

## *Parent Talk about UMS Kindergarten*

I am pleased to share my experience with the Kindergarten Program at Unitarian Montessori School. I realize that by being an educator myself with formal and extensive learning in the field of child development and education I have a unique perspective on the program. But, like everyone else, I am just a mom making decision after decision- everything from what food my children eat to what programs they can watch (and how long!). The decision to enroll my daughter in Kindergarten at UMS, continuing her tenure for a fourth and final year, was very easy for me. It was a phenomenal gift to our daughter to give her a fourth year at a school she loved, offering a beautiful environment for her to further explore what she had been experiencing in a systemic and developmentally appropriate way for three years- letter sounds into fluent reading, bead counting into complex mathematics, hands-on science and very most of all: the opportunity to practice peace education. In Kindergarten, my daughter was able to choose topics that interested her and practice literacy skills researching and writing her own book. She worked at a pace that was right for her- rather than in a class of same age peers that all work on the same topic at the same time. She was a leader in her class which opened up so much confidence and continues with her to this day. I don't think that any two experiences will be the same as all children and families are different but I do think that when you make the decision to stay for Kindergarten at UMS you are giving a marvelous gift to your child. Bigger than a trip to Disney- the Kindergarten year will be the cherry on top of the icing on the cake. Your child will take the learning from this final year with them forever. My daughter is now in third grade. She speaks fondly of her days at UMS- the school was a second home to her and her teachers and peers were family. Many parents of younger children considering Kindergarten at UMS will want to know if her current academic performance is enhanced now as an upper elementary student. My best response is that my daughter loves to learn. She is curious, has a solid foundation in all academic areas and approaches academics with confidence and enthusiasm. She is the youngest in her class yet a high performer. She stands up for her peers and is a friend to all. Do I think that her education at UMS contributes to her current self? You bet. Would a trip to Disney carry with her like that? I don't think so but it's on my decision-making plate along with many other things- maybe on yours too. If I had the opportunity to send my child to Kindergarten at Unitarian Montessori again I certainly do so in a heartbeat. Best decision ever!

Kristin Rastogi



Our son, Peter Alai, attended UMS for Kindergarten during the 2015-16 school year. He had been in the school since he was 3 years old. We were so happy that we were able to keep Peter for one more year in such an educational, loving, playful, and kind environment. I feel that Kindergarten year was crucial in setting him up for the success he has enjoyed in public school as a 1st and 2nd grader. We just love UMS for so many reasons -- its diversity, its approach to learning, its natural setting, its focus on peace and kindness, its leadership (Miss Sue is amazing). I think part of me just wanted to keep him protected in that lovely little cocoon before going out to the big, bad world of public school (which is not so big or bad as it was in my imagination, but it's certainly no UMS!).

Academically, I was extremely pleased with Peter's progress at UMS. I remember being quite surprised that he learned to read toward the end of the school year before kindergarten. Although we read a ton to him at home, we hadn't been pushing him to acquire that skill. I was grateful that the UMS teachers noted Peter's readiness and nurtured his interest in books and words.

I believe the school also gave him a solid foundation in math with its focus on number sense and using manipulatives to understand concepts like groups of 10 and big numbers. And his love of science and nature I totally attribute to that wonderful little school setting in the woods! Peter also enjoyed all the "enrichment" time that Miss Tina did with the kindergartners on their own (while the other kids were napping) where they learned drama, mindfulness, and more. One of our initial concerns when we were deciding whether to keep Peter at UMS was the age thing. How many other kindergartners would there be? What if Peter was the only one? At one point we were under the impression that Peter might be the only one and after some discussion with my husband and others, we were open to it. A little girl named Maya had done it the year before and had a positive experience. I do believe there's a lot of merit in Miss Sue's belief that the kindergartners become classroom leaders and grow by teaching the younger kids. Eventually, a handful of kindergartners did join Peter in his class, but I do believe his experience would have been just as positive had he been the only one.

I am so glad Peter had three great years at UMS -- especially when I read these studies about the importance of the first five years for laying the groundwork for learning. I love the school's focus on independence and self-directed investigation. If you're able to swing it, you can't go wrong choosing UMS for kindergarten for your child!

Traci Alai



Last year my older son, Yonatan, was a Kindergartener at the Unitarian Montessori School (UMS). Although it was his first and only year at UMS, he managed to fit right in and both he and we were very pleased with the decision of spending his kindergarten year there. Between his days in the Cardinals under the supervision of Ms. Manique and her staff and his kindergarten pull out program with Ms. Maura – he truly had a great time and learned so much!

We found it amazing that so much learning was accomplished WHILE allowing him ample time for free- and outside-playing. With all this going on and the life skills that he acquired, it was wonderful to find out that when he started first grade in public school he tested above and beyond what was expected of him at the end of first grade. E.g., although being bi-lingual and the youngest in his class, he tested at reading level i-j at the first week of school, which is almost second grade reading, not to mention his math skills that were also unbelievable. Most of all, we are truly appreciative of his ability to manage time and to work independently; two things that we are always trying to reinforce at home, and we found UMS to be a great help with.

It was a wonderful experience for him and for us, and we are strongly considering enrolling our younger son for this program next year.

Orly Levitan



Cameron went to UMS for 2 years. During this time, I saw a great improvement with regards to his confidence. UMS did not just teach my son academic stuff, they help him develop good manners and independence. UMS help mold the students to be a better person. Caring and respectful to others. Embracing diversity as well as celebrating cultural differences.

The Kindergarten program gave him strong academic foundation. He is doing well in first grade. He is well adjusted and made friends very quickly. I would highly recommend UMS to all parents.

Jasmin Pun