

*Pictured: Kingsley's New
 Elementary Building
 Facing the Downtown
 Crossing.*



Montessori in New England Expands in Heaps & Bounds

**Kingsley Montessori
 School, Boston, MA**
 by Renee DuChainey-Farkes
 Head of School



“Two Buildings, One School.” You could say this is Kingsley Montessori School’s new mantra and a growing trend among Montessori Schools in Greater Boston that are expanding their facilities and programs to provide superior education that places equal value on academic excellence and the development of a strongly held set of universal values, which include self-esteem, respect for others, honesty, integrity, responsibility, empathy, compassion, kindness, peacefulness, a sense of concern for others, warmth, caring and a love of community. In the Greater Boston area, we have more than a half dozen Montessori schools that are growing and expanding, providing more children and families the opportunity for a Montessori education. Toddler and Middle School programs are in high demand as well.

Located in downtown Boston, The Kingsley Montessori School opened a new state-of-the-art elementary building in September 2005. Kingsley now operates as one school in two buildings. The preschool building is located one city block from the elementary building. Expanding to a two-building campus required extensive physical improvements and renovations at both building sites. The acquisition of this new building is also all owed for enrollment expansion.

As Kingsley’s Head of School, Renee DuChainey-Farkes, said “These new and renovated spaces provide a more dynamic enhanced school experience for both our students and teaching staff—while continuing to provide our unique learning environment, which

supports Montessori and educational best practices. It also enables Kingsley to offer an outstanding urban educational experience to a greater number of Boston area families.”

Kingsley Montessori School is the result of two, well established Back Bay schools – The Kingsley School, founded in 1938, and Back Bay Montessori founded in 1986 – joining together to become Kingsley Montessori School in 1991. Enrollment in 1986 was a mere twelve students, and today the school boasts 171 students: 92 in the children’s house and 81 in the elementary program. Enrollment at the elementary level is expected to continue to grow during the next several years. Kingsley’s plan called for expanding the preschool enrollment first and growing the elementary program organically from the children’s house.

The plan to expand started with a major strategic planning effort in 2001 that identified that parents valued their children’s Montessori education, but that small enrollment numbers at the higher grades caused them to seek another school. Like most Montessori schools, Kingsley had strong enrollment at the children’s house level and became more like a pyramid, with smaller enrollment at the elementary levels. The school made a decision to accept the challenge to increase the elementary student enrollment and to grow the school. Several major strategic decisions were determined.



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■ The first step was to hire the best Montessori trained teachers. Kingsley knew the challenge of finding the best teachers and added a school benefit incentive to provide tuition reimbursement for Montessori training.

■ The school achieved its Montessori and independent school accreditation.

■ The admissions process strengthened its focus to identify families and children who would flourish in a Montessori setting and from whom Kingsley was a very close match with their values and long-term goals for their children. This message was communicated openly and honestly with prospective parents, that the school desired families who looked at Kingsley as a school for their child and family through grades K-7. This message was also communicated to current families.

■ The next challenge was to increase enrollment at the elementary level by adding a lower elementary classroom. Since space was in demand, the decision to decrease the number of children's house classrooms in 2003 in order to begin expansion at the lower elementary level was made. This was a bold step, but it showed parents the future direction. Retention rates immediately strengthened.

■ The expanded elementary classroom was successful, and space for the elementary students became an even bigger demand! There was a need to create an environment with the needs of elementary-age students and curriculum in mind.

■ The Board of Trustees spent several years focused on finding additional space. This task was successfully achieved in January 2005 with the acquisition of the Essex Street building.

■ One of the decisions that Kingsley would become a two-building school campus, the leadership model was supported with the addition of two full-time directors: Director of Early Childhood and Director of Elementary.

■ Both buildings underwent major renovations and now include large unlit

classrooms, science labs, performance and visual arts studios, world language rooms, library/reading room, after-school program spaces, gross-motor space, community spaces, along with a new toddler classroom for two-year olds.

This new building, which was built as the First Spiritual Temple in 1885, lends itself to an elementary environment with high ceilings, large stained-glass windows, and high ceilings. Students now have a science lab, which encourages them to do experiments beyond the curriculum where microscopes are available at all times of the day. There is now an open and accessible art studio with a wide range of material's tool and projects – a place where students can further enhance their creativity, discover their unique interests and abilities and continue to grow and blossom through discovery.

The school library is for students to do independent research, learn additional library skills or find a study hall to focus and study for an independent period of the day, or to finish homework! The curriculum now includes a dramatic program where students have more opportunities for public speaking, for depth of self-expression or self-discovery of their talents. The new movement room allows for music/dance, and after-school programs, and a place where students can build community with themselves.

There is now opportunity to invite parents in to participate in their child's learning and performance, creating more community and partnership through involvement with families. Kingsley is currently making the building available for outside community use, offering meeting space for neighborhood associations and other and tot groups.

A new Parent Lecturer Series began this year, and there are plans to incorporate a parent and teacher information center. Kingsley is a true urban school, where students and programs take advantage of the urban setting by close access to the historical, educational, architectural, and cultural resources of Boston.

It is unlike many private/public school classrooms in that it adheres to the principles of 'green' design. The school used the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) guidelines as a benchmark for construction. The school is considered sustainable in part because it reused the existing structure and, where possible, the architects reused materials at the site, leaving doors, light fixtures,

cabinets and even toilets in place instead of replacing them. Exposing elements of the original structure, like brick wall and ceiling, also limited the amount of materials used. According to Bob Hicks, an architect with SMMA, the architect and engineering firm responsible for the school's design, energy-efficient heating and air-conditioning systems, lights and water-efficient toilets also add to the site's sustainability. The school is unique in that the space does not include plastic square rooms, teacher's desks, or white walls.

Kingsley has demonstrated consistent growth and today holds a strong position among independent schools in Boston. Kingsley is an innovative, creative, and dynamic community with a high level of commitment from students, parents, faculty, staff and board of trustees. Faculty integrate diverse learning backgrounds and styles to create a varied teaching and learning environment. Kingsley envisions a Montessori independent school community of supportive parents, dedicated teachers and staff, and joyful learners. At Kingsley, students are prepared academically and for life, and parents work in partnership with the school.

The school's design and expansion was accomplished with the help of an experienced team of professionals including Wynne Street Advisors (real estate advisor), Paradigm Properties (project management), Symmes Main & McKee Associates (design associates), Commodore Builders (pre-construction services), and Palmer & Dodge LLP (legal counsel).

Kingsley is fully accredited by the Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). Kingsley is a member of the International Montessori Council (IMC) and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). It is governed by a Board of Trustees and is organized as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. Its faculty has Montessori certification from a variety of accredited teacher education programs. Renee DuChaine-Farley, Head of School, is a board member of the American Montessori Society.

