

## **From Our Founders Group**

Our founders group of twenty parents and educators grew from a common vision for an alternative public elementary and middle school in Hayward. That vision has started to take root as Golden Oak Montessori: a child-centered school with a focus on diversity and community stewardship.

We believe the Montessori method of education can offer an important educational alternative in Hayward. As parents of children with very different talents, learning styles, ethnic backgrounds, and needs, we have seen them all thrive in Montessori preschool and kindergarten. Our kids are advancing academically and are excited to attend school—we want to see this love of learning continue throughout their education.

Montessori education focuses on the child, not the teacher. Children choose their “work” from a carefully prepared classroom that challenges them to explore, to work together, and to meet the highest academic standards. At the same time, Montessori puts children in multi-age classrooms, where children at various levels—even those with special needs, children who are learning English, or gifted students—can excel, recognizing that children have different learning styles and that their development at this age is not one-size-fits-all.

We believe Montessori’s child-centered philosophy is a great match for Hayward’s ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, and academic diversity; in fact, the more diverse the students, the richer the Montessori classroom experience.

Golden Oak Montessori School will follow in the well-established footsteps of Montessori public and charter schools—325 at last count by the American Montessori Society—to place equal emphasis on academic success and character development. It is our vision to nurture competent, responsible, adaptive citizens who are self-motivated problem-solvers and are profoundly attentive to the world and humanity around them. In the best sense: life-long learners.

As local parents, we hope to see our children’s innate curiosity, their wonder at the world around them, and their open-mindedness cultivated by their educational experiences. To paraphrase Dr. Montessori: every child is an acorn who holds an oak within. Please join us in supporting Golden Oak!

Thank you,

Aneema Van Groenou, MD  
Co-Chair, Golden Oak Montessori Founders Group

## Meet the Founders

### Co-chairs

**Aneema Van Groenou** A Kaiser Emergency Physician in Hayward with life-long ties to the community, Aneema helped to launch the Golden Oak Founder's Group with Jackie Moses and serves on the Curriculum and Educational Program Committee. *I attended Montessori school until fifth grade and attribute my success as a doctor, writer, and team leader at medicineplanet.com to a strong Montessori foundation which encouraged me to both think independently and also work well collaboratively. I can't think of skills I value more for my girls' education.*

**Jackie Moses** A lifelong resident of Hayward and a flight attendant for 17 years, Jackie is an involved parent and community member, and is committed to making the Montessori Method available to more families. Jackie helped to launch the Golden Oak Founder's Group with Aneema Van Groenou and serves on the Outreach Committee. *When I heard about the charter school option, I was very excited about the possibility of bringing the Montessori method to public schools.*

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*All families should have access to alternative forms of education, not just those who can afford to pay for private school.*

*-Jackie Moses*

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### Finances and Fundraising Committee

**David Siopak** A Managing Director and Portfolio Manager at Charles Schwab Investment Management, David volunteered for over 10 years at OASES (Oakland Asian Students Educational Services, a non-profit organization), serving on the Board of Directors, most recently as President. *Having arrived in the United States as a young child with limited English language skills, I am grateful that my parents, teachers, classmates and neighbors guided me to become a self-directed learner and contributor to my community. Today, as a father of three young children, I seek a setting with a rich, integrated curriculum providing learning activities that honor their personal interests, choices and goals. Establishing a Montessori charter school featuring small, multi-age classes, setting individualized goals, an emphasis on quality work, foreign language interaction, and meaningful community participation characterizes the ideal learning environment to guide a new generation.*

**Mike Gorski** Mike used his education in finance and as a Program Manager for Visa to help create a solid financial template for the Golden Oak business plan. *As a parent of a thriving Montessori student, I took on this mission because it made sense. Not every family can afford an alternative scholastic option, though, like in our case, the need may be there. Assisting in the creation of Golden Oak will create an elementary and middle school option for my active and unconventional son, allowing us to stay in the Hayward community.*

**Sergio Knaebel** As an officer at a foundation funding economic development and environmental projects in Mexico and the U.S., Sergio evaluates the effectiveness and management of nonprofit organizations. He brings these skills and contacts to the task of effectively financing Golden Oak Montessori.

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*I came to the U.S. from Mexico after high-school, and understand firsthand the difficulty of adapting to a new country and culture. I want an education for my two daughters that helps them nurture and feel proud of their talents, coaches them individually where they are weak, and teaches them respect for people who are different than they are.*

*- Sergio Knaebel*

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## **Community Outreach Committee**

**Kim Gorski** Kim is a Marketing Consultant whose skills are being deployed in helping our founders group find effective ways to reach out to the community we hope the school will serve. Her creative talents are reflected in our school newsletter and other marketing materials. *Montessori education has presented amazing results for my extremely active son; the “hands-on” philosophy was a custom-fit. Luke is socially confident, compassionate, and most important, my son has so much FUN at school! These results are why I strive for each parent in my Hayward community to have this scholastic option for their child.*

**Murielle Bichard** A senior software engineer who is very active at Stonebrae Elementary as the Treasurer, Historian, former PTA Secretary, and the co-chair on the schools Wellness and Nutrition Committee, Murielle has developed relationships with the Hayward School Districts Child Nutrition Services and Hayward Coordinated School Health Council.

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*The Montessori method was a great help for my son to acquire English (in speaking, reading and writing) even though he was first showing signs of dyslexia due to his bilingual home environment.*

*-Murielle Bichard*

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**Mary June Manglicmot** With deep roots in the Hayward community and professional expertise in environmental liability, Mary June is also committed to education for underserved communities as a founding member of a foundation to support indigent students. Mary June is a tutor at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, and a volunteer for Junior Achievement for the Bay Area. *I became involved in the Golden Oak Montessori School Founder’s Group with my children’s benefit in mind. In the process, I’ve come to understand that the Hayward community as a whole will benefit from having a Montessori school available to families without tuition cost. Not only will Golden Oak educate our children, but the*

*school's community outreach programs will encourage the students' parents to be active members in their own neighborhoods and community.*

**John Napieralski** As a business consultant and Director of IT Strategy for Williams-Sonoma, John has contributed his research and analytic skills to the design of Golden Oak. *We hope to send our children to this school even though we are residents of Castro Valley. Castro Valley has a highly ranked elementary school according to test scores, but education is more than a collection of facts and "teaching to the test." Our oldest daughter Sierra has been attending a Montessori preschool for the past two years and we see in her the positive impact of the Montessori method. This charter school would provide the Montessori option for the benefit of a broad range of students.*

**Matt Moses** Matt works as a creative professional, a Visual Effects Artist in the motion picture and television industries, and he contributed to the design of the Golden Oak school website, the visual aesthetics for the marketing materials and the school logo. *Montessori gives children the freedom to thoroughly explore their interests. For creative thinkers, it's a natural fit.*

**Kim Storm-Pagel** A recent graduate from the CSUEB Nursing Program, Kim has just begun her new career in nursing. She's a PTA member and the Chairperson of the Parent Education Program at Independent Elementary. *As a parent of two children who attend a Montessori preschool, I am committed to the development of an elementary school where they can continue with the Montessori method. My children are passionate about learning how to read, solving math equations, discovering the world through science, and learning languages. The Montessori method will give these children something they can take with them as they continue their education and move into their careers.*

**Christy Napieralski** Christy is a Director of IT Finance and Operations for Ross Stores. She is active in the Castro Valley Mothers Club, playgroups, and participates in community activities and programs throughout the East Bay with her children. Christy has organization experience as a volunteer for the American Heart Association and swim coach for the Special Olympics. *The impact of technology and how quickly it changes strengthens my belief that the specific facts we learn are less important than the way we think and in what manner we interact with the people and environment around us. I feel that the Montessori Charter School will foster a love of learning in my children and build their character through an emphasis on diversity, self-motivation and environmental consciousness.*

## **Governance and Organization Committee**

**Betty Lin** A lecturer at Mills College on Infants and Young Children with Special Needs, Betty has dedicated her career to working with children with special needs and their families. Betty is an Infant Development Specialist at Children's Hospital and Research Center at Oakland, a special education preschool teacher, a Certified Child Life Specialist working with hospitalized children, and a steering committee member of the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council. She brings her dedication of serving children and families to the Founder's Group. *As a mother of children with multiple health issues, I am invested in creating a safe learning environment for my children. Golden Oak Montessori will be a safe school for children of various abilities and needs, and a place where all children are valued as active agents of learning.*

**Frank DeJesus** A specialist in organizational structure and liability, Frank also directs a foundation funding college tuition for indigent students in the Philippines and is a Little League and Soccer coach. *The ability to learn at their own, individual pace and according to their own choice of activities has done wonders, particularly with my son Xander, who can be characterized as a 'spirited child.'*

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*Our son is in Montessori preschool, and we planned to put him in parochial school for first grade, but we would opt for the public school system in Hayward in a heartbeat if Montessori were available.*

*-Frank deJesus*

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**Patti Presto** Patti brought her skills as an Organization Development Manager and her track record of developing programs recruiting under-represented minorities in organizations to help craft Golden Oak's organizational structure and outreach programs. As a volunteer for AT&T Inc. community programs, she has worked with minority children in Chicago's high-risk neighborhoods. *Being a parent of two children, one who currently attends a Montessori preschool and another entering in 2009, I was very curious as to whether or not this would be good for my children. As my knowledge of Montessori grew, I knew that in fact, that this would be enriching not only for my children but for other children as well. I decided that I wanted to become a founding charter member to be a part of the process.*

**Mark Tanaka** A career physician at Kaiser in Hayward, Mark lives his healthful message both as an ultramarathon champion and an avid volunteer at the Kaiser Permanente Teddy Bear Clinic, an outreach program for local children which promotes wellness. He also does volunteer talks at community organizations and volunteer trail maintenance in the East Bay Parks. *After decades of formal schooling and through my profession in the ever-changing field of medicine, I have experienced first-hand a variety of learning venues and teaching styles. The proposed Montessori charter school would provide an exciting and effective alternative to traditional forms of education that I would love to bring to the community in which I both live and work*

## **Educational Program and Curriculum Consultants**

**Krista Ericson** Krista is the founder of Eagle Peak Montessori School, a public charter school in Walnut Creek authorized by the Mt. Diablo Unified School District in 2001. She was the administrative Director of the school for 3 years and now serves on the charter school's Board of Directors ensuring that the school stays true to its mission of providing an authentic Montessori education to all students. Eagle Peak Montessori School has been well-received in the community and enjoys a stellar reputation in the district. Krista also co-founded Myrtle Farm Montessori School in Concord. She has been a Montessori educator for over 28 years and has served as a teacher trainer to several Montessori training programs.

**Michelle Hammons** Michelle has been involved with public Montessori education for her entire career. She is currently the Principal of Eagle Peak Montessori Elementary Charter in Walnut Creek. Michelle has been fundamentally involved in the planning of Golden Oak, bringing her practical

experience in heading a successful Montessori charter school to this project. *Over 100 years ago when Dr. Montessori started her first school outside of Rome, Italy, it was for children who didn't have educational options. Charter schools are designed to give students greater options in education through the public sector. The marriage of Montessori and Charters is the perfect way to continue Dr. Montessori's work. Golden Oak Montessori will provide children the excellent educational experience provided through the Montessori method in a public venue. I support this effort in full.*

**Judi Bauerlein** Judi Bauerlein is the past President of the American Montessori Society. She has started and run two Montessori Elementary magnet public schools. She has been a Montessori elementary, preschool and high school teacher and teacher trainer for more than forty years and runs workshops on Montessori curriculum and philosophy around the world.

**Meher Van Groenou** Meher Van Groenou is the founder and Director of Five Canyons Montessori in Castro Valley and of The Montessori Institute of Advanced Studies for teachers' training. A prominent spokesperson for early Montessori education, she has been selected to serve on many committees for educational advancement, such as the Alameda County Steering Committee for Early Care and Education, the National Teachers Research Network, and the Early Childhood Advisory Committee of Alameda County. *As a member of many local and national advisory committees for education research and reform, I feel strongly that offering educational alternatives benefits a community with diverse needs. As a Hayward resident for 40 years, I am thrilled to support this public school effort in my community.*

**Willem Van Groenou** Dr. Willem Van Groenou is a professor of Sociology at Cal State East Bay who has taught the Sociology of Education with a philosophical and historical perspective. He served as a curriculum and educational philosophy advisor for the Golden Oak Founder's Group. *"Awakening the gift of integrity in children seems to me the purpose of parenting and education. I'm also interested in the civic development of children which will help them later to foster intelligent communities in marriage, neighborhood, and at work—that is why I am enthusiastically supportive of Golden Oak's Community Stewardship commitment."*

**Michelle Arriaga** Michelle is an administrator and teacher at the Dixon Montessori Charter Elementary School in Davis, California. Michelle contributed to the curriculum alignment and helped guide leadership of the charter process.

## **Finances and Development Consultants**

**Miles Denniston** Miles is a consultant at the Charter Schools Development Center, a non-profit organization that helps parents through the process of petitioning for and starting a Charter School. Miles' initial interest in education was sparked by his experience starting a Performance Arts School in Oakland. He has a business degree from Harvard Business School.

**Pete Villa, CPA** Pete Villa helped guide our financial plan. As Eagle Peak Montessori's Treasurer for the past three years, he is responsible for developing and monitoring the annual budget and actual expenditures as well as developing fiscal policies and ensuring the compliance with these policies. He is currently the Chief Financial Officer and Co-founder of BlueSky Marketing Group, Inc.