

# HARBORLIGHT



M O N T E S S O R I S C H O O L

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## **Susan E. Egan, Harborlight Montessori School Co-Founder & Head of School to Retire after 38 Years of Service**

Susan E. Egan, Co-Founder of the Harborlight Montessori School in Beverly and Head of School for the past 38 years, has announced that she is retiring at the end of this school year. Her final day of service will be June 30, 2011.

Egan, a Registered Nurse, co-founded the school in 1973 with one early childhood education class for three to six year olds. The school opened with just 27 children, including her oldest son Jed, in the basement of the First Baptist Church on Cabot Street. The school has grown exponentially under Egan's leadership. Located on a wooded campus on Essex Street, today the school enrolls more than 250 children in 17 classes -- from infants and toddlers to middle school students from throughout the North Shore.

“When I look back on my long tenure at Harborlight, I get immense satisfaction from knowing my life's work has been instrumental in helping to develop the minds and characters of hundreds of children, by creating an institution that is a model Montessori school for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, elementary and middle school students,” Egan said in a letter to parents, faculty and staff announcing her retirement. “Observing these children over the past 38 years, watching them learn, think creatively, face challenges, build friendships, and grow strong intellectually, physically and emotionally, has been very rewarding.”

“The Board of Trustees is very happy for Susan upon the announcement of her retirement as Founding Head of School,” said Robert P. Cipriani, President of the Board of Trustees. “The testimony to her success as an educator and administrator is that Harborlight is functioning as a model Montessori school with a talented and dedicated faculty and staff. Our children are thriving in a nurturing, caring and safe environment.”

Egan worked as a nurse before giving birth to her first son Jed and pursuing Montessori teacher certification. She taught in another Montessori School for two before co-founding Harborlight Montessori in 1973. Within six years, the school outgrew its first homes at the First Baptist and United Methodist churches on Cabot Street and purchasing a house on Essex Street in 1979. Within a year, the school had outgrown the house and in 1980 purchased the former Lutheran Church across the street at 243 Essex Street. Egan added an elementary school, which her second son Peter attended.

The school has built numerous additions over the past 31 years, including a second floor that houses the upper elementary and middle school classes (grades four to eight), several wings for the burgeoning preschool, as well as special rooms for art, music, Spanish and a school library. Harborlight also bought the house next door and converted it into classrooms for infants and toddlers.

Egan, a longtime resident of Beverly, recalls growing up in Quincy and declaring at age six that, "I want to help make the world a better place when I grow up," she said. "As an adult, I thought Montessori education was the way to do it. I am passionate about the Montessori philosophy. It is a scientifically proven, very effective method to educate children, but also a way to change the world – one child at a time."

Egan earned her Master's Degree in Education from Antioch University and completed post-graduate work in Counseling Psychology at Salem State University. She is a licensed Mental Health Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, as well as a licensed teacher, school director and Registered Nurse.

Egan's drive to found and grow Harborlight was based on her desire to provide the best education possible for her sons, Jed and Peter Dickman. Egan was bored with rote learning as a child and found the hands-on Montessori method, started by Dr. Maria Montessori in Italy in 1907, to be creative and completely engaging. Her husband, Bill McDonough, a retired general contractor, and her sons, Jed and Peter Dickman, have actively supported the school and helped it to grow over the decades. Four of their 10 grandchildren attend the school presently and three are alumni.

"One of the biggest misconceptions about Montessori schools is that they are a free for all -- the kids can do whatever they want -- and that is not true at all," Egan said. "Montessori is a highly structured, organized and scientific way to educate children. Visitors of Harborlight can observe vibrant Montessori classrooms full of very engaged and happy children who are working very hard."

In addition to academics, Harborlight emphasizes teaching children the importance of love and kindness toward other people by nurturing compassion and humanitarianism. Harborlight students have participated in many community service projects over the years. "It's about giving back, not just taking," Egan said.

Egan herself has been an active community volunteer. She has served on the Board of Symphony by the Sea for many years, including as its President. She has also served on the Lynch Park Advisory Committee.

Egan has helped to support the Montessori movement beyond Harborlight. She has lectured on Montessori education at several colleges and founded in 1996 the National Center for Montessori Education-New England, a graduate level Montessori teacher certification program affiliated with Gordon College. She was also one of the founders and the first President of the Board of Directors of Montessori Schools of Massachusetts; the first President of the Board of the North Shore Middle School, which was renamed the Glen Urquhart School; and served on the Board of Directors of North Shore Gifted and Talented Education.

“I am proud to have played an integral part in advancing and promoting academic excellence throughout the North Shore and in Massachusetts, while advocating for the exceptional Montessori Philosophy and Method of Education,” Egan said.

Egan says she is looking forward to traveling with her husband Bill after retirement and reading something other than education books. “I haven’t read a novel in years,” she said.

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

Susan E. Egan, retiring Founding Head of Harborlight Montessori School in Beverly in front of portraits of Dr. Maria Montessori that were painted by Egan’s mother.