



December 15, 2021

HIGHMARK SUPPORTS NEW PLAYGROUND AND EXPANDED OUTDOOR LEARNING AT SUSSEX MONTESSORI SCHOOL

SEAFORD, DE – The 340 children currently enrolled at Sussex Montessori School will soon have a new playground and expanded outdoor learning opportunities thanks to a major grant from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware.

The donation from Highmark’s Blueprints for the Community grants program will support our gardening program, outdoor classrooms structures, and 10,000+ sf outdoor play and exercise area as part of the ***Growing Minds, Growing Bodies*** initiative.

“We’re deeply grateful to Highmark Delaware for the opportunity to build a health program that is intentional in addressing the wellbeing and needs of the WHOLE child,” said Lisa Coldiron, Head of School. *“This allows us to do what we know is good and right for children: helping them build strong bodies and minds.”*

Growing Minds, Growing Bodies promotes healthy foods and eating through gardening, outdoor activity and learning, and positive social-emotional development and exercise through play. Students, staff and families participate in the gardening and harvesting of freshly grown fruits and vegetables—from soil testing, pest control, composting and planting— an endeavor made possible through partnership with the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension, 4H programs, and Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids. Along with nutrition education, the school envisions an on-campus greenhouse and student-run farmer’s market in hopes to encourage healthier eating and impact the obesity rate.

Additionally, outdoor classroom pavilions will be used for innovative outside instruction, reading groups, scientific exploration and observation, and parent engagement activities.

“Building strong bodies is paramount to healthy living for children and adults,” Coldiron said. “Exercise is an integral part of Sussex Montessori’s curriculum as research clearly demonstrates its positive effects on the child’s brain and ability to focus and attend,” she adds.

The playground components are designed to promote physical fitness, coordination, balance and agility, cognitive development and focus in children. The natural play area will be built to include climbing equipment, natural balance beams, swings, trails, and an embankment slide.

This is the second gift Highmark has made to Sussex Montessori, following a donation in 2020 to provide wraparound services and social work support to students and families.

Nick Moriello, president of Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware, said *“We are pleased to support the Sussex Montessori School’s Growing Minds, Growing Bodies program to educate and empower students in making healthier lifestyle choices that will benefit them throughout their school years and beyond.”*

Now in its second year, Sussex Montessori is serving children, primarily from Western Sussex County, in grades K-4. A 5th grade will be added in 2022. The school provides a wide-range of social services in addition to the unique Montessori curriculum to meet the special needs of children from a rural area.

Since its inception in 2007, Highmark’s Blueprints for the Community program has contributed over \$21 million to Delaware communities, with an emphasis on the uninsured and underserved. Blueprint grants seek to reduce health care disparities in minority populations and address social determinants of health. More than 441,000 members subscribe to Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware.

Sussex Montessori continues to seek support for its growing campus, with an additional \$2 million needed for capital expansion projects. For more information, please contact 302-644-0107.

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Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is a public elementary school located in Seaford, Delaware and provides free Montessori education to Delaware students in grades K-6. SMS uses the hands-on approach and time-tested philosophy of Maria Montessori to educate children through authentic personalized learning experiences in multi-age classrooms, respectful relationships, opportunities to innovate, and a focus on global and community citizenship. For more information about Sussex Montessori School visit www.sussexmontessoricharter.com or call 302-404-5367; Facebook [@MontessoriDE](https://www.facebook.com/MontessoriDE)