

## **Montessori – The proof is in the pudding.**

Over the last few weeks, I've enjoyed many occasions to speak informally with parents, and many of you have asked me questions about what I think about Springmont now that I've been here six months. My response usually starts with, "Well, I don't feel like I'm drinking from a firehose anymore!" One thing I want all parents to know is that have spent a lot of time observing and developing a vision for the direction I'd like to steer the school. This vision has been reinforced by the results of the Engagement Surveys administered in January.

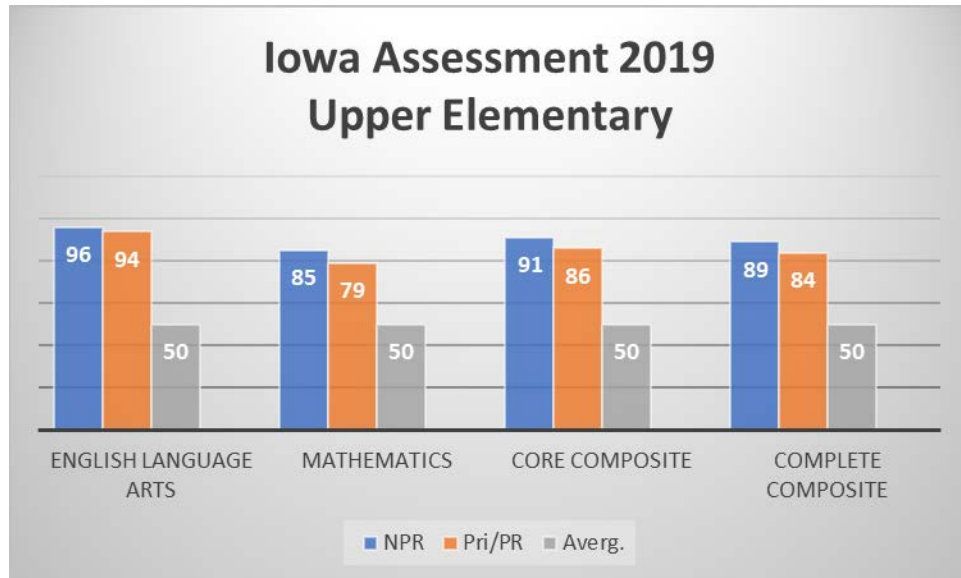
While the full findings from the surveys have been presented to the Board of Trustees and will be used to inform a new Strategic Plan for the school, I wanted to share and address one of the most interesting findings now. The parent survey revealed that the vast majority (92%) of families chose Springmont because of its Montessori philosophy. A shocker, I know! However, it is also clear from the survey that this alone is not enough to retain families all the way through eighth grade. In short, you love Montessori but need proof that a Montessori education will prepare your child(ren) for high school.

So, my answer to the question about what I think about Springmont is "It's a great school doing an incredible job of preparing young people for secondary school AND for life beyond formal academics." But the next question is inevitably, "How do you know?" If you attended our Alumni Panel in January and listened to former students describe how Springmont was the catalyst for their successes, both in school and life, you can stop reading now because I'm sure you're sold.

For those of you who have not had the pleasure of interacting with our young alumni, the next best thing I can offer are the results of the Iowa Assessments (formerly the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or ITBS) our students took in January. I have been a professional educator for some 30 years, and my opinion about standardized testing has remained the same throughout. Simply put, I think standardized tests are worthless with perhaps the only exception being that they can illuminate global weaknesses in a school's curriculum. Unfortunately, the American educational system has not developed a tool to more accurately assess student achievement despite countless studies that prove there is little correlation between test scores and classroom performance, and that standardized tests are culturally, socio-economically and learning-style biased – to name just a few flaws. Beyond the bias, the Montessori curriculum is not chronologically aligned with common public-school curriculums, so Montessori students are exposed to the content and skills these tests try to measure either before or after their public-school peers. In other words, due to the individual nature of a Montessori education, your child is not waiting for the rest of the class to "catch-up" before being allowed to move on nor is s/he inundated with new material before being ready.

Springmont has not publicly shared standardized tests scores in the past, not because our students scored poorly (our students do quite well), but because these tests only tell half the story and do a disservice to the measurement of your child's full potential. Believe it or not, there are some Montessori schools that never share standardized test scores, telling parents that if they are concerned with test scores they should look for a different educational philosophy. In the north Atlanta independent school market, that stance seems short-sighted, but I wish Springmont could be as unapologetically Montessori.

Though standardized tests do not measure a student's full potential, they do provide a context for measuring Springmont against the national average as well as independent and parochial schools. The chart below shows the average scores of our Upper Elementary students this year. The grey columns represent the national average score or what is considered "grade level." Using English Language Arts as an example, Springmont students scored better than 96% of all students who took the test (NPR) and better than 94% of all students in independent and parochial schools (Pri/PR). In both cases and across the board, our students are well above grade level.



These results are especially impressive given the fact that Springmont values a diverse population of learners and does not require an entrance exam as part of the admission criteria. I am pleased with how well our students scored because it demonstrates the strength of the Elementary curriculum, and more importantly, the strength of the faculty!

If schools are going to continue to use tests to measure academic achievement, I hope they will someday follow the lead of several medical schools and adopt an evidence-centered design for simulation-based assessment that measures what students know and how they apply that knowledge in a given scenario. That type of assessment would be beneficial for all children, especially Montessori students, as it is a better predictor of the intellect of the whole person because it measures EQ as well as IQ. But that's fodder for another letter!