

VIMSIA

Notes from the Head of School

Year End Update - 2016

Each year we strive to improve...student learning is the litmus test. We do not always get it right, but I view “problems” as “learning opportunities” to grow by. As another school year is coming to a close, it is a time for thoughtful reflection about how to build on what we have done right, and how to improve in areas that have fallen short.

Staffing

Each year staff members decide to move on. We are grateful to them for adding value to VIMSIA and we wish them well in their new journeys. To that point, we wish Lucia Serje, Fernando Rebollo, Flavia Granato, Marc Corbeil, LeAnne Mattingley, Olguita Vazquez, Andy Palmer and Kandeah Brooks the very best in their new endeavors.

Additions to our staff include:

- Neysa Hess, who has already joined our staff teaching Lower Elementary. She continues on in this position next year. She has her Lower and Upper Elementary AMI teaching diploma and a BA in History/Anthropology from Purdue University. Ms. Hess joins us from Arizona with her husband Stacey and their two children, Gabriel and Katarina.

While it is always difficult to have staffing changes mid-year, we are very grateful to Ms. Aideen Keating for traveling from Ireland to step back into her veteran teaching role and mitigate any time lost for the children. We wish a heartfelt thank you and be well to Ms. Serje and welcome Ms. Hess to her new role as Lower Elementary teacher.

- Parrish Staples will be joining us to teach Physics and Science/Math in the PGIA. He has a Masters and PhD in Physics from the University of Massachusetts. His government career in nuclear physics has been mainly with Los Alamos National Laboratory and the NNSA. He has had numerous publications and achievement awards in the area of nuclear physics from the Department of Energy, Los Alamos National Laboratory and the NNSA. Mr. Staples has a passion for STEM and is interested in training, educating and mentoring the next generation of STEM professionals. He, his wife Katya and their son Vladimir will be joining our VIMSIA family.
- Eman Passerella, and her husband Chet, have literally taught all over the world. They join us currently from Houston, TX. Eman Passerella will be teaching Math in the PGIA. She has been teaching Math since 2004 and IB HL Math since 2009. She has a Master's Degree in Secondary Education and a Teaching Certificate in Secondary Mathematics.

- Chet Passerella joins us along with his wife Eman. Mr. Passerella will be teaching Music and Theater as well as taking on the role of VIMSIA Stage Manager. He has a degree in Music Education and, in addition to his own professional performance career, has taught any and all things music and theater related in K-12 classes including IB for decades.
- The improved commitment to identifying learning differences and to work with all parties to implement the proper actions, not ignoring problems is making strides forward. Better communication and working relationships between parents, teachers and students is still needed, but growth is being achieved. Rachael Parisse, a learning specialist who has worked with us on a part time basis for the past two years, will join us as a second full time learning specialist.
- Cyrene Stocking, who has been Teacher's Assistant in Ms. Mattingley's class, will be moving to Casa to replace Ms. Flavia as the second Casa Teacher.
- May Leader has already started in our Bougainvillea Enrichment Center. We welcome May and her two children back to VIMSIA.
- We are in the process of solidifying some additional open positions and will make announcements once confirmed.

Accreditations

This year we have had our AMI accreditation review and our DP self-evaluation. Our accreditations with both AMI and IBO help us to continually work to a very high global standard of education and to stay focused on our priorities.

Internationalism

This year we have already had students travel to Santo Domingo, Israel, Madrid, New York, Baltimore and Atlanta. Our End Sessions will add to that list with students traveling to the Yucatán, China, and Amsterdam.

MMUN as an after school club worked very well, maximizing the program while not detracting from Montessori learning. This year's trip was outstanding.

The science and cultural trip to the Weizmann Institute in Israel owns the "quote of the year". One student subsequent to her engagement with Dr. Ruth Arnon, who invented the cure for multiple sclerosis and is now working on the cure for influenza said: *"It's true; one person can indeed make a difference."* I hope one day all of our students will make a difference.

Spanish infusion took a global leap forward with our exchange program with CASVI in Madrid Spain. Many of our students are indeed fluent now. We will continue the program and even more improvements are coming to the program. Also do not forget our upcoming end session Spanish programs.

The end session feature of the IA expands the horizons of our students in so many ways. It allows our learners to discover new areas of interest in an in-depth manner.

Science and math programs at VIMSIA are beginning to take hold with our association with the Weizmann Institute, our NASA week, on-going NASA programs, coding, new and additional talent as well as our seasoned veterans. Do we have more work to do? We certainly do, but the path is clearer today than it was last year.

VIMSIA is now an active member of the Caribbean Association of Independent Schools, CAIS. Members gather regularly to discuss challenges and benefits of operating institutions of student learning in the Caribbean. Why reinvent the wheel when others have traveled the same road.

The Arts

Arts, music and theatre improved last year with stellar showings at the Holiday Show, Taste the Nations, Art is a Verb and the Spring Magic Recital. This year our DP Seniors held their first professional art show for the whole community at the Sevenminussevent Art Gallery in Sub Base. With the addition of a full time music and theatre teacher and the continued efforts of our existing arts staff, even better programs, events and activities are in the works for next year.

Sports

Traveling to Santo Domingo to play soccer and to raise the competitive bar of our young athletes has changed the outlook of our entire program.

VIMSIA soccer teams, Elementary, JV and Varsity are shining examples in so many ways: leadership, perseverance, developing talent, overcoming hurdles, lessons from failure and the list goes on. And I continue to expect more. Our sports programs have come such a long way and we are considered an athletic force within the community. All of our sports programs represent VIMSIA proudly and successfully.

Graduate Success

One reassuring fact: **Our graduates**, both students who have gone all the way through from Montessori to IB and new students only in IB, all have the common denominator: they **come back from college and state they were well prepared**, some even say college is “easy”.

A national note of fact: **Only 45% of high school graduates attending university graduate in four years. 80% of Students graduating from an IB program attending university graduate in four years. Now that’s a major difference in time, money and effort!!!**

This year we add a plethora of new colleges and universities to the list of PGIA student acceptances. The full list will be available soon on the website, but a short list includes Princeton University, Indiana Institute of Technology, United States Coast Guard Academy, Ball State University, Duquesne University, American University, St. John's University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and Providence College.

Campus

Ongoing maintenance is just that...on going. Yet the campus is better maintained. We are always open to improvement ideas. One day we will solve the pick up traffic problem with parent cooperation.

Drug Policy

VIMSIA has a zero drug tolerance policy. Period. Such has been administered that way for several years and it will continue to be implemented. Please teach the lesson at home so that your students have no confusion about what we expect from them.

Announcements/Reminders

- High School graduation is Sunday May 22 at 2:00pm
- Montessori Graduation is on June 10th at 9:00am
- The 2015-2016 VIMSIA school year is over on June 10th, pickup time is 11:30 on June 10
- Summer Camp information is available on our school website

I will continue to focus on developing the growth mind set of the school, where-by we seek to constantly recognize our mistakes, learn from our mistakes and improve. "Status quo" and "easy" are not words in our vocabulary. It's easy to throw rocks, it takes a whole lot more to pick up those rocks and build something meaningful. To that end, I seek everyone's help in growing VIMSIA to be a better school with student learning as its core.

Regards,

Michael Bornn, Head of School
VI Montessori School & Peter Gruber International Academy