



# The Sundance Spirit

## Quarterly Newsletter

A Publication of Sundance Montessori School

Fall 2009

### Enriching the Mind and Spirit of Our Children

#### Article Highlights

Direct Talk-Robin Saia	1
Teacher Spotlight	3
Spotlight Family	4
Book Review	5
3 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Trike-a-Thon	6
Walk Now-MAPS	7
Green Thumb	8
Spanish with Ms. Margarita	9
Student Alumnus	10

## Direct Talk

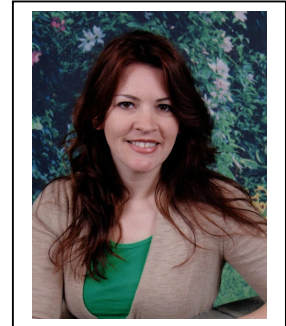
With Sundance Director, Robin Saia

**This is the first year that you are not teaching in a classroom. How is the transition from teacher to full-time director going?**

For me, Sundance has always been a place where you have the opportunity to get to know everyone. We have our own little family here. Over the years, as the program grew to include more classrooms, more faculty, and an additional after school program, with their separate faculty, our community has grown too.

I remember in 2002 when we opened our second classroom, I was still teaching in the early childhood program. This was the first time that children attended the school that were not exclusively my students. I was now sharing the role with another teacher. It was a very difficult transition for me.

Each time the school added a new classroom, there were more children and more families that I wanted to actively participate with, but I couldn't since I had my own classroom responsibilities.



About three years ago I began to warm up to the fact that I would have to leave the classroom to fulfill my duties as a full-time director. I imagined that I wouldn't be able to teach or engage with the children anymore. I felt like the office would be on a different planet, far away from the classroom environment; so I avoided the change as long as possible.

Fortunately, I could not have been more wrong. Even though I still miss teaching full time, I actually get to participate in each and every classroom. When I need a break, I can go over to the school and work with the children, and when I have something to share with a class, I have the time to present it.

“I am so lucky to work with such amazing people.”

## Direct Talk (continued)

I have also been able to get back to building rapport with the parents again. Hosting the morning parent coffee breaks for the parents has been a great way to start the day, and to connect with families. We share our own parenting stories, talk about our children's interests, and I am available to answer questions one-on-one with all the parents. Overall, stepping out of the classroom and into my role as full time director has been a great change for me and I look forward to growing into this new position in the months and years to come.

### **What else are you doing with all of your “free time” now that you aren't in class?**

Interestingly enough, I am busier than ever. The image of the school director sitting at a big desk, enjoying a cup of coffee and casually looking over their work, is not the real picture of my day. I almost never get to sit down.

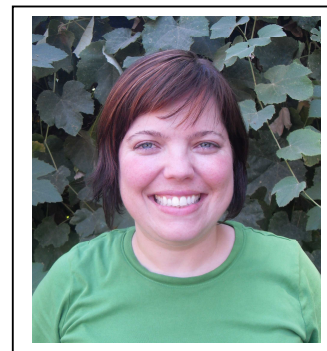
The main reason I am so busy is because the teachers, in their unwavering commitment to the school, are always involving me in new and inspirational school projects. I am so lucky to work with such amazing people. They work with such creativity and enthusiasm; they are always taking on new projects to improve their classrooms. My main role has been to help support them as they continue to grow and improve the school and classrooms.

I can honestly say there is not one faculty member who does not keep me involved, and a part of their classroom.

## Spotlight on: Ms. Kelly

Ms. Kelly Regan is the lead teacher of the Jupiter classroom; a very new, very wonderful classroom comprised of Kindergarten and First Grade students. Ms. Kelly stepped into the role with natural grace and ease that has been awe-inspiring. The Jupiter students truly enjoy their new teacher and classroom environment!

Interview by Brenda Rios



### **How did your path lead you on the road to becoming a teacher?**

When I was little, I admired my teachers and was excited about what they had to say. I always had a lot of questions and I felt like they knew everything. As I was growing up, I was always encouraged to further my education, so I thought I would pursue a law degree. I decided to major in history so that I could make any easier transition into law. During that time, I worked at a non-profit organization and I began to examine my values. It was then that I decided that making a lot of money wasn't the most important thing to me, so I changed my major to get my teaching degree.

### **Why did you choose to teach the Montessori Method?**

One of my professors in the college I attended in Atlanta was a Montessorian. She taught the class from a public school perspective, but she was once the director of a Montessori school. When it came time to observe a classroom, I asked if I could observe her school and I loved what I saw.

### **What most inspires you about Montessori education?**

I have observed public, Catholic and Waldorf schools and I believe that the Montessori Method teaches children how to be people, and how to manage themselves. Montessori has a more realistic view of children, whereas other methods ask too much of children; such as asking them to sit too long and listen to a teacher speak for a long time. Other methods also expect too little of children, and don't give them enough to do. Montessori offers a good balance.

### **I hear that you really love animals. What first sparked your interest in animals?**

We always had dogs and cats in my home when I was growing up. I was an only child, so I played a lot with my pets; I dressed them up and played school with them. I believe pets play an important role in the type of adults we become; if you can be kind and respectful to a helpless animal then you are going to grow into a compassionate adult.

### **Things to know about**

#### **Ms. Kelly**

#### **What is your favorite color?**

Apple green or turquoise

#### **What additional languages do you speak?**

Spanish and a tiny bit of sign language

#### **Do you have pets?**

I have 2 dogs: a Jack Russell Terrier that I have had for a long time, named Parker, and a Pomeranian mix who is young, named Freddy. I also have a Parakeet named Waffles, and a tortoise named Willy.

#### **What was your favorite subject when you were in school?**

Reading

#### **Do you have a favorite quote, or motto that you live by?**

"True courage does not always roar, sometimes it's a quiet voice at the end of the day saying 'I'll try again tomorrow.'"

Maryanne Radmacher, poet

# Why We Are a Sundance Family

## Interview with the Kinney Family

### **You have two children who attend school at Sundance now? When did they first begin and how did you prepare them for school?**

David joined Sundance in the summer of 2006. We started with summer camp, and for his first year he was in Ms. Dina's class. Going to school was a big step for David because he was used to staying home with a parent. It was a big adjustment and it was wonderful to have a supportive community—teachers, administrators, friends—during this period. We were not able to prepare him much because it was also our first time to send a child to school and we did not know what to expect.

Daniel joined Sundance just this summer (2009 summer camp). Daniel had an easier transition because he is very familiar with the school, wanting to stay and play whenever he comes with us to take David home. We prepared Daniel by encouraging him to do things for himself, telling him about his classroom rules, like sitting in circle, keeping busy with jobs, being nice, and sharing toys. David was a good role model for his younger brother.

### **Were you familiar with the Montessori Method before enrolling in the school?**

We had heard of Montessori, but we did not know what it was all about. Now that we are familiar with it, we are growing to love it. The Montessori classroom lets a child learn and grow at his own pace and supports him regardless of whether he needs help (if he is having a hard time) or advanced work (when he is going beyond what is expected). A child falling behind does not get labeled, but instead gets support and encouragement from the teachers. A child moving at a fast pace does not get limited by a strict curriculum.

### **How did you come to choose Sundance over other schools in the area?**

In Sundance, we found compassionate teachers who are competent and willing to work with us as we educate and nurture our children. The Sundance community is very supportive. Going to school is just like going to a second home. Academics are important, and it is great to have a school that teaches children that, plus life skills and proper conduct. I like the fact that the school echoes the values that we also teach at home.

### **Is there a key concept or method in the Montessori classroom, (the environment or the curriculum), that you feel has made the greatest impression on your children?**

I find the Montessori classroom "peaceful but bursting with energy." Peaceful because everything is in its proper place, everything is organized. Bursting with energy because there is so much to do and so much to be learned. The student does not learn by rote and learning is not limited to concepts and papers. Rather, they have jobs that support the concept and reinforce the learning. Also, the classroom does not simply focus on academics. I like the fact that there is "practical life" that hones skills needed for day-to-day living.

### **What do you hope your children will take away from their Montessori education, when they go out into the world as adults?**

I hope that they will always have the love for learning that the Montessori education fosters. I would like them to forever remember the grace, courtesy, good manners, respect for others, and the environment, and all the other positive values echoed by their Montessori education.



They Kinney family: Therese, Daniel, David and Chris

## Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers need to know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences by Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.

by Kelly Regan

Why Gender Matters was written by Dr. Leonard Sax in 2005 to address the controversial question of whether or not boys and girls develop differently. Dr. Sax is a psychologist and a general practitioner. He uses contemporary research to examine this question, and concludes that gender is an essential factor in how children learn, socialize, communicate, and relate. He concludes that the differences between boys and girls are not created by society; gender differences are based in biology, brain structure, and hormonal development. In other words, boys prefer toy trucks and girls prefer dolls because they were born that way, not because we raise them that way.

Why Gender Matters includes chapters on many issues of interest to parents and teachers, such as brain development, aggression, school success, sexuality, risk-taking and drug use, and discipline. According to Sax, caregivers can effectively handle these issues only if they understand how boys and girls differ. In the last forty years our society has worked toward treating the genders equally, and creating "gender-neutral" schools and workplaces; and Sax believes that this has led us to ignore and reject gender differences in child development, to the detriment of the children themselves. This belief leads Sax to some thought-provoking discussion of issues such as rough play, mathematic ability, and even spanking. The chapters on brain development and school success were those I found most interesting personally, and they contain references to many intriguing scientific studies, which demonstrate differences that I have observed in the classroom.

Boys are the "underserved" gender in early childhood and elementary education, according to Sax. He says this is particularly true in early childhood and elementary education classrooms, where statistics show that boys tend to be less academically successful than girls do. This trend reverses in high school when girls are more likely to struggle academically. One of the most interesting and simplest points that Sax makes is that boys are less sensitive to noise and distraction than girls are. His research shows that boys, in general, do not hear as well as girls; and boys learn better when they are moving, whereas girls find movement distracting. Therefore, Sax concludes, our current model for the ideal classroom favors girls because the teachers (most often female) prefer quiet and calm. Of course, this leads us to some simple modifications we can make to help boys succeed—Sax suggests seating boys in the front row so they are closer to the teacher's voice, giving them plenty of opportunities for movement, even removing their chairs as they may be able to focus better while standing. While it may be difficult for many of us to accept that our schools give either gender preferential treatment, these recommendations are certainly useful, and lead us to recognize how we can make our classrooms work as well for boys as they do for girls.

Any discussion of why boys and girls are different is bound to head into sensitive territory. We will all react to Sax's discussion of gender differently, based on our cultural, political, and professional backgrounds. After re-reading this book, I realize that I can't offer my opinion about the ideas Sax presents, without referring to my own experience and beliefs as an educator. I can't give my opinion of such complicated issues briefly or objectively. However, I can tell you that I think this book is worth reading. The science Sax uses to build his argument is sound, and his discussion of these issues is very thought-provoking. When I began the book, I thought that I would reject its arguments because I knew Sax is in favor of single-sex education and my work is in co-education. I surprised myself by deciding that the book supports the work I do as a Montessori teacher. As the author himself states, the differences among individuals will always be more significant than the differences between genders.

As an educator and a Montessorian, do I think Sax's argument that boys and girls should be educated separately is convincing? No, actually I think the answer lies in providing early education and elementary education that focuses on the individual child, and takes each student's individual gifts and challenges into account. In a classroom with a small student to teacher ratio, and with a flexible program, we can meet the needs of each child; including those needs that are based on gender.

# Sundance in the Community-St. Jude's Trike-a-Thon

by Brenda Rios

*The wheels on the trike go round and round, all through the school!*

Sundance Montessori School held its' 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Trike and Bike-A-Thon (or as some liked to call it 'Bike-a-Tron') on Friday, October 9, 2009; where children had the pleasurable experience of riding their trikes, bikes, and scooters along with their friends. No matter what level of riding ability, those who participated enjoyed a clear day complete with blue skies above, mild temperature, and sunny smiles all around.

Never before has there been so much parent participation at the Trike-a-Thon—how could any parent resist seeing their child riding on a perfectly safe, child-friendly riding course? The course was especially beautiful this year with all of the wonderfully talented creative hands that took the challenge of chalk in hand to create beautiful images on the pavement.

Many parents spent their time with the children handing out coloring books and helping with snacks and water.

There were plenty of moms and dads on the course, helping students who had a new set of wheels, steer along the meandering path. Many more parents helped direct the correct flow of traffic, and teach the importance of stopping at the stop signs, slowing down around the corners, and waiting for their friends who may be riding a little slower.

This year we expanded the Trike-A-Thon to accommodate our growing student body. Now that we have two elementary classrooms, we had to create two separate riding courses; one for the primary classes and a second for the elementary classes.

Ann (Grace's mom) did a wonderful job laying out the course in the back parking lot for the elementary students. An artist herself, Ann drew a charming miniature village and a bright field of flowers. She was a pro with the chalk spray striping machine, loaned to us by Jenna and Julia's mom. Having drawn the course for last year's event, Ann appreciated having the spray machine to make the job easier and quicker. Victor (Elijah's dad) created the course for the primary students, complete with turnouts and alternate routes.



After Victor designed the course, the creative talents of Natasha, Bhavin, Kuntal, Lalitha, Deepa, Elisa, Kim, Thao, Carol and Alona set to work creating flowers and fun animals, really animating the course for the children's enjoyment.

Sundance families have raised a combined total of \$725.00 for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. When you consider the challenges that most of us are faced with in this economic climate, it shows that our community can still come together and raise funds for those who are in greater need than ourselves. This is the true spirit of our Sundance Montessori School Community, and is what makes our campus so unique.

We would like to thank the following families for participating in our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Trike-A-Thon :

Bhavin and Kuntal (Shagun's parents)  
Natasha and Mike (Stella's parents)  
Lakshmi (Yash's mom)  
Lalitha (Kushal's mom)  
Deepa (Skanda's mom)  
Gnanakumar (Govind's dad)  
Corey (Madalynn's dad)  
Srinivas and Yamuna (Aditya's parents)  
Elisa (Ava's mom)  
Beatriz (Andrew's mom)  
Kim (Mason's mom)  
Nicole (Makalyn's mom)  
Victor (Elijah's dad)  
Ann (Grace's mom)  
Margarita (Joseph's grandma)  
Thao (Bao-Nghi's mom)  
Carol (Sebastian's mom)  
Robert (Matthew's dad)  
Alona (Adam and Sonia's mom)  
Janet (Jenna and Julia's mom)

*Editor's note: My sincerest apologies if I accidentally missed anyone.*

# M.A.P.S IN THE COMMUNITY-WALK NOW FOR AUTISM!

by Brenda Rios

For two years now, M.A.P.S has participated in "Walk Now for Autism." The event, hosted by Autism Speaks, takes place all across the United States, and includes British Columbia, Canada. As we all know, autism is a disorder that is non-discriminatory and affects children on all points on the globe.

The 2009-2010 walk in Sacramento was held on Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>. This year Autism Speaks went all out and booked Raley Field to house the scores of vendors who came out to exhibit their company information. Each booth also featured a fun game or activity for children to enjoy.

The weather was a nice break from the sweltering heat of the weekend before! It was sunny, but a slight wind made the use of a light jacket a necessity.

M.A.P.S showed its support with a team of enthusiastic walkers: Molly Mix and her daughter, Jolie, Terra White and her friend, Nicole Juarez and daughter Makalyn, Alyssa Flores, her boyfriend Joe, and his sister, Breena, Jady Davis, and Sheri Layer. Each walker on the M.A.P.S team wore an original, patented "Bow's Clothes" shirt. Bow's Clothes are a collaborative product of Sundance student, Bowie Christopher, his mom, Melissa, and Brenda Rios. Bowie's original drawings and poetry were replicated, exactly as they were drawn, onto tee shirts to create Bowie's very own line of apparel, complete with his own designer label "Bow's Clothes" printed on a sleeve of every shirt.

Wendy Richards, Robin Saia and Brenda Rios were present at the M.A.P.S booth, where visitors could pick up information on the IPG Program for either their novice or expert child, look at Bow's Clothes shirt designs, and read a bio about the artist himself, Bowie Christopher. As an activity, children could go "fishing" in the Halloween mini pond that was created for the booth. The game attracted children of all age ranges, including a few curious adults who were intrigued by the broom handled fishing pole with the high-powered magnet attachment, which picked up ghosts and pumpkins out of the leaf-littered water—we are a highly creative bunch!

If you want to know more about the Walk Now for Autism and see the different walks and amounts raised across the country, you can paste the following link into your URL browser:

<http://www.walknowforautismspeaks.org/site/c.iglRL6PIJrH/b.4356939/k.BF85/Home.htm>

To date, the grand total raised at the Sacramento Walk Now is \$198,630, but donations are continuing to be accepted. Molly Mix has been instrumental on the M.A.P.S. Walk Team in raising sponsorship for her participation. In all total, M.A.P.S. contributed close to \$1,000.00 to the Sacramento Walk--no small feat for a company still new in existence within the autism community.

You can see more of Bow's Clothes and his unique shirt designs at [www.mapsautism.com](http://www.mapsautism.com).



# Green Thumb Committee: Getting-to-Know-You

by Brenda Rios



The weather could not have been better suited for the first Green Thumb Committee garden event of the year. The Getting-To-Know-You Dinner on October 1, 2009 had quite a turn out, at least 55 adults and children attended. Some of the families who joined in the fun included: Nateghi, Rios, Mix, Lingam, Zand, Strautman, Sax, Juarez, Kasula, Dennison, Harel, Arias, Ramachandran/Schuit, and Rivera, as well as Sundance and M.A.P.S faculty: Ms. Sheri, Ms. Kathy, Ms. Brenda, Ms. Robin, Ms. Molly, Ms. Terra, Mr. Spencer, and Ms. Wendy.

Strings Italian Café on Riley Street in Folsom provided our garden party with a delicious meal of spaghetti noodles with marina sauce, penne pasta with Alfredo sauce, a hearty, garden salad, and parmesan encrusted bread—yum! We also had plenty of cool refreshments: water, juice and natural Hansen's soft drinks.

As guests mingled and got to know one another (*Who's mom are you? Which class is your child in?*), the children played with their friends on the playground and romped around in the garden. Art activities were available at the lunch tables for those children who were feeling creative. There were a variety of wooden animals, dinosaurs, trains, and other objects, to color with Crayola markers. There were also blank, wooden garden signs for children to fill in with their own messages, which ranged from "I love you" to simply "Boo!"

It was wonderful to see children who no longer attend Sundance, but are still a part of our community; their friends are always happy to see them again, and are quick to pick up the games they were playing right where they left off.

On the invitation, guests had the choice of either paying for their meal or bringing an item for the community garden. Many people brought wonderful new items that will further enhance the children's gardening experience. Ava's mom, Elisa, brought a beautiful flowering petunia plant, Ms. Brenda brought 3 packages of various colored tulips, Ms. Terra brought organic fertilizer, Stella's mom and dad, Natasha and Mike, brought a big bag of organic soil, and Ms. Wendy, Mr. Spencer and Mrs. Nicole from MAPS donated a large-sized watering can, and four new pair of children's gardening gloves.

The Getting-to-Know-You Dinner also gave everyone a chance to see the progress of the garden, since the cleanup efforts on Saturday, September 26th. During the cleanup, beds were cleared of weeds that had grown up during the summer, plants were trimmed back, and dead vegetation was cleared away. Soon it will be time for the children to begin planting for the fall garden.

This year each classroom was assigned a planting bed that will be theirs to maintain for the school year. The Mars and Mercury classrooms will share the first large bed. Mars will be planting tomatoes and basil for the fall garden, and the Mercury class will be planting peppers and spinach. Neptune and Jupiter will share the furthest large bed. The Neptune class is planting broccoli, cauliflower, and chives. Jupiter will plant leaf lettuce and peas. The Earth class has the tall planting box along the fence. They will care for the radishes that they plant, watching them grow from tiny seedlings to mature plants.

The next big gardening event will take place in the spring, when we get the garden ready for our next community event: The Ice Cream Social. This event will be a lot of fun for everyone, with ice cream and arts and crafts, and by then, lots of beautiful flowers in full bloom. This is the time when we get to see all of the bulbs that were planted in the fall, come up and show their colors.

At any time during the year, the Green Thumb Committee would love additional ideas for the community garden, this includes sharing a particular gardening talent, or much-needed carpentry skills. Please send your ideas to [brenda@sundancemontessori.com](mailto:brenda@sundancemontessori.com). The Green Thumb Garden Committee will share these ideas and transform the Children's Community Garden into a wonderful, natural, outdoor experience for the children in our community!

# Se Habla Español with Ms. Margarita

by Margarita Rivera

"Miss Margarita, are we having Spanish today?" students ask me as soon as they see me, regardless of the day or time of the week.

Spanish lessons for the Kindergarten and older students, began in September and take place on Thursdays. Of course, the children think every day is Thursday. If your child has not spoken to you about the Spanish lessons, be sure to ask. You may have already noticed a word or two sprinkled into their everyday language.

Language learning is an integral part of being a world citizen. Exposing young children to the sounds of a foreign language encourages a respect for languages that are different. The concepts then cease to be foreign and become yet another way for people to communicate with one another. Children who are exposed early on to different languages are more open to hearing and learning another language.

Studies have shown that imprinting of language sounds occurs when children are very young, actually, the younger the better. It has also been shown that once learned, those language sounds are not forgotten, and can be recalled years later as they are needed. Although the young child might not remember what they learned, the brain has stored the sounds and deep grammatical structures.

Spanish instruction concentrates on four main areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The program at Sundance Montessori will focus on the listening and speaking areas for the 2009-2010 year, with some choral reading. During the first months of the program, children will primarily listen to the sounds of the Spanish language, as they learn songs and games. Students will then have the opportunity to practice everyday phrases and to speak the language within authentic communicative contexts as the year progresses.

Learning another language allows students to learn about a different culture and its people. It allows them to see the things we share and those that make us different. Learning another language teaches us about ourselves and our own language.

The first Spanish class I ever taught was a class for senior citizens who were traveling to Mexico for the winter; the year was 1976. Since that time, I have taught at the university level in California and Wisconsin, in the bilingual third grade in California schools, and now I find myself in the classroom at Sundance Montessori. I am always looking forward to bringing the joy of learning Spanish to a new group of students.

## Sundance Student Alumnus: **Nadia Barnett**

In our very first issue of the Sundance Spirit Quarterly Newsletter (2007), we featured Lamees Barnett, the sister of former student, Nadia Barnett. Although Lamees did not attend Sundance herself, she wanted to volunteer during the summer because of the fond memories the Barnett family had of Sundance.

In this issue, the spotlight is on a much older Nadia; a well-rounded young lady who has the drive to succeed, and the courage to make her dreams come true. We are very proud to feature the accomplishments of Nadia Barnett.

Current age: 12

How old were you when you started attending school at Sundance?

*4 years old*

Who were your teachers?

*Ms. Robin and Ms. Brandie*

What do you remember most about being at Sundance?

*Reading, doing math, and having fun!*

What school do you currently attend?

*Placer Elementary*

What are your favorite subjects in school?

*Math*

What extra curricular activities do you enjoy? Any hobbies or sports?

*I like dance and golf.*

What type of dance do you do?

*I do jazz, ballet, hip hop, lyrical, contemporary and tap; pretty much all of them.*



**Nadia Barnett, graduating from Kindergarten.**

**Nadia's family from left to right are: sister, Lamees, father, Terry, mother, Awalif Lenjawi, and brother, Rashad.**

Are you planning to go on to college once you finish high school?

*Yes*

Do you know what college you want to go to, or maybe what state you would like to study in?

*Maybe in New York*

What kind of work or career do you want to pursue when you are done with your schooling?

*I would like to be a dance teacher.*

Can you tell me about the most exciting or interesting thing that has happened to you in your life so far?

*Going on stage for the first time, doing a solo competition, when I was about 7 or 8 years old.*

*And, I also won a scholarship at a dance convention and they asked me to come back again the next year. There were a lot of people that tried out—about 50 girls—you had to audition for the scholarship, and I won.*

What words of wisdom would you give to the young Sundance Montessori students?

*Keep your head up and keep trying; don't ever give up.*

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## About Our School

Sundance Montessori is a private Montessori school serving the needs of children in Primary (ages 3-6) and Elementary (ages 6-10).

The campus is conveniently located in the historic district of Folsom on a quiet, peaceful lot with two school buildings, a spacious play yard, complete with a small orchard of fruit trees, and a beautiful children's community garden.

Before and after school care is also available on campus. Children may also participate in playgroups after school in M.A.P.S., Inc., a social skills play therapy program, dedicated to fostering diversity and compassion among children of all needs and abilities.

Visit the school's website:

[www.sundancemontessori.com](http://www.sundancemontessori.com)