



## HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HATTIE MAE WHITE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER  
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Dear Garden Oaks Family:

The Houston Independent School District learned of the opportunity to apply for a Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant in December—something that hadn't been done since the 1980s.


After careful consideration of timing, capacity, and resources, it was determined that this was a worthwhile opportunity to pursue to benefit students across our district. A committee was then called together which was made up of a small group of parents representing many parts of the district and staff to provide input in developing a plan for the Magnet grant.

A core element of the proposal is to eliminate, reduce, or prevent minority-group isolation in elementary and secondary schools. This would be accomplished by offering a specialized, focused, and rigorous curriculum—with open enrollment. Several themes were identified for the districtwide proposal as program designs that would attract students to the schools. They are: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); International Baccalaureate; Health Sciences; and Montessori. Schools were identified for the proposal on the basis of needs, space, capacity, opportunity for growth, and existing programs. Garden Oaks Elementary School was identified as a candidate for the grant due to the low neighborhood enrollment, its existing Montessori program, and the high interest across the city in additional Montessori programs.

The Montessori approach to educating children has been gaining in popularity among Houston parents and students for some time, and the Montessori program is an attractive and successful feature at Garden Oaks Elementary School. The Middle Schools Assistance Program grant will enable the school to become a full Montessori school. Due to the interest of the school community, an environmental component has been added to the Garden Oaks Elementary School proposal as a special feature. Such an expansion of the program depends on federal approval of the \$2.4-million grant, and the district is considering a number of options designed to meet the needs and wishes of Garden Oaks parents, students, and community members. There is high interest in Montessori being part of the district choice program. After extensive community input and review of comments, the district developed a transition plan for the current students attending Garden Oaks. The transition plan for implementation of the grant would be a gradual, extended transition to a full Montessori program, and a super-zone would be created for students in the area so that families would have an option of a non-Montessori instructional program should they so desire. Key elements of the transition plan include neighborhood students' being able to enter kindergarten this coming August and complete their education at Garden Oaks in a traditional instructional program. Such a plan would also ensure that students who are currently enrolled would be able to finish their elementary education at the school. The existing Pre-School Children with Disabilities (PPCD) program would remain in place at the school to serve students with special needs. Additionally, a bilingual strand for the Montessori program will be added to serve Spanish-speaking students. Neighborhood students would be given priority for enrolling in the Montessori Magnet program.

There have been many questions related to the additional cost of implementing the Magnet program at Garden Oaks Elementary School. Transportation for the Magnet program at Garden Oaks would be an added expense that would be offset by allocating the grant funds to pay for allowable expenses and positions.

The Montessori program has proved to be a creative and effective way to educate children, but it may not be for every parent. Be assured that HISD is continuing to meet with parents and community members to address questions and to collaborate with and accommodate the needs of the community. To encourage this continued dialogue, parents and community members can send questions to [magnet@houstonisd.org](mailto:magnet@houstonisd.org); more information about the Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant is available online at [www.houstonisd.org/magnet](http://www.houstonisd.org/magnet).

Sincerely,  
  
Michele Pola, Ed.D.  
Chief of Staff