functional facilities that allow for Montessori education. At the same time, we are committed to never allow facility costs to infringe on the provision of 1) appropriate and necessary staff training, 2) reasonable staffing levels, 3) Montessori and other learning materials, and 4) stable financial forecasts.

- **Continue the course of controlled enrollment growth.** Enrollment growth will naturally occur as we continue to enroll two classes of kindergartners each year and grow them through the school. Maximum enrollment is anticipated by the fall of 2016.
- **Enter a 5-year lease of the Montessori school building at 6633 W 900 N, McCordsville, IN (the former site of Geist Montessori Academy). This will constitute GMA's south campus.** As of fall 2012, the south campus will house Kindergarten, Kindergarten Enrichment, and lower elementary classrooms. The goal is to install playground equipment at the south campus prior to the start of the 2012-13 school year. Fund raising for this purpose may be warranted.
- **Maintain the upper elementary and middle school classrooms at 13942 E. 96<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 120, McCordsville, IN (the current site of Geist Montessori Academy). This will constitute GMA's north campus.** The goal is to purchase gym equipment in order to maintain a physical fitness program with limited space.
- **In the fall of 2014, launch a facility review and planning committee, headed by the Director of Operations and accountable to the Board of Directors. The committee is to include one board member and is to consult with the Head of School.** Based on actual enrollment and updated enrollment projections, the committee will be charged to evaluate facility needs and options at the end of the 5-year lease at the south campus (and the end of the 10 year lease at the north campus in 2020). The committee is to bring a facility recommendation to the board by the fall of 2015. Options to consider include:
  - Renovation and/or additional construction at either or both of the north and south campuses to continue to accommodate the school at the two sites.
  - Renovation and expansion at either of the two locations in order to accommodate all GMA students at one site.
  - Construction of a new, truly “Montessori” building at an entirely new location. (The Board does not anticipate this will be a viable option without an extensive capital campaign and/or private or public investment.)

# COMMUNITY IMPACT PLANS

Cooperation between area public and private providers of Montessori education will increase the likelihood of Indianapolis becoming a model for the proliferation of this unique and effective educational model. GMA will be an active participant in Indianapolis' education reform conversation.

- **The GMA board will recruit an ambassador from within GMA's community to actively participate in and represent GMA in UMSI (United Montessori Schools of Indiana).** UMSI's mission is to actively encourage, support and advocate toward *excellence* in Montessori Education, and to advocate for the *expansion* and future of Montessori education.
- **GMA will, whenever possible, coordinate efforts with other local Montessori schools in order to bring excellent Montessori training opportunities to this area.**
- **The GMA board will advocate for Indiana teacher education programs to initiate Montessori training at the undergraduate and graduate levels.**
- **The GMA board will assign one member to serve as its Charter School expert.** This particular board member will follow the work of the Indiana State legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Indiana Public Charter School Association, keep the board aware of pertinent developments, and advocate for the interests of area charter schools and GMA, in particular.

# PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

1. **What attracted you to Geist Montessori?** Please rank the following matters in order of their importance to you. (#1: most important to you; #4: least important; etc.)

#	QUESTION	Ranking
a.	Montessori approach	1.16
b.	Status as a charter school	3.39
c.	Location	3.43
d.	Quality of teachers	2.56
e.	Student to teacher/aide ratio	2.63
f.	Other _____	

2. **What matters most to you in the future?** Please rank the following matters in order of their importance to you. (#1: most important to you; #4: least important; etc.)

#	QUESTION	Ranking
a.	Better communication between school and home	3.88
b.	Emphasis on community building & conflict resolution	2.85
c.	Expanded or different facility	4.34
d.	Full Montessori accreditation	2.36
e.	ISTEP+ scores	4.65
f.	More full-time classroom assistants	2.94
g.	More music, art, world language, physical education	3.03
h.	More sports opportunities	5.69
i.	Other: _____	

3. **What would you like to see in GMA's facility?** Please rank the following matters in order of their importance to you. (#1: most important to you; #4: least important; etc.)

#	QUESTION	Ranking
a.	Additional outdoor/green space	1.76
b.	Expanded facility	3.14
c.	Gymnasium	3.34
d.	Larger classrooms	3.33
e.	New facility	4.31
f.	Smaller class sizes	2.29
g.	OTHER: _____	

4. If GMA were to move to a new building, how much farther would you be willing to travel?

0 miles	2 – 5 miles	6-10 miles	11-15 miles
1	19	13	4

5. If GMA were to have two locations (a KG/lower elementary building and an upper elementary/MS building, for instance), would you travel up to 5 miles to drop off siblings at each location?

Yes 20 No 5 Does not apply to me 11

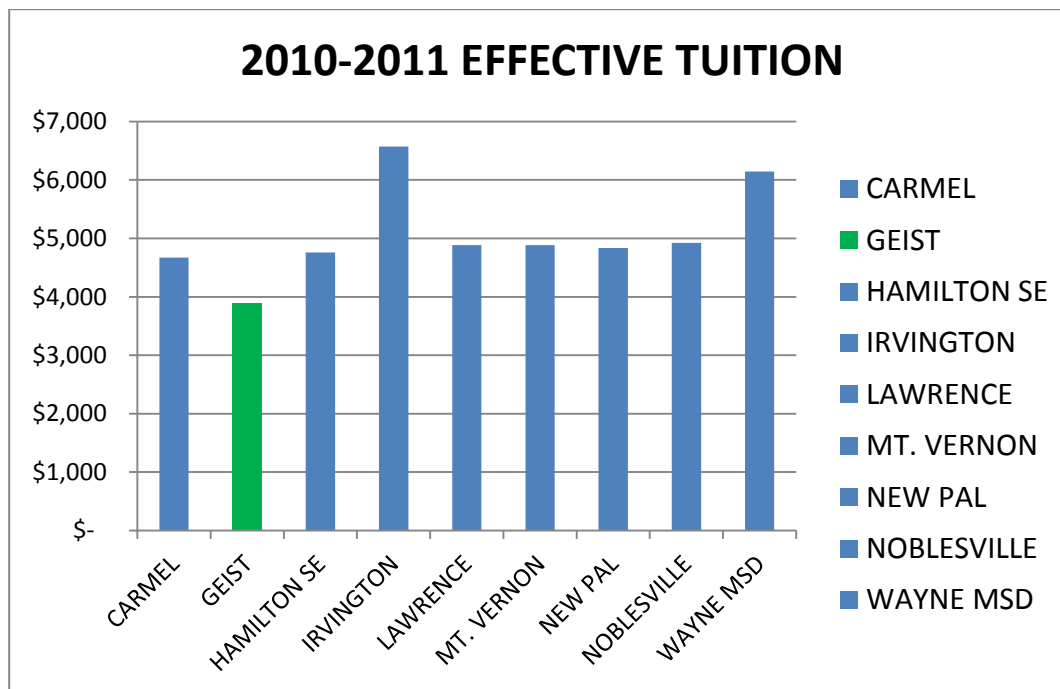
# GMA FUNDING REALITIES

**Charter schools face a unique funding issue.** Whereas traditional public schools access three funds (operations, transportation, and facilities), charter public schools access only one fund (operations). As a result, a charter school's transportation and facility costs must be covered by the operations budget. In addition, **GMA's per pupil funding is lower than most other school corporations in the area, based on school location and student demographics.** The bottom line is that GMA must be extremely conservative in its expenditures. The bulk of spending must be used to strengthen the Montessori program.

## Area Per Pupil Funding

	2010-11 Tuition	2010-11 Difference	2010-11 Effective Tuition*	2010-11 Effective Difference	GMA Budget Impact
CARMEL	\$4669	\$(54)	\$4669	\$773	\$194,676
GMA	\$4723	--	\$3896	--	--
HSE	\$4757	\$34	\$4757	\$861	\$216,852
IRVINGTON	\$6571	\$1848	\$6571	\$2675	\$673,980
LAWRENCE	\$4884	\$161	\$4884	\$988	\$248,856
MT. VERNON	\$4884	\$161	\$4884	\$988	\$248,856
NEW PAL	\$4833	\$110	\$4833	\$937	\$236,004
NOBLESVILLE	\$4922	\$199	\$4922	\$1026	\$258,432

\*Effective Tuition incorporates the lack of facilities funding for charter schools. A percentage of GMA's per pupil funding goes toward facilities, in contrast to traditional public schools.



All data from IDOE

# ENROLLMENT GROWTH PLAN DETAILS

For GMA to be financially viable long term, enrollment needs to reach approximately 400 students. The following chart outlines the planned growth to achieve that target.

Year	Student Count	Additional Classrooms	Total Classrooms
2011-12	252	4 <sup>th</sup> LE	9
2012-13	290	5 <sup>th</sup> LE and 3 <sup>rd</sup> UE	11
2013-14	335	4 <sup>th</sup> UE and 2 <sup>nd</sup> MS	13
2014-15	365	5 <sup>th</sup> UE	14
2015-16	393	3 <sup>rd</sup> MS	15
2016-17	<b>414</b>	Middle <i>Teacher</i>	<b>15</b>

## Final School Configuration

Level	# of Classrooms
Kindergarten and Enrichment	2
Lower Elementary	5
Upper Elementary	5
Middle School*	3
<b>Total K-8</b>	<b>15</b>

\*The Middle School will employ 4 teachers for 3 classrooms by 2016-17. If future facility expansion allows, the Middle School will be divided into 4 classrooms.

## HOW CAN PARENTS AND PTO HELP?

- Paint and mulch at the south campus over the summer of 2012 (and ongoing, as needed)
- Raise money for playground and gym equipment
- Cut and laminate materials for new classrooms
- Keep volunteering in the classrooms
- Send Golden Beads to school