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Type of School/Organization Submitting Entry:
School District: Over 25,000

Entry Category:
Marketing Communication

Please consider this entry for a Golden Achievement Award!
The area’s newest is just around the corner

Diverse community, shared vision, exceptional education. That is the Garland Independent School District. Serving more than 57,000 students across three cities—Garland, Rowlett and Sachse—GISD ranks as the 13th-largest public school district in Texas. But, enrollment trends have been on the decline. And, the amount of charter or private schools in the area has continued to increase.

GISD offers many opportunities that set it apart from the competition. In addition to more than 200 Career and Technical Education courses and iPads for all high school students, the district boasts several magnet programs. Some focus on arts or innovation while others provide enriched education in specific subjects. Some even allow students to become multilingual. All aim to transform teaching and learning to meet the needs of 21st-century students, preparing them for success after graduation.

In 2015, GISD’s Division of Communications and Public Relations was tasked with promoting an exciting new option for district families and the community—Montessori at Herfurth and Luna elementaries. Staff members took this as a chance to sell the district itself, creating a variety of marketing pieces to inspire interest. These ranged from brochures to bracelets to bus wraps and targeted students, parents, businesses and community members.

Following a yearlong communication campaign, GISD’s Montessori magnet program received more than 500 applications for just 264 seats. In 2016-17, its staggered rollout launched with 11 classes between the two campuses. This proved the most successful start of any GISD magnet program. District departments and other campuses now seek to replicate the buzz Montessori marketing created.

Research

Research

With 10 specialized magnet programs, Garland ISD offers families the unique opportunity to customize education. Most other districts require students to attend the school closest to home, but GISD allows them to attend any campus in the district. This opportunity is called Choice of School and it meets individual interests and learning styles.

In 2013-14, specialized programs included classical studies, math, science and technology, Mandarin Chinese immersion, enrichment academies, Spanish dual-language, performing arts, a collegiate academy, global business and International Baccalaureate. All magnet campuses, however, were located in Garland. During that school year, the district enlisted the help of more than 1,000 students, staff, parents, business leaders, clergy members and city officials to develop a Strategic Plan that would guide decision-making for the next five years. The resulting document lists seven goals and specific action steps to reach it.

Goal 1 states, “We will provide a secure learning environment that allows active student participation and opportunities to collaborate through relevant content and instruction.” A corresponding action step directs GISD to “Initiate discussion and research on expanding the academies/magnets at the elementary and middle school level.”
This directive led to a Magnet Interest Survey in 2014-15 where the district polled its families and the community to find out what might appeal to them most. Survey choices included an all-male or all-female school, STEM academy, performing arts magnet, etc. More than 1,100 responses were received and among the top-ranking results, Montessori proved to be most cost-effective.

District research also showed several potential students in the area attending private Montessori campuses. And, GISD’s Herfurth and Luna elementary schools appeared to have room for growth. These campuses, located in Rowlett and near the Sachse border, promised to extend magnet offerings across district boundaries as well.

Armed with a potential new magnet offering, Herfurth and Luna principals, as well as key district administrators, gathered additional information about launching a public Montessori school. They also toured Dealey Montessori Vanguard and International Academy in Dallas ISD and Daggett and Como Montessori schools in Fort Worth ISD.

**Analysis**

Following presentations to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees, Montessori at Herfurth and Luna was given the green light in spring 2015. A committee was then formed to plan a 2016-17 launch.

GISD’s Montessori Planning Committee brought representatives from every district department together to ensure buy-in and that questions could be answered quickly. Meeting every other week, the group developed a $1.3 million implementation budget with $50,000 allocated for marketing. Members also determined the staggered rollout timeline, application and selection process, and more.

Before communication could begin, principals needed to first ensure they had enough teachers for the program. Montessori requires extensive training to not only know the unique learning materials and activities, but also how to prepare each day’s classroom environment. Montessori teachers observe all students’ skill levels and interests, providing opportunities to build on knowledge already gained and guiding each toward advancement. If current staff at Herfurth and Luna did not want to participate in Montessori, they were allowed to transfer campuses. Communications then created a special flier to recruit new teachers.

Relishing this opportunity to sell the new program, Communications also wanted to showcase the district and potentially attract students who attend outside schools. Staff members faced the challenge that people may not even know what Montessori is or how the specialized program differs from traditional education. And, since magnets require applications and eligibility testing, more than 260 prospective students had to express interest and qualify to fill first-year seats.

Believing in the old saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” Communications organized three photo shoots during the summer. The first captured Montessori classrooms at an area training center. The second captured the faces of GISD’s upcoming campaign and the third some skills-building activities. A logo was then created, along with letterhead, email signature art and notecards, for branding purposes. Anticipated FAQs were also developed into English and Spanish fliers that could be placed in school offices.

**Communication**

The Montessori communication plan officially kicked off at the beginning of 2015-16 with a press release and web page. The online presence featured scrolling photos with captions that explained the unique Montessori learning environment. A resources section also provided links to general Montessori information and accordion-style FAQs mirrored answers from the printed fliers. This page differed from all other magnet programs, taking a more image-driven, graphic approach. Communications submitted the press release to local news outlets and also published it as a news story on the district website.
Informing current families was a priority because Montessori brought 3-year-old seats to the district and also offered prekindergarten to students not traditionally serviced. Both required fees from $237.50-$475. And, as the rollout continued, Herfurth and Luna students faced a decision to take advantage of the program or attend a different school.

For this reason, selling the program was also very important. Several promotional pieces were created, promising a private school education at a public school price. An out-of-the-box brochure used Montessori as an acronym to describe its benefits with accompanying pictures illustrating each letter. A business card and T-shirt also helped spread the word throughout the community, along with yard signs and bus wraps. Roll-up banners were placed in each school as well. But, the selling did not stop there.

Digital content complemented this array of printed materials. It included additional website stories and social media posts, as well as slides for the district’s television channel and football stadium video boards.

Several presentations gave principals the opportunity to promote themselves. Every year, GISD hosts a Magnet Fair for families to learn about all available programs in one place. Communications helped the Montessori campuses put together a branded and appealing booth. Those who visited received a “We Grow the Whole Child” cup to plant and take home a seedling. Pencils, bracelets and temporary tattoos also proved to be big hits. Additionally, on Thursdays, prospective families could tour model classrooms. A special invitation was created for this, as well as ones for campus steering committees and a parent meeting.

Evaluation

During 2015-16, an email account set up for Montessori collected approximately 500 questions and comments from parents, community members and job recruits. One hundred sixty families also showed interest at the Magnet Fair alone. And, when the application period opened in spring 2016, more than 500 students submitted one. Principals then tested each applicant through an observation in a Montessori classroom. Approximately 240 letters of acceptance were issued, complete with a commemorative magnet. These not only allowed families to feel connected to the program, but also to promote it amongst friends and relatives.

GISD's Montessori marketing created quite the buzz among the district's tri-cities, with local news outlets and city organizations publishing a variety of content. It even caught the attention of GISD alumnus and Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, who scheduled a visit to Herfurth after the launch of the program.

Montessori's successful rollout can been credited to the fact that the Planning Committee brought representatives from every administrative department to the table. This inaugural approach has now become standard for large district initiatives or events. Several other magnet programs have also requested Communications' help to replicate Montessori's buzz through widespread branding, diversifying marketing materials and making current pieces more visually interesting. Photo shoots have become a common practice for brochures as well. And, catchy slogans are now determined as an initial step.

Introducing 3 year-olds to the district—an age where parents may not even be thinking about school—as well as filling almost all paid spots, Communications counts its campaign a success. Some already ask if GISD will open another Montessori campus, and plans are currently underway to launch additional new programs. More and more, Communications is seeing eyes being opened to everything the district has to offer. But, an increase in comprehensive marketing campaigns comes with increased burden on a small staff. Upon evaluation, not every piece created for Montessori brought the desired return on effort. Having the experience to draw from, however, has proven beneficial when approaching other projects and requests.
GISD’s Strategic Plan includes individual action plans for seven goals, providing the blueprint for district decision-making throughout the next few years. Goal 1 addresses the expansion of magnet program offerings.

Focus groups, forums and surveys revealed a shared vision of student success and the steps needed to achieve it. Montessori answers the call issued by the community. Teachers act as facilitators and students take control of their learning, problem-solving through multisensory materials that provide real-world connections.
GISD is exploring the possibility of offering new magnet programs. Please complete the survey by March 20 - surveymonkey.com/s/MagnetInterest...
Visiting three public school Montessori campuses in Dallas and Fort Worth ISDs, attendees debriefed with three questions. What did you see or hear that you liked? What did you see or hear that you want to avoid? What questions do you still have, or what do we need to explore further?
Montessori Schools in the Immediate Area

A. North Garland Montessori School
B. Lake Cities Montessori School
C. New Century Montessori Academy
D. Firewheel Montessori Academy
E. Breckinridge Montessori School
F. Montessori at Bowser
GISD’s unique Choice of School program allows families to attend any campus in the district—whether it’s down the street or across town. With enrollment numbers on the decline, Herfurth and Luna elementary schools often served as overflow campuses. Students who selected schools that had reached capacity would be bused to fill open seats at Herfurth and Luna. This meant these campuses would be ideal locations for new magnet programs, since they had capacity to accept new students.
A Montessori Planning Committee formed to develop the program budget, implementation, promotion and recruitment. In addition to campus principals, members included representatives from every administrative department. This ensured buy-in throughout the district and that questions regarding finance, curriculum and instruction, communications and Human Resources could be answered almost immediately. The Planning Committee met every other week prior to the program launch and continues to meet once a month during its first year.
GISD used the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector’s planning timeline as a guide for its implementation. The program was developed as a staggered rollout over five years. Since Montessori begins at 3 years old, an age not traditionally serviced, the program allowed district residents and staff members to enroll their children at a price of $475 per month. Those who qualified for prekindergarten at 4 years old could also receive a discounted price on this full-day program. Private Montessori campuses in the area cost up to $1,000 per month.
Training and Recruitment

Montessori Training

Primary Elementary Training:
✓ 3, 4, 5 year olds
✓ 8 weeks of training

Lower Elementary Training:
✓ 1st, 2nd, 3rd grades
✓ Two years of training

Upper elementary Training:
✓ 4th & 5th grades
✓ These teachers will need 3 years of training

Administrator Training

✓ Both principals and assistant principals started training summer 2015
✓ Training continued through this summer
✓ 1 year practicum
✓ Credentialed by American Montessori Society

Because of Montessori’s unique classroom and instruction requirements, Herfurth and Luna elementary schools are GISD’s only magnet campuses that do not offer a traditional education strand. For this reason, teachers at both schools were given the option to transfer campuses if they did not wish to commit to the program and complete extensive training. The principals also attended Montessori conferences and became credentialed by the American Montessori Society in preparation for the program launch.
Photo Shoots

Photo shoots organized by Communications showcased 3 and 4-year-olds to bring awareness to the new opportunities available. They also aimed to illustrate the defining characteristics of Montessori:

- Multiage classrooms
- Multisensory, integrated instruction
- Social and emotional development through independent, group and teacher-guided work
- Well-rounded education, including practical applications such as cooking and gardening
In preparation for a full-scale communication campaign, program branding was developed. Logo connoting incorporated Montessori visuals of building blocks, nature and hands-on activities. The final logo design used painted handprints in place of the letter o. Campus letterhead, email signature art and notecards were also created. To answer any questions prospective families and the community might have, FAQs were created in both English and Spanish.
Montessori Coming to Garland ISD in 2016-17

The area’s newest Montessori is just around the corner. Garland ISD strives to provide all students with a well-rounded education that includes school choice. Currently, the district boasts 10 specialized magnets at 16 campuses. Montessori provides students with an alternative to traditional classroom learning. Additionally, the district of GISD’s programs will be the newest and largest.

Montessori will debut in 2016-17 with six primary classes at each campus, consisting of three and four-year-olds, as well as kindergartners. Any child interested in enrolling is welcome to apply. GISD employees and community members are to enroll their children for $475 a month, and others can still apply at $475.

“We are excited to be able to offer these new opportunities,” said GISD’s Associate Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Jovan Wells. “We want to ensure all our students succeed academically, and Montessori programs like GISD Montessori allow us to provide an alternative learning setting.”

Montessori offers individualized, integrated instruction. The classroom environment contains materials as well as Montessori materials other than textbooks, and students move around the room at their own pace, studying art, geography, history, language, math, music, science, etc., at the same time. Education is an exciting process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline and a love of learning. It also provides practical life experiences, such as cooking and gardening.

Montessori classes group grade levels together, forming a classroom in which older children spontaneously share their knowledge with younger peers. In addition to the primary level, lower elementary includes first-third grades and upper elementary fourth-fifth.

Herfurth and Luna will stagger the rollout of classes throughout 2017, adding new levels and grades each year. For more information, visit www.garlandisd.net/montessori. For questions, please email montessori@garlandisd.net or call 972-475-7994 (Herfurth), 972-675-3040 (Luna).

Considering Montessori? Choose GISD.

Garland Independent School District
501 S. Jupiter Rd.
Garland, TX 75042-7108
Printed Pieces

Bus advertising in English and Spanish was used on routes through target neighborhoods.

Roll-up banners were created for use at the two campuses, as well as community events. The yellow sunburst on the green banner was a Velcro addition made to target parents of younger children.

Business card-sized marketing piece
Digital Content

Between regular programming, GRS-TV runs PSA/promo slides in a regular rotation.

Advertising at athletic stadiums

Website stories

Twitter posts
Promotional Items

Temporary tattoo, silicone bracelet and pencil giveaways

T-shirts for campus staff

Stickers were printed and adhered to 9 oz plastic cups. Children were encouraged to plant a seed to take home and grow.

Promotional yard signs were printed on coroplast and placed at the schools and around their neighborhoods.

Temporary tattoo, silicone bracelet and pencil giveaways
Every year, the district hosts a Magnet Fair to provide families a “one-stop shop” to explore the various magnet opportunities available in GISD. The principals set their space to reflect a typical Montessori classroom.

During public tours offered every Thursday, families were able to see how different a Montessori classroom would be from a regular classroom.
A dedicated email address, Montessori@garlandisd.net, was created for prospective families and teachers to express interest and ask questions. Principals, along with the district’s Human Resources department, monitored this inbox to ensure emails received a quick response. Hundreds of emails were received prior to the program launch, and many continue to come in as the district prepares for the rollout of lower elementary classes.
Montessori Selection Process

Ages 3 & 4 (as of September 1, 2016) –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
<th>Timeline:</th>
<th>Where:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-enroll in GISP</td>
<td>October 17- March 13</td>
<td>Student Services Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Complete the GISP Magnet Application</td>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attend an interview &amp; assessment session</td>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Age 5 (as of September 1, 2016) – Magnet, Academy & Montessori

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
<th>Timeline:</th>
<th>Where:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-enroll in GISP</td>
<td>Oct. 17- Dec. 1</td>
<td>Student Services Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apply for program eligibility testing</td>
<td>Oct. 17- Dec. 1</td>
<td>GISP magnet page (website)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3. Attend testing session  
  - Magnet & Academy testing | Jan. 16 | Kimberlin Academy            |
  - Montessori assessments | Jan. 6-30 | Montessori campuses          |
  *You will be contacted for a testing time | | |
| 4. Complete application | Jan 14-25 | GISP magnet page (website)    |

To participate in the program, families must first apply during GISP’s magnet application window. Selection is then based upon an onsite student observation and parent interview. Students who have older siblings at the campus receive priority consideration. If applicants exceed the number of available seats, a lottery will be conducted.
Dear [Parent],

Welcome to the Luna Family!

We are delighted that you have chosen to enroll your child in the Garland ISD Montessori Program. [Student name] has a confirmed seat at Luna for the 2016-2017 school year. This acceptance notification overrides the GISD School of Choice Process.

We look forward to immersing your child in an academic curriculum that will lead them toward being an independent learner. The Montessori learning model builds confidence, competence, self-esteem and respect for others.

Despite your excitement about the learning experience your child will have, I'm sure you have questions. Below, I have included some QR codes that will link you to further information that will be updated throughout the summer. Also, be sure to save the dates for Minnow Camp; our upcoming student orientation camp. Scheduled for [date], this adventure is designed specifically for our incoming kindergarten students.

We look forward to having your child grow with us!

Sincerely,

[Principal]

Luna Elementary

@Luna_Lions

Twitter

Get Involved. Join PTA!

The acceptance packet included a personalized letter (mail merge doc) and a 3.5” refrigerator magnet. Both were enclosed in a turquoise blue envelope, sealed with a handprint sticker.

Scan the QR code to watch a video that highlights the successful launch of GISD’s Montessori program. Principals recount offering more classes during the first year than any other magnet, and parents relay satisfaction with their child’s development.
Commissioner of Education, Mike Morath, is a proud GISD alumnus. Since he often speaks about participating in one of the district’s magnet programs, the Montessori principals invited him to see the latest offering. Morath visited Herfurth Elementary School in fall 2016, touring Montessori classrooms and learning with students in outdoor environments.
Coming soon: Elementary school to debut Montessori for 2016-17 school year

Amber Hamilton ahamilton@starlocalmedia.com  Nov 30, 2015

Herfurth Elementary is preparing to open one of the district's first Montessori programs.

Excitement for the program, which has been in the works for a few months, is mounting. It will allow children ages 3-5 to learn at their own pace — to become independent learners.

Jessica Hicks, principal at Herfurth, said the word “independent” doesn’t mean the students are alone.

“There are many ways that social and emotional content is built into the Montessori world,” Hicks said. “Some people get nervous, but there are so many ways that social and emotional content is built into the Montessori world that they will do great.”

Learn More

There will be an informational meeting at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 2 at Herfurth Elementary, 7500 Miller Road in Rowlett. Parents are invited to attend and learn more about the Montessori program that will open at the school in 2016-17.

“The Montessori classroom is designed to give children the opportunity to learn together,” Hicks said. “Children are allowed to learn at their own pace.”

Montessori comes to GISD

The Montessori program comes to one of the district’s elementary schools. The program will be open to students in grades K-12.

Each work in the Montessori classroom has a purpose, including an animal farm that teaches students nouns.

― Mayor of Rowlett

For daily news, visit www.garlandisd.net/rowlett. For questions, please email montessori@garlandisd.net or call 972-418-7770 (Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.).

City Press

Garland

Cebrate Christmas on the Square throughout December

Holiday at the Granville Arts Center

Downtown Garland

tree Power

Garland ISD

Choose GISD

November 2017