

Amanda McCarthy, at right on back row, is site director at Weinacker's Montessori School's Hillcrest location. She visited three years ago and fell in love with the school. Within a week, her three children were enrolled, and she was working there. With Amanda, from left, are teacher Caroline Wagner and John Weinacker, the school's president; and students, center row, Braxton Evans, Drew McCarthy and Ella McCarthy; and front row, Bella Cannon and Sophia Tombrello.



Weinacker's Montessori School Makes Learning Fun

John Weinacker's two daughters are students at the west Mobile location of Weinacker's Montessori School — the same school he attended from the age of three, as one of the first 15 students in the program his mother, **Marcia Weinacker**, started in 1969.

Today, as president of the Montessori school that bears his family name, Weinacker oversees five sites in Mobile and Baldwin counties, with 65 teachers working with nearly 350 students. Weinacker's Montessori School is the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Month.

Developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in Italy in 1907, Montessori is a hands-on, sensory-based philosophy of learning that encourages individual development at each child's own

pace in a calm, engaging environment. Educational activities and musical instruments are kept at a child's level, and each student chooses his or her own work. Even in the baby room, lined with cribs under black-and-white mobiles, there are no high chairs. Babies learn to sit in chairs around tables and are encouraged to move and crawl around on their own.

As an example of how Montessori schools are different, Weinacker describes one of his favorite techniques for learning in which children can use a blindfold to do an activity they've already learned. "It's good because they concentrate on a skill they've developed in a different way," he says — and by blocking one of their senses, they strengthen the rest.

The concept has worked so well for Weinacker's Montessori School that Weinacker now sees second and third generations enrolling. The program accepts children from ages three months to nine years old, and they're grouped by multiple ages to create a family atmosphere. "Ideally, we'll have an American Montessori Society-certified teacher for each age grouping," Weinacker says. Teachers undergo approximately 320 hours of classroom instruction, plus 540 hours teaching in the classroom in the intensive Montessori training program.

The measure of the school's success, he says, is "how well they do when they leave here and go on to other private or public schools. They have a good skill base when they come out."

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